

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

July, 1944

Cover by A. R. Tilburne

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The Spare Room

By CRAWFORD SULLIVAN

ED JACOBS hadn't wanted to buy the house in the first place; he had been trying to save three thousand dollars to buy half interest in Mr. Cash's hardware business. But Ellen pleaded and cried, and said a home was the best investment a couple could make—and furthermore they could rent out the spare room until they decided to raise a family. Ed said no,

positively; the payments would be more than they could afford, and the house wasn't worth the money. Two days later Ellen took him down to the bank to sign the papers.

The house was sandwiched in between two other houses which were exactly like it. It was two stories high, long and narrow, with a staircase on one side and the



Heading by
A. R. TILBURNE

*It's a sound idea to check on a prospective boarder—after all
monsters usually can't dig up good references!*

rooms on the other. All in all, it was not much different from thousands of other houses, but Ellen Jacobs thought it was very extraordinary. As it turned out, she wasn't wrong. The house was probably the most extraordinary residence in Brooklyn.

Ed held down a pretty good job selling merchandise for the J. M. Cash Hardware Store. Being a hardware merchant is something like being a doctor: you have to diagnose everybody's plumbing troubles, doorbell failures, electrical leakages and so on. Ed had a friendly, conservative manner which made customers trust him like an uncle. He seemed to know everything about everything, and he could make you feel like you were getting ten dollars worth of information with a dollar sixty-nine cent purchase.

Ellen was one of those extremely feminine women who scream bloody murder at the sight of a mouse. She was slightly faded—the way most blondes get when they slide over the thirty-year mark—but she was still attractive enough to be whistled at now and then. Ed and Ellen had been married a long time, and they got along fine. The only thing they had serious disagreements about was what movie to see on Saturday night. Ellen liked love stories, musicals and sophisticated comedies; but Ed went for those Grade B horror pictures that packed the audiences in down at the Lyric.

"I can't understand why you like those awful shows," Ellen protested. "The last time we went I didn't sleep a wink for two nights."

Ed gave an unsympathetic chuckle. "I love 'em," he said. "They make you forget about everything else. It's a sort of relaxation."

"I don't see anything relaxing about it. Especially that last one, where the girl turned into a wolf and nearly bit her lover's arm off."

"Didn't bother me a bit. The trouble with you is, you let your imagination run away with you."

"Of course I know that such things don't ever really happen," Ellen said quickly. "But just the same—"

"Did you read that book, *Wollocks and Werewolves*, I got out of the public library?" Ed asked. "The guy that wrote it

claims that supernatural things happen all the time. People have just gotten so civilized they don't like to admit it. The guy ought to know what he's talking about; he's a professor at New York University—name's Matthew Faust. He sounds like a smart Joe."

"He can't be very smart if he believes in those kind of things," sniffed Ellen.

"Can't tell," said Ed archly. "We might have a ghost right in this house. Sometimes at night when I hear the doors creak I think that—"

"Ed—quit it!"

Ed laughed his head off. He always liked to get a rise out of her.

THEY had lived in the house a month or so when Ellen put an ad in the paper to rent the room. The first person who answered it was a girl from the dime store; but Ellen turned her down. "I don't want a woman," she told Ed. "They always want to borrow your clothes and use your electric iron. I'd like a nice, substantial bachelor, around middle age."

Shortly after dinner a man came to the door. He wore a black topcoat and a snap-brimmed hat with a black satin band. He inquired about the room, speaking in a low voice that had a trace of an accent—something like Charles Boyer. Ed invited him in.

"My name's Jacobs," he said. "This is my wife, Mr.—I didn't get the name."

"Kraken," the man replied. "Mr. Kraken." He removed his hat and bowed in Ellen's direction. His hair was shiny black and seemed glued to the top of his head. His eyebrows started in the vicinity of his temples and extended down to the bridge of his nose in a kind of "V." He was a rather distinguished-looking man, Ellen thought.

"You work near here, Mr. Kraken?" she inquired.

"At the shipyard," he nodded. "I am on the night shift."

Ed glanced at the man's hands. They were long and slender, with tapering fingers and slightly pointed nails. "You do some sort of clerical work?"

"I am a draftsman," Mr. Kraken replied. "I must sleep during the day, and I do not

wish to be disturbed. I am anxious to find a room where I can have complete privacy. I am willing to pay fifty-five dollars a month if the room is suitable."

"Oh," Ellen swallowed hard. She had intended to ask thirty-five and get thirty.

