

# Requiem

## 6 short stories

by Ray Cummings



Below us lay an inner space which was spread a confusion of globes. Orbits, are circles that of Earth. To me I found these later to be, from the distance some were big and bright, so others I would in our own world have said to be a hundred feet in diameter. . . . The big one, surrounded by darkness it seemed almost as though it contained very important and hidden, and that, lay just before me. And the whole formation, quite accidental like a picture with strong perspective.



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# some short stories

Requiem For A Small Planet

The Golden Temple

Monster of the Moon

Clue In Crimson

The Scalpel of Doom

The Dead Man Laughs



# Requiem For A Small Planet

By Ray Cummings

The last story of one of science-fiction's original greats--and as timely as tomorrow's headlines.

THE VOICE of the Hittag city was always a restless, muttering murmur, floating here from far off over the distant hills. And you could see the blotch of its glow-lights. Sometimes the voice would rise as though in anger. Sometimes the blotch would spread, then die away and surge again. Restless; active with the struggle for accomplishment. To Jan, as he stretched sprawled on the blue sward, comfortable and lazy with the fullness of the food inside him, it seemed that the intruding presence of the distant Hittags was the only dissonance here in his little world. The shimmering blue pool at his feet was beautiful. Mara's music, as she played and sang to herself after the evening meal, was sweet and gentle like herself. The perfume of the flowers massed around the garden and Mara's dwelling here, the shining opalescence of the eternal twilight, seemed to make Jan's soul expand so that life was holding everything that one could want.

But always--all Jan's young life--the jangle of the Hittag's was off there beyond the purple hills.

Now little Mara came through the dwelling entrance into the garden. Her stringed lute was in her hand. Her long pale hair, the pale draped robe, shimmered blue in the warm dimness. Her gentle beauty was like an aura around her.

"Jan?"

He stirred, on the sward. "Yes, Mara? Here I am." He sat up, smiling, extended his hand as she came to him so that he drew her down, reclining beside him.

"Play more, Mara."

The stirring flying things cheeped to join her music, little vivid blobs of color as they flitted among the blue-gold leaves. The fountain of the pool was a soft background of harmony.

But the Hittag splotch in the blur of distance was muttering loud tonight. Jan could see that Mara's blue eyes were troubled.

He stopped her music. "What is it, Mara? There is something wrong?"

It seemed such a momentous question.

"Old Mama Megan," she said. "To the very aged must come a divination? Don't you think so?"

"What of her?"

"She tells me that now we should fear Hido."

That terrible word fear. Word so incongruous here in the little realm of the Marans that one might grow from childhood to maturity and scarcely hear it uttered. Fear Hido? How could they fear Hido who for so long had done the few simple tasks of gathering the food from the lush fields, serving it, and keeping their dwelling in order?! Hido with his dwarfed, ugly little body, his imp-grin and comical gestures and jokes that always made you laugh--why should the dread word fear be invoked, because of him?

"Mama Megan reminds me that once he was a Hittag," Mara was saying.

So long ago, when still Jan's mother and father were living and Jan was very small, Hido had come; beaten and scourged by the Hittags, he had come like a refugee to the Marans. No Hittag had bothered to chase him. No Hittag, busy, restless with his civilized struggle toward what he called achievement, would ever bother with anything concerning the little race of Marans off here in the secluded hills. To the great Hittags, the simple Marans were savages. Unimportant in the restless Hittag world.

Jan himself knew little of them, but it was enough. Their present ruler, him whom they called HittagH, surely was a madman, lashing them on, mad with lust of power to lift himself and push down others who might oppose him. Life for the Hittags was a struggle always to create complexities. A life of fear. A life with violence and bloodshed, and they called it civilization's upward struggle! To Jan, it was the reality of savagery. Nature was benign here in this world peopled only by the Hittags and Marans. Surely, there was nothing to struggle against. Jan's father had once said a strange word, and tried to explain what it was. Sickness. A thing that ended lives before their life-span of time. It was not here. Only age at last could kill. Or sudden accident or violence. For the simple Marans, accidents was rare. Violence, the Hittags created. But why? Why?

Jan, now that he and Mara had reached maturity so that soon children would be coming, knew that there was no answer to that. He could only be thankful that surely their children would be spared such struggle.

"Mama Megan wishes you to come to her," Mara was saying.

"Come now?"

"Yes, that would be best. Soon she will be sleeping."

JAN ROSE to his feet, stretching his long, sly body. He was much taller than Mara. Taller, really, than most of the Marans. A little different, too. His eyes were blue, like Mara's; his blond hair was cut shorter, but still it was like hers. Yet about him there was something very different. A different cast of feature, perhaps a sort of sternness, incongruous to his gentle nature. He could remember that his father had been the same, perhaps even his mother also.

There was a mystery about Jan. It used to trouble him a little, when he was a questioning child. Now suddenly it was troubling him again. Old Mama Megan would know. With her great age and wisdom, surely she would be able to tell him. He thought now that tonight he would ask her.

Pulling Mara by the hand, Jan strode into the dwelling room, where Hido was removing the evening food. The misshapen dwarf, with his ugly grinning face, pointed chin and bulbous nose, set down his tray and did a little mock dance, waving his thick arms and jiggling so that his stone bracelets tinkled.

"Laugh," he said. "Who but Hido shall always make you laugh? Go hasten to your love-couch, I wish you well."

"Hido, shush," Mara said.

"And life is merry and we are wise to keep it so." He was still jiggling as he vanished with his tray.

They found old Megan in her wood-chair, quiescent with the weight of great age. The opal sheen from outside lay spread on her thin wrinkled face, as though it were a sort of glory. Her hands were



folded in her lap among the leaves of her robe. She was so old now that to Jan it seemed that only her glowing eyes were really alive.

She greeted them silently, with one hand stirring into a gesture so that they sat down on the leaf-strewn floor before her, hand in hand like little children who had been summoned.

Then she said, "I have not told you, but now I should. It will be soon now that I am gone from you."

"Mama Megan--" Mara gave a little cry; Jan just silently stared. It is the way of life, but you can never quite get use to it, the inevitable passing of the old whom you love. Mara's mother, and her mother and hers, were here, with no thought yet of dying. Now Megan, oldest of them all, had found her time drained out. Jan realized it; so many of the old had tried to explain it. Nature tells you, with little warning signals that you cannot miss.

And now old Megan knew, so that she had sent for them.

"Mama Megan--" Jan touched her hand with a caress, but she smiled gently.

"It is not for sorrow, the ways of wise nature," Megan said. "But there are things now, I must tell you.

Things of the Maran Secret. I have been its Custodian, you know."

They knew it, of course. The Maran Secret. To all the young it was a mysterious thing, a thing you could not even begin to understand. A legend. A tradition. Yet everyone knew it was very real. From out of the dim past, down through the generations unnumbered, someone always was the Custodian. Near the end, warned by nature that time had run out, always the Custodian must pass it on to someone else,

this knowledge of the Maran Secret.

"To us both, Mama Megan?" Jan and Mara spoke together.

"Yes, I have decided. You two, still so young yet being as one, with your coming children."

"Now?" They held their breath.

"Yes. Perhaps you will be surprised. There is nothing that I can tell you save where it is."

"The Secret?" Her words were puzzling. Always Jan had thought it was something which was to be explained. But now old Megan was telling them it was nothing of that. Merely it was something that was hidden here, with Megan's knowledge only that she knew where it was hidden.

"But what is it?" Jan murmured.

Her grey, palsied head shook with negation. "I do not know. Through the ages, always it has been here. They say it has a container, indestructible by time. It lies there, buried in the ground."

She was telling them the place. Not far from here, out in the nearest little valley between the twin hills.

Now they were the Custodians and could find it if need be.

"Find it if need be?" Jan echoed. "If need be for what? And you don't know what it is? You talk riddles, Mama Megan."

She was still gently smiling. "The new Custodians must know what I know. I must tell you now something of the history of the Marans. You have not been taught it. Perhaps that is because we Marans feel it is

a little shameful. There was once a time when the Marans here were struggling upward, building a great civilization."

"Like the Hittags," Mara breathed.

The smile on Megan's pallid lips was ironic. "Yes. Like the Hittags. The Hittags were primitive then--just little roving tribes far away. The Marans were the Great Race. They were learned in science.

They built great cities--vast, complicated ways of living, working very hard with frantic urge to satisfy needs which they created for themselves."

Megan's thin, shaking arm gestured vaguely toward the window oval where it shone with the opalescent distance outside. "Their cities are out there now, buried in the ruins of time. And we, here, are all that is left."

"But what happened?" Jan demanded. "They got tired of working? Tired of working, for nothing at all?"

"Perhaps they reached the peak that man is allowed to go," Megan said. "I do not know. I am not wise enough to interpret the ways of God. I know only that their science at last tampered with nature too freely. Some engine of death which they had found with which to murder each other, at last turned against them. There was the Great Catastrophe. And then there was nothing left but a world in ruins, and little remnants of struggling beings left in the chaos."

"And that's--us?" Jan murmured.