They showed Mr. Kraken the room, and he seemed satisfied with it—so satisfied, in fact, that he paid a full month's rent on the spot.

HE arrived at seven the following evening with a small suitcase and left for work about an hour later. Ed didn't pay much attention at the time because he was listening to his favorite radio program, *The Green Gboul*. Ed hardly gave Mr. Kraken another thought until quite a while—three weeks, to be exact—after he had moved in.

"I've only seen that guy about twice," he told Ellen. "Where does he keep himself?"

"In his room, I guess." She was busy making a pie for Sunday dinner and didn't want to be bothered. "He sleeps all day."

"Even on Sunday."

"I guess so. We don't see him much because he goes in and out the back door. He says he's afraid he'll disturb us if he goes tramping through the house late at night."

"Maybe he's wanted by the police," Ed suggested.

"Heavens, no," said Ellen. "If that was the case, he wouldn't be working at the shipyard. He's just naturally shy."

Ed thought it over. "Wonder if he's in his room now?"

Ellen put the dough into a pie pan and pressed little dents around the edges. "Maybe."

"Think I'll go up and see."

"You better not," She looked perturbed. "He said he wanted absolute privacy during the day."

"He couldn't get sore if I just tap on the door and ask him down for a cup of coffee. It's nearly four o'clock."

Ed went up stairs. He started to knock on Mr. Kraken's door, then paused. The transom was closed and dark, indicating that the window blinds were drawn. Maybe he was still asleep. Ed walked away, changed his mind, came back and rapped on the door. No reply. He rapped again—this time a little harder. Still no reply. He tried

the door and found it locked. Insatiably curious, he crouched down and peeked through the keyhole. His perimeter of visibility included a smoothly covered bed, a bare-topped bureau, an unoccupied chair and no sign of Mr. Kraken.

"What are you doing?"

Ed jumped up, looking guilty as a sheep dog munching mutton, and saw Ellen standing at the end of the hall. "I—I thought maybe he was sick or something," he blurted. "But he isn't there."

"Dear me, can't the man go out on Sunday afternoon if he wants?"

"I didn't see him go out—and I've been in the house all day."

"He probably went out the back while you were in the parlor. Ed, sometimes you are like a nosy old woman. It's a good thing we don't run a hotel."

Ed went downstairs muttering something under his breath. He felt ashamed of himself, and it made him mad at the world in general and Mr. Kraken in particular. He was going to lay for that guy and have a talk with him. If Mr. Kraken wanted to live there, he could use the front door like everybody else—instead of sneaking up and down the back stairs.

AFTER dinner, while Ellen was listening to the radio, Ed went to the kitchen, locked the back door and bolted it. He then parked himself on the front steps and smoked a cigarette. When Mr. Kraken came home, he'd have to use his front door, and Ed was determined to be there waiting for him.

Hardly anybody was on the street. It was time for Jack Benny, and all the radios in the block were blaring. After about ten minutes Ed was tempted to give up his vigil and go inside. The program sounded like it might be funny.

"Don't you find it rather cold out here?"

Ed looked over his shoulder and saw Mr. Kraken standing behind him—in the doorway! He looked taller than usual, and the light from the street lamp made his eyes shine.

"Where did—? I thought you were out!" Ed said, fumbling for words.

"Surely you had no reason to think that?" Mr. Kraken stared at Ed squarely, his sweep-

ing eyebrows resembling a couple of question marks.

"Only that it's Sunday," asserted Ed. "Most everyone goes some place on Sunday." He lit another cigarette and tried to appear unconcerned.

"I work every night and sleep every day," declared Mr. Kraken. "I live in a purgatory where there is neither sun nor Sunday."

Ed was definitely perplexed. He knew perfectly well that Mr. Kraken hadn't been in the room that afternoon—unless he had happened to be standing out of sight when Ed looked through the keyhole. One thing certain—Mr. Kraken hadn't been asleep. Ed had seen that much with his own eyes.

"You're going to work now?" Ed asked.

Mr. Kraken nodded.

"I have to get some cigarettes," Ed lied. "Mind if I walk a ways with you?"

"Not at all." The reply was politely insincere, as if to let Ed know that his company would be tolerated but not preferred.

Mr. Kraken had a brisk, gliding walk that made Ed hustle to keep up with him. All the time Ed was wondering where Mr. Kraken had been that afternoon. He *must* have been in the house. He couldn't have come in the back door and gone out the front, because the back door was locked. Ed could not make up his mind whether to ask him point blank what the score was or to try to draw the truth out of him by subtle questioning.