"Out of them, our world as we have it here now, has come," Megan said. "The span of ten times my long life. But these Marans who were left--surely they had learned their lesson." Her thin, quavering old

voice took on a sudden warmth, almost as though in talking of this, she were young again. "A lesson learned from the lash of an unthinkable horror. Those chastened Marans, suddenly saw what fools their forebears had been. And they lived for the things that all mankind really wants. So that now, as you see and feel, we are happy here."

"And now the Hittags are doing it all over again." Mara said.

"Yes. I suppose so."

"But Mama Megan," Jan said. "You forget to tell us about the Maran Secret." It was something left from the great Maran civilization. Something the pitiful survivors found intact in the ruins. They had a temptation to preserve it, so that always to now, it had been kept hidden here.

"To be used if need be," Jan said. "What did you mean by that?"

Old Megan shook her head. "Words that the Custodian before me passed down. Perhaps, originally, one might have thought he could have a need to use the hidden thing, whatever it is. We cannot imagine that--not now--because it is a thing diabolic."

How different from what Jan and Mara always had pictured the Maran Secret to be! Just a shuddering, unknown thing, diabolic.

OLD MEGAN'S eyesight was dim, her hearing blurred. Jan and Mara had their backs to the door oval; they were intent, so that the little noise there behind them went unnoticed. Megan did not see the moving shadow as now it slid away.

Megan was saying, "There is no one in the world now--perhaps even among the Hittags save their madman ruler--who would want our

Secret. But always I have remembered that Hido is a Hittag. I wanted to tell you that--though perhaps it means so little as a warning that I do great injustice to the clowning fellow. But they say now that HittagH is desperate. There is someone else there among them who lusts for the Leadership."

Jan had heard of it. In his mind there was a dim picture of the boastful madman, lurking in his tower--the Great Leader, yet fearing everybody and everything. His mind, warped, twisted, bringing mad fits of rage, so that alternately he would order murder done, and threaten suicide if ever his power were successfully assailed.

Suddenly Jan remembered what he had wanted to ask her. "Mama Megan," he said. "My father and my mother--how is it they were not very old, like you, yet they passed and were gone?"

Megan's face clouded. Her eyes looked away. "They died," she said. "One quite soon after the other.

You were very small."

"Yes, I know. I can remember them a little. Was it an accident?"

"No."

"Violence?" A shudder was within Jan.

"Violence?" she echoed. "Oh no. They were here. Right here in this house. I was with them."

"Then--what?" he demanded.

"They called it a meaningless word," she said. "A sickness. Perhaps, like I feel now. Jan, child, question me no more. Your father told me little. Almost nothing. What little it was, I could not understand."

"I am not just like the Marans," Jan declared. "I know it. There is something different."

"Question me not. Your father left you a message. You have it written down."

"To be opened, only if ever great and terrible danger comes to me," Jan said bitterly. "Yes, I have it."

He touched his chest. "I have it always on me, as you told me I must. Yet never can I open it, of course."

For how can great and terrible danger come to a Maran?" A little while ago he could have said that sincerely. Yet now, somehow, it sounded empty, fatuous.

Old Megan was sagging in her chair, her little strength drained from the talk. Mara said, "Jan, we must go."

Then they left her. Presently on their couch Jan lay with Mara in his arms with the soft warm redolence of the opalescent air caressing them. The little shining pool outside their window splashed with music to lull them. Surely they felt older. Not children now. The new Custodians.

Jan was thinking of the mystery of it. A thing diabolic, so ironically to be treasured from generation to generation just because that was the tradition, the command of ancestors long gone. He was thinking too of the mystery of himself, the message from his father that he could not open. Never had he wondered about it more than now.

And he was thinking of his love for Mara and hers for him. And their coming child. Surely they were very singularly blessed...

He knew that he had been asleep. Mara, warm here in his arms, was asleep. But something had awakened him. Something horrible. Then he knew it was a scream he had heard, because now it was repeated--a scream, gurgling off horribly into a moan. It awakened Mara. She gasped in fear, with her arms around him.

"Jan!"

"That was Megan! Surely that was Megan!"

IN THAT MOMENT, as he and the trembling Mara flung on their leaf-robres, it seemed that a bridge was crossed by Jan. A great gulf spanned. A transition, as though from one world to another. For a brief interval he stood dazed, trying to encompass it. All his life, here among the Marans, the thought of violence was a distant thing. Something apart. Something to be contemplated abstractly as happening somewhere to others, but never to oneself. Yet here now, embodied in that scream, was the presage of violence. Something--someone--forcing violence.