They had walked about half a block when a little black dog pounced out of a doorway and came running toward them lickety-split. It was Mr. Ewalding's dog, Mopsie, and she was a great friend of Ed's because he always petted her and occasionally gave her a handful of crackers from his lunch bucket.

Mopsie was no more than three feet away when she stopped suddenly, nearly tripping over her ears. Her legs stiffened, her hackles rose and her lips curled away from her teeth. She growled—not the type of growl you would expect from a thoroughly domestic spaniel—but a deep-throated, savage sound that made Ed step back in alarm.

Mr. Kraken paused for a moment. "Do not be frightened," he told Ed. "The beast will not attack us."

Ed wasn't so sure. The white savagery

in Mopsie's eyes reminded him of a mad dog he had seen shot when he was a kid. There was an instant when she looked like she might spring; then her tail swished down like a semaphore, and she raced for home, howling as she ran.

"Dogs," said Mr. Kraken, "do not like me."

Ed could believe that, but he could not figure out why the very sight of Mr. Kraken should make Mopsie turn into a canine lunatic. "I'm very fond of animals," he said.

"Why?" asked Mr. Kraken. "All animal life is predatory; the higher forms feeding upon the lower. If you were hungry enough, starving, let us say—you would look upon the dog differently."

"Could be," Ed gave a forced chuckle, hoping that Mr. Kraken was merely indulging in a little gruesome jocularity. He found nothing in Mr. Kraken's casual countenance to encourage that hope.

They came to the corner drug store, and Ed happened to glance sideways, toward the drug store window. Something was wrong. Ed couldn't figure it out immediately, but he knew something was wrong. It had to do with the drug store window.

"Here's where I get my cigarettes," said Ed. "See you later."

"Good night, sir," said Mr. Kraken, with a small bow.

As Mr. Kraken walked away, Ed turned toward the window again. He saw what it was this time, and his legs became rubbery. He leaned against a lamp post, just staring at the glass.

ED'S IMAGE was plainly visible in the window, but Mr. Kraken's image was missing. Mr. Kraken had walked between Ed and the window—and he had cast no reflection.

The truth hit Ed like a sledgehammer—made him so weak he nearly folded on the spot. He had seen it in the movies, heard it on the radio, read about it in books; but he never really believed it could be true. He knew, though, that there is only one creature who does not cast a reflection in a glass.

No doubt about it—Mr. Kraken was a vampire.

Ed was considerably worried when he reached home. Having a vampire for a

roomer was not the most customary occurrence in the world, and he could not decide offhand how to deal with the problem. It is somewhat to Ed's credit that, when the first shock had passed, he approached the problem with the same scientific detachment that might be expected of a zoologist who had just found a sabre-tooth tiger living in his backyard. Ed realized, first of all, the value of his discovery. A real, dead vampire—brought to the limelight—would be worth ten times as much as a live sabre-toothed tiger. Of course there was a certain amount of danger; but vampires, like tigers, could be handled. Having studied the subject extensively, Ed knew all the approved methods.

At this point it may be well to explain that Ed Jacobs was just as excited as anybody else would be under similar circumstances, but it was much like the excitement people experience upon meeting their favorite movie star face to face. Ed had seen so many vampires on the screen and heard so many of them on the radio that he was entirely familiar with their peculiarities.

Vampires, he knew, prowled only at night, nourishing themselves on the blood of some unfortunate victim. From dawn to sunset they remained dead as fence posts, anchored to their earthly remains. Therefore, while Mr. Kraken was supposedly turning out blueprints at the shipyard, he was really roaming the streets of Brooklyn with an eye out for some luckless individual's corpuscles. During the day—instead of sleeping in the spare room—he was quietly mouldering in a secret sepulchre.

Ed decided not to mention his discovery to Ellen. He remembered the time a man had been sideswiped by a beer truck and Ellen had him brought into the parlor until the ambulance arrived. The man recovered in two days, but Ellen was a total wreck for a week, worrying about him. She invariably went to pieces whenever anything upset the well-ordered routine of her life. Ed was more rugged.

Next day, Ed was so preoccupied he missed out on three sure-fire sales, and he undercharged a lady forty-nine cents on a glass coffee pot. Mr. Cash sensed that something was wrong, but mistook it for the flu and sent him home an hour early.

A note was waiting for him on top of the radio. It read:

"Ed dear,

"Mother has had another one of her spells. I tried to call you at the store but the line was busy twice. I am leaving for East Orange and will be gone a couple of weeks probably. That's all the longer they usually last. You will find meat and milk in the ice box. You have plenty of clean shirts and if I am going to stay longer I will let you know. Don't forget to collect the rent from Mr. Kraken.

"Love, Ellen"

ED WAS neither surprised nor displeased. Ellen's mother had had these spells before—always when there was spring house-cleaning or heavy sewing to be done. It couldn't have been timed better. Now he could study Mr. Kraken like a scientist studies an amoeba—without anyone looking over his shoulder. Furthermore, there might be a certain amount of personal risk, and he was glad Ellen was out of it.

The house was as silent as a well-managed mortuary. Ed went upstairs, took a skeleton key from his pocket and opened the door to Mr. Kraken's room. The shades were still drawn, and slender fingers of sunlight crept beneath them, clutching at the window sill. There wasn't much time. Mr. Kraken would probably put in an appearance soon after sunset.

Ed entered the room, trying to look in all directions at once. The place smelled musty, the chair seat was covered with dust and the chenille bedspread was as smooth as when Ellen had first laid it. Opposite the bed was an old-fashioned bureau with drawers on each side and a full length mirror in the middle. Ed looked into the drawers and found them empty. Opening the clothes closet, he discovered only a bunch of unused hangers and an indolent spider. Then his eye fell on the small suitcase Mr. Kraken had brought with him; it was lying flat beneath the bed. He pulled the suitcase out and opened it. Nothing inside but the manufacturer's inspection ticket. Mr. Kraken had evidently purchased the suitcase so that he would not arouse suspicion by moving into the room without any luggage.

As Ed snapped the suitcase shut, he noticed that the fingers of sunlight had slipped away from the window sill. Then he noticed something else, and his Adam's apple gave a sudden leap, nearly choking him.

Mr. Kraken was watching him from the doorway.

Ed tried his best to look like a man waiting for a street car and succeeded miserably. He got up off the floor and said, "Home early tonight, aren't you?"

"*Hah!*" said Mr. Kraken. His eyes had a carnivorous gleam, and the skin over his high cheekbones appeared so transparent that the form of a skull seemed visible behind it.

Ed stole a quick look at the bureau mirror. According to the mirror, there was no Mr. Kraken—nothing but an empty doorway.

"Why did you do that?" demanded Mr. Kraken.

"Do—what?" Ed did not like the expression on Mr. Kraken's face. It reminded him of a mandrill he had once seen at the Bronx zoo.

"The brute had glowered at him broodingly, as though the crowning achievement of its career would be to break him into small pieces and then jump on the fragments with both feet.

"I wonder why that mirror should interest you so greatly?" Mr. Kraken said, smiling. It was the first time Ed had ever seen him smile. His teeth were white and shiny, and four of them were regular tusks. He moved forward with his fingers outstretched, as if itching for the feel of Ed's throat.

"Stay where you are!" Ed reached into his vest pocket, withdrew a small brownish bottle and wagged it at Mr. Kraken threateningly.

"Wolf's-bane!" Mr. Kraken recoiled like a stepped-on snake.

"You guessed it," said Ed, his confidence sweeping back. "I figured you would."

"Why?"

"Because you're a vampire, that's why. Now, don't deny it."

MR. KRAKEN looked crestfallen. "Why should I deny it?" he said sullenly. "There's no disgrace in being a vampire. Vampirism is strictly hereditary, and I come

from a long line of distinguished vampires."

"I don't hold it against you," said Ed. "Only I don't want you prowling around the neighborhood scaring people to death—"

"How did you find out about me?"

"It was easy," said Ed. "I've been to a lot of movies which featured vampires, and I've studied their weak points. I also read Professor Faust's book on the subject—which I have, in case you'd like to borrow it. When I learned what you were, I knew just what to do. I got the druggist to give me some tincture of aconite, which is made from wolf's-bane. As long as I keep it in my pocket, you can't lay a hand on me."

"That's true," Mr. Kraken admitted resentfully.

"Tell me about yourself," Ed urged. "How did you get in this deplorable condition?"

"It was easy," said Mr. Kraken. "I died."

"Of natural causes, I hope?"

"I was murdered," stated Mr. Kraken. "Murdered in this very house."

Ed was flabbergasted. "That's not possible!" he exclaimed.

"No?" Mr. Kraken exposed his upper tusks in a smug grimace. "Didn't you buy this house from a man called Benjamin Schlik?"

"That's right," Ed nodded. "He was leaving for Arizona for his health."