Perhaps Mara was feeling the same. She clung to him. She was gasping, "Megan--in danger--"

Then as he turned and dashed through the dim and silent cubby rooms, Mara was running behind him.

Old Megan was not in her chair. She was not on her sleep-couch. She was lying on the flooring.

Dead? As they bent over her, the blue-veined waxen eyelids fluttered up. She murmured, "Hido came. He must have listened as I made you Custodians--yet he--did not think he had heard clearly enough." That grinning, hideous dwarf, trying to force more information from Megan, finally had knocked her from her couch. Her slow gasping

voice now was barely audible.

"Jan--other Hittags were here. I saw them here lurking in my corridor. If they--find now the Maran Secret--if the madman Leader gets it--our little world is gone, Jan."

"Megan! Megan!" Mara was bending down, sobbing. She tried to hold the old woman's head in her warm arms.

But Jan only stood mute, with the turmoil of his thoughts flooding him. Now Megan's faint voice was saying, "Remember your father's message --so that at least you and Mara may save yourselves. I--love you both--my children--good-bye--"

She lay so still. The waxen shell of her lay still, and the evanescent thing which was Megan had fled away.

Violence. Megan had died by violence. Unthinkable thing, yet here it was. As he faced it, groped with the reality of it, unprecedented fury rose in Jan. It blurred him, this coping with a wild rush of new emotions. Then he turned, shouted something at Mara. He hardly knew what it was.

"Mara--wait--don't come!"

The opalescent dimness outside, the eternal glowing, shimmering twilight of the little Maran realm, enveloped Jan as he ran. And now he knew that Mara was coming behind him, running with flashing pale limbs and her robe and pale tresses fluttering behind her.

The dim hills shone ahead of him as he ran, for the little valley between them. Then suddenly a figure rose up from a leafy copse in front of him. Hido. The dwarf jumped. He flung a rock, but Jan ducked down and then was upon him.



It was a blur of horror, this weird new thing that Jan knew was the lust to kill. The gibbering dwarf was hard with muscle. Jan could feel it as they rolled, pounding wildly at each other. Mara was standing with a hand against her mouth, her wide blue eyes staring at this incredible scene of violence.

Now the dwarf had him down, astride him, trying to grip his throat. But the simple work of the fields hardens one. Jan too, had the strength and the youth, so that now he had heaved the heavy dwarf away and leaped to his feet. And plunged again. Jan knew that this time his antagonist was under him; Hido was screaming from the blows in his ugly face.

He was finished, but Jan did not know it, nor care. How could he know anything, save that he was fighting something which had to be killed? He was on his feet again. Incredibly there was frenzied strength in him, enough to lift Hido up. A great jagged rock, Jan's height, was nearby; and now he was jamming Hido against it, pounding the dwarf's head against the pointed rock.

"Jan! Jan!"

He hardly heard Mara's cry of horror. The dead twisted thing was at his feet, but once more he picked it up, panting, sweating as again he heaved it headfirst to crash suddenly against the rock.

Incredible, this lust. It was like a water-maelstrom bursting loose inside him, a thing once surging that was not to be checked.

"You--you--" His tongue had no epithet, though weirdly he wanted one.

He was hurling the limp body, and picking it up and heaving it again...then pounding it with a rock held in his hand until at last his

strength and breath gave out and he dropped back beside it on the ground, spent and trembling.

Violence. His first experience with violence. In that moment Jan knew he hated it, would always hate it, with a revulsion so terrible that it made his gorge rise. The dim opalescent scene swim dizzily around him. He felt Mara's shaking arms holding him.

Megan had said there were other Hittags here. Jan was Custodian. The thought made him leap to his feet and he drew Mara up with him. She understood, of course, because now again she was running behind him, trying to keep with him as he dashed into the glowing little valley.

HE KNEW he was too late, because far up there ahead of him, shapes were fleeing. The Hittags.

There was a group of them. In that moment they bounded away and were gone in the twilight glow, little dots vanishing in the distance beyond which the Hittag city was a blotch in the sky...

He paused to stare, and Mara caught up with him. "Jan, that was the Hittags?"

"Yes, I think so. They may have gotten it."

Then at last he and Mara were gazing blankly at the hidden rock which already had been found and moved, revealing the hole down into which he and Mara climbed to find the hidden little place underground. Evidence of strange science was here. The forgotten science of so long ago--smooth and glistening polished walls here underground; a little metal casket here, of a strange smooth substance impervious to time. And the casket was open; its tiny mysterious contents was gone...