"*Hah!*" Mr. Kraken made that unpleasant noise again. "Schlik's real name is Joseph Guloff. He is the man who had me murdered."

"He seemed like such a nice little guy too," mused Ed.

"I was Guloff's partner, and he did not wish to divide fifty thousand dollars with me," continued Mr. Kraken. "I know he is still in town, and I will walk the streets every night until I find him. Then I will drain every drop of blood from his fat carcass."

Ed shuddered. "I beg your pardon," he said delicately, "but are your—er—earthly remains located in this house?"

"They are," replied Mr. Kraken. "And I know just what you are thinking. You want to find out where I am buried, so you can get rid of me. A stake through the heart is

the most conventional way—or perhaps you would rather scatter my dust over the sea?"

"Oh, no," protested Ed. "That was the farthest thing from my mind."

"Then let it remain so," said Mr. Kraken harshly. "I intend to be your guest for a long, long time."

So speaking, he swished his coat around himself and vanished down the hall like a swift shadow.

ON THE following evening Ed went up to Mr. Kraken's room again and sat on the bed, waiting. Sure enough, shortly after sundown, Mr. Kraken appeared.

"I want you to keep out of here," Mr. Kraken said severely. "I've paid my rent like a human being, and I insist upon being treated like one."

"Did you find Guloff last night?" Ed asked.

"That's my business," snapped Mr. Kraken. "Let me warn you—it infuriates me to have anyone pry into my affairs."

"You know," said Ed pensively, "if I were in your condition, I'd forget about Guloff. A guy in your condition could pick up some cash for himself."

"I'm not interested in money," Mr. Kraken replied. "I've found that it is of no use to you after you're dead."

"But you're only dead during the daytime—"

"Nevertheless, it changes one's attitude considerably," Mr. Kraken informed him. "The only thing I hunger for is blood; fresh, warm blood."

"Naturally," Ed agreed. "But I think you could cure yourself of that uncouth craving if you put your mind to it. Have you ever wanted to go on the radio?"

"Certainly not," bristled Mr. Kraken.

"With your voice you'd be a natural for one of those midnight to dawn record programs," asserted Ed. "However, that would only be the beginning. With me handling the business end of it, we'd—"

"No!" Mr. Kraken exclaimed harshly. "Now get out of here before I tear your heart from your body and eat it before your eyes!"

Ed replied by patting the bulge in his vest pocket. That little bottle of wolf's-bane made him feel as secure as if he were

watching Boris Karloff from the third row of the Lyric Theater. "You can't scare me," he said. "No, sir, not one little bit. You might as well realize, Mr. Kraken, that I have big plans for you and they don't include letting you run wild on the streets and getting me into all sorts of trouble."

"I will not be exploited!" Mr. Kraken's voice sounded like someone trying to rip up a board.

"Who's exploiting you?" countered Ed. "With a puss like yours, you could put Karloff and Lugosi out of business. I'll guarantee you a movie contract within—"

"And I'll guarantee you something else," interrupted Mr. Kraken. "Guloff shall be my first victim, but you will be the second. Some evening I shall find you without that bottle of wolf's-bane on your person. When that time comes—*hak!*" He rattled his teeth horribly.

Ed was a little disappointed in Mr. Kraken's attitude; but, having made a specialty of selling people things they didn't want, he had supreme confidence in his powers of persuasion. Mr. Kraken always came to the spare room soon after sundown, and for three consecutive nights Ed was on hand to greet him. Ed tried every angle he knew, but, instead of improving, Mr. Kraken's attitude became increasingly hostile. He finally decided there was just one more method of persuasion left: force. He could threaten to destroy him.

In order to do this he would have to find out where the remains were located. The cellar was the most likely place, but he had already inspected it carefully, without finding anything.

The next day Ed stayed home from work and went over the house with a fine-toothed comb. He even pulled up the flooring on the back porch and tore out part of the bathroom wall. In the end he was convinced more than ever that Mr. Kraken was somewhere in the cellar.

Toward sundown he hid in the cellar behind a packing box. The place was dank and musty, and a big spider was sitting in a web in front of the small window which fronted the street, at sidewalk level. Slowly, the sunlight faded away from the window, and the cellar became dark. Then a street light went on, casting a yellow light into

the cellar. Ed could see the outline of the furnace, the big spider—nothing else.

It became late. Ed had been tensely expectant when the sun went down, but now, after waiting at least an hour, he began to wonder if anything was going to happen. Perhaps he had guessed wrong. Mr. Kraken usually put in an appearance before now.

THERE was a sudden rustling noise—as if mice had gotten into the furnace. Ed's vertebrae seemed to crawl down his back like a cobra. The furnace door rattled for a second on its hinges; creaked open.

It looked at first like black smoke issuing from the furnace; then it oozed together the way a chocolate pudding does when you cook it long enough—and there was Mr. Kraken.

Mr. Kraken stood motionless for a long time, and the yellow light cutting across his face made him look particularly repulsive. Finally, with silent footsteps, he moved toward the spot where Ed was hidden. Ed sucked in a deep breath and held it until Mr. Kraken went on up the stairs. After hearing the cellar door open and close, he followed quietly.

Mr. Kraken went straight to the front of the house. He opened the front door, and Ed saw him bend down and pick up a white object which lay on the doorsill. Ed gave Mr. Kraken a quarter-of-a-block head start, then trailed behind him, hugging buildings wherever possible.

They walked a long ways — about five miles, Ed figured. They were somewhere in the vicinity of the East River when Mr. Kraken stopped in front of a saggy, three-story building that had an abandoned pool hall on the lower floor. A sign overhanging the sidewalk read, "Export Street Hotel."

Ed ducked into a doorway and then peered out like an inquisitive cat. Except for Mr. Kraken, the street was deserted. The telephone wires made crackling noises, and a boat whistle moaned out on the river.

Mr. Kraken stood still as a stone gargoyle; then, with remarkable agility, he went straight up the wall.

He went up swiftly and easily—very much like a spider on a thread. Ed could hardly believe his eyes. One minute Mr. Kraken was there on the sidewalk, and the next, he

was up on a third story window sill. A sickish feeling assaulted Ed's middle as he saw Mr. Kraken shove up the sash and step inside. Somebody was about to meet a ghastly end, and Ed felt more than certain that the luckless individual was Joe Guloff.

While he was wondering what to do about it, a shrill cry emanated from the upper portion of the hotel. It was quite a horrible noise, and it made him turn cold all over. He ran up to the hotel entrance and found the door locked. All he could see was a flight of stairs and a dim light globe sticking out of the bare wall. He rang the night bell, hammered on the door pane; but got no reply. A tougher character than Ed Jacobs might have smashed in the door, but Ed was a great respecter of other people's doors and, besides he had no desire to become suspiciously involved in a murder. What Ed wanted most was a cop.

IT WAS one of those dockside neighborhoods full of bleak-faced warehouses and deserted lumberyards, and the nearest outpost of human activity was a small beer joint about three blocks up the street. A juke box was bellowing at the top of its audio-control when Ed barged into the place. Grabbing a wall phone, Ed inserted a nickel and yelled for the police station. He got a quick connection.

"I want to report a murder!" he shouted at the voice which answered.

"Yes? What address, please?" The voice at the other end sounded tired and disinterested.

"Export Street Hotel. There's a man there named Joe Guloff—"

"Joe Guloff, did you say?"

"Joe Guloff," Ed repeated. "I don't think he's dead yet, but you'd better hurry!"

"And what is *your* name?" The voice had suddenly acquired an inquisitorial ring, like Mr. District Attorney.

Ed told him.

"Address?"

Ed told him that too.

"There's nothing to worry about, Mr. Jacobs," said the voice considerably. "The squad car's on its way. There'll be some questioning, of course; but don't hide anything. It'll be to your advantage to tell all you know."

"Yessir," said Ed. He wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, went over to the bar and ordered a double bourbon with a lemon peel.

Pretty soon two police cars came screaming down the street, and their sirens subsided to a growl as they pulled up in front of the Export Street Hotel. Ed stayed at the bar, crunching a pretzel thoughtfully. What could he tell them? The whole truth and nothing but the truth about Mr. Kraken? No. There wasn't a cop in New York City who'd believe him.

He drained his drink, chewed a moment on the lemon peel and started back toward the hotel. A sizeable crowd had gathered in the street; policemen were shouting. An ambulance slid around the corner.

A cold breeze seemed to touch the back of his neck. He turned and saw Mr. Kraken standing behind him.

"Why did you call them?" demanded Mr. Kraken wolfishly. "Answer me!"

"Murder is not my idea of good clean fun," said Ed reproachfully. "Did you kill him?"

Mr. Kraken's mandible worked up and down like the jaw of a snake. "I only needed a few more moments. Miserable, meddling idiot!"

"You listen to me," said Ed, shaking his forefinger sternly. "From now on, blood-snatching is distinctly out. Either you will toe the mark and embark upon some honest enterprise, or I will shovel the ashes out of my furnace and chuck them into the river. You see—" he added, "—I know where the body's buried."

Mr. Kraken's face twitched in a dozen places. He sighed bitterly. "When I first came back to this world, I was full of high hopes. I had been a failure in life, but I felt certain I had all the requisites of an admirable vampire. I've failed again."

"You're just beginning," Ed told him. "We'll go down to the police station and tell them who you are. Once the story hits the papers, you'll be famous—"

"I won't do it!" Mr. Kraken exclaimed in a shrill voice. "I won't be hounded by you!"

"Now, see here—" Before he could get any further, Ed found he was talking to space.

Mr. Kraken had vanished.

The crowd was dispersing by this time, and the police cars were wheeling away. Ed went to a hotel that night because he knew the police would be waiting to question him when he got home. He didn't want to lie; but how could he make them believe his story? He rolled and tossed all night trying to think of a solution. It came to him about six a.m. The police might not believe him, but they would certainly listen to that eminent scholar and authority on the supernatural, Professor Matthew Faust.

ED LOOKED up Professor Faust that morning. The professor was an oldish gentleman with a large nose and a bemused manner that made you think of a barn owl. He appeared pleased when Ed told him he had read his book. "So few persons are interested in the study of hyperphysical phenomena," he remarked. "What part of the book did you find most interesting?"

"The chapter on vampires," Ed told him. "I've got one living at my house."

"I beg pardon?" frowned Professor Faust.

"That's why I came to you for help," said Ed. He started right from the beginning and told old Professor Faust everything. The professor seemed puzzled at first, and by the time Ed had finished the narrative he looked downright alarmed.

"The police wouldn't believe me if I told 'em about Mr. Kraken," Ed concluded. "That's why I want you to help me. What do you say?"

Professor Faust moved toward the door gingerly. "I would say, sir, that you are a sick man. I suggest that you—er—see a psychiatrist immediately."

Ed was stunned. "You—don't believe me?"

"I'm afraid you took my book too literally. It was meant to be a compilation of primitive superstitions and folklore—"

"And you think I'm nuts because I believed what you wrote!"

"The power of autosuggestion often brings on hallucinations. According to Freud—"

Ed got out of there as fast as he could. He was disappointed, disillusioned and hopping mad. There was now only one thing to do. He would sneak into the house about

sundown, find Mr. Kraken and threaten him with certain extinction if he didn't make a clean breast of things to the police. It might work.

Having some time to kill, Ed went to Central Park and spent the afternoon feeding squirrels. It was hot, so he took off his coat and vest and snoozed a while in the sunshine.

He reached home shortly after dark, sneaking down the alley and entering through the back door to avoid any cops who might be posted near the house. Climbing the back stairway, he went straight to the spare room and sat on the bed, waiting for Mr. Kraken to appear. An hour passed, and nothing happened. Ed had waited for Mr. Kraken before, but this time he was extraordinarily nervous. The longer he waited, the more he began to suspect that Professor Faust might be right. Maybe he *was* crazy. Maybe Mr. Kraken was nothing but an hallucination after all. All those horror movies he had seen might have brought it on. He made up his mind never to see another one again.

Then he heard a creaking door downstairs and the sound of moving footsteps, and he felt better. Mr. Kraken was coming! He was real, after all.

Ed stood up. A spindly moon cast a faint beam across the bedspread. He did not see the door open, nor see it close, but all of a sudden he noticed a black figure standing in front of the bureau.

"You're late," said Ed.

Mr. Kraken did not reply. A pair of shiny eyes glared into Ed's face.

At that moment he sensed something wrong. He placed his hand against his stomach for reassurance, feeling for the little bottle he always kept in his vest.

His vest was gone. He had left it hanging on the bench in the park.

Ed tried to speak, but the words clogged his throat. All he could see was those terrible eyes and the black shadow that remained as stiffly frozen as himself. Without that protective bottle of wolf's-bane he was as helpless as a rabbit in front of a boa constrictor.

Sucking down a deep breath, Ed took a jittery step toward the door. The black figure moved toward the door also. He en-

visioned those terrible tusks slaving for his throat. Sweat trickled down the bridge of his nose, and his mouth tasted salty.

He clenched his fists; bolted for the hall. He managed to reach the top of the front stairs, grabbed for the rail and lost his balance. His forward momentum, combined with the pull of gravity, sent him looping through the air like a projectile from a well-aimed mortar. He landed on his back somewhere in the vicinity of the bottom newel post.

The impact knocked out his wind and made him feel as if he were being pushed around in a revolving door. The whistling sensation ceased—and he became conscious of a pair of icy hands creeping about his throat.

Ed let out a shriek that would have made a banshee run for cover. He struck out with both fists, and his knuckles sank into something paunchy.

"Ed—stop it! Ed!"

HE OPENED his eyes and saw Ellen standing beside him. A jug-shaped policeman leaned against the stair rail, clutching his midriff and groaning mightily. It was Sergeant O'Callahan of the Flatbush Detail.

"What's wrong with you, Ed?" Ellen asked, massaging his neck again. "What happened?"

"He—tried to kill me—" Ed faltered. "He caught me without my bottle—"

"Looks like he had too much of the bottle," growled Sergeant O'Callahan.

"The police have been looking for you all day," said Ellen.

"I figured they would be," sighed Ed. "It was lucky they reached Joe Guloff in time."

"I'll say it was," nodded Sergeant O'Callahan. "We rounded up the whole gang. They were usin' the hotel as a hideout."

"What gang?" frowned P.

"Guloff's gang, to be sure. We've been lookin' for them ever since they heisted the shipyard payroll. What we want to know is how you knew where they were hiding?"

Ed remained on the floor for a few seconds, just looking stupid. Finally he crawled to his feet. "I didn't know Guloff was a gangster," he said. "I called the

cops because I thought he was being murdered."

"Yeah?" The sergeant scratched the back of his bristly scalp. "Guloff claimed he was bein' murdered, too. He was so weak he couldn't walk, and when we got him to the station house he went absolutely berserk—like a crazy man. Kept yellin' about some guy who used to be his partner—guy by the name of McCracken."

"Kraken," said Ed. "I found out that Mr. Kraken was going to kill Guloff and I followed him to the Export Street Hotel."

"Mr. Kraken is our roomer," Ellen explained. "Ed never liked him from the first."

"Where's he now?" the policeman asked.

"I—think he may be—upstairs," Ed stammered.

"That we'll soon discover." Sergeant O'Callahan took a large, dangerous-looking weapon from his holster and started up the staircase with it.

"I think Mr. Kraken's gone," Ellen whispered to Ed. "I looked into his room this morning, and all his things were gone—"

"This morning? When did you come home?" Ed was surprised to see her all over again.

"About nine," she said. "Didn't you get my special delivery letter? Oh, you must have—or you wouldn't have hired the man to clean out the furnace."

"The what?"

"The furnace. A man came and cleaned it out. He said you phoned him late last night and hired him to do it. He charged me fifteen dollars."

"You mean—he cleaned *everything* out of the furnace?"

"I saw to it that he did a good job," she nodded. "He said you insisted that he dump the ashes in the river."

"Best place in the world to dump ashes."

"Oh, sure—the river," said Ed groggily. Then it came to him. He recalled how

Mr. Kraken had picked up something *just* before leaving the house last night. Ellen's letter—they always left specials under the door. Mr. Kraken knew that Ellen would be home next day, so he had gone and called the furnace man. It was the same as suicide.

But if Mr. Kraken was now peacefully at rest in the bottom of the river, whom had Ed seen in the spare room not less than fifteen minutes ago?

Ed hurried up the stairs and nearly knocked over Sergeant O'Callahan, who was coming down. He stepped into the dark room and was immediately confronted by a shadowy figure that seemed to grow larger as he moved toward it. He clicked on the light and found himself looking into the big bureau mirror—looking at his own image! He had nearly scared himself to death on account of something that wasn't there.

"He's not here, lad," said Sergeant O'Callahan. "We'll pick him up before long. And as for yourself—I'll see to it personally that you get what's coming to you."

"Get what?"

"The reward. There's a twenty-seven hundred dollar reward for information leading to the arrest and capture of Joe Guloff. I thought you knew."

"That's wonderful!" exclaimed Ellen. "Now you can buy into Mr. Cash's business. Aren't you glad we let Mr. Kraken have the spare room?"

Ed's legs wobbled. He had to go sit on the bed.

Ed Jacobs says he has investigated the matter thoroughly, and he is satisfied beyond the shadow of a doubt that the furnace man dumped the ashes into the river some place below Greenpoint. Therefore, if you are ever in Brooklyn and you see a tall, gaunt man in a long overcoat following you some night, there is nothing to be worried about. It couldn't possibly be Mr. Kraken.

Still—you never can tell.