The new Custodians. Children, really, so short a time ago. Perhaps all the Marans--so simple and trusting and gentle a people now--were not much more than children. Even old Megan, mistrusting Hido, yet had made Jan and Mara Custodians in simple fashion. Only those who live by violence, trained to it, will think to guard in advance against a murderous enemy.

"Mara, what can we do?" But Jan knew then that it was an irrevocable thing. She was standing staring at him. And because she was a girl; and more perhaps because she was a woman whose child was coming--and the horror of the first violence she had seen was flooding her--suddenly now the color of life faded from her face. She stood staring at Jan, puzzled, bewildered by the feelings within her.

Perhaps she thought it was death now rushing at her. She gave a soft little cry; her hand went out as though to clutch at him, and she wilted down, lay at his feet.

To Jan, she was dead. Fainting was something beyond his experience or knowledge. He crouched, holding her in his arms, his grief blurring him. Mara and their child, both gone. There was nothing here with Jan but a great, drab void of emptiness, with everything which had been his life suddenly taken away.

Then he saw that she was breathing. It brought hope.

"Mara! Oh, my Mara--"

So much time passed. He could not guess how long he sat there in the cold and dank little vault with his dying one in his arms. But death held off. Now a little of the rose-color was coming into her cheeks and lips. She stirred.

Her eyes opened. She had come back to him. She and their child. The flooding thankfulness of it misted his vision, choked his voice so that he could only hold her with his cheek against hers and his fingers winding in her tossed, pale hair.

It may have been the full time that one would sleep while he sat there holding Mara and both of them wondering when death would come. But she was strong with color now. Gradually it came to them that she would not die.

"The Hittags took the Maran Secret," she murmured. "Oh, Jan, what shall we do?" There was nothing they could do. They left the vault open as they had found it. The little valley between the twin peaks glowed around them as they stood wondering what they could do. To Jan then came the presage that though the valley looked the same, certainly everything was different now with the Maran Secret gone. A new era, just beginning. An era of danger, of horror...

THE VALLEY here was no longer the same. Always it had been like everything here, shimmering with quiet peace and security. Now there were voices Marans running here, shouting, babbling with the new emotion of terror.

"Doomed. Death--death is coming to us all!"

"The end of the world--"

"Where shall we go--what can we do?"

A little way down the valley, as Jan and Mara too were running, they came upon an old Maran sitting on a rock with his hands dangling and on his face the vacancy of bewilderment. Jan seized him. "Tell me--"

He stared. "My Meeta," he mumbled. "I cannot find her. I do not know where she is. I tried to find her\_--"

"They talk of doom and death," Jan gasped. "The end of the world!"

"Yes," the old Maran said. "The Secret was stolen--have you not heard that? Already news has come to us from the Hittag city. The Hittags themselves fleeing here--fools! What fools, those men who call themselves civilized."

Jan was shaking him. "Doom?"

"Their madman leader has the Secret. In his impregnable tower he stands laughing at his enemies because with the Secret he is bringing the end of the world, and he laughs and jibes because he is a madman."

Now Jan and Mara were running again, with the babbling chaos of terror around them. And others were telling them--the horrible, diabolic science with a madman using it...

Suddenly in a little blue-green glade with the tinkling splash of a brook at their feet, Jan remembered.

He stopped the aimless panic of their flight.

"Jan, what is it?" Mara gasped.

"That message my father left me." He remembered it now against the flesh of his chest, under his leaf-robe. "He said, if there were ever terrible danger." Now Jan drew it out. He sat down by the brook, opening the small flat package with the wondering, awed Mara beside him.

"Jan, what is it? What does he say?"

There were very many words in his father's small, neat script. For a long time Jan sat reading, his face grim, his eyes puzzled.

"Jan, what does he say?" "So much that I cannot understand."

A chance at least to save just him and Mara--and their child who was coming. That much seemed clear. Now Jan knew that his mother and father, and he himself who had not yet been born, had come here from some strange and distant place. Why of course!

A strange and distant place so that they were not just like the Marans. Here was the chance for Jan and Mara to return there. A haven... Jan felt it so. An escape...

He tried to explain it to Mara. "We must go ourselves and our unborn child."

His whole world was here by the brook, as he stood with his arms around Mara. Everything else was doomed by a madman.

"There is enough, just for us two--"

There was a flat little vial, and as he opened it, tiny pellets rolled out into the palm of his hand.

"Now, Mara--"

"Oh, Jan, whatever you say--" She was docile, trusting because he gently smiled at her, trying not to show his fear.

THE PELLETS were sweet to the taste. They bubbled on the tongue and were gone. Now Jan and Mara sat by the brook, clutching at each other with a vast and terrible dizziness sweeping them so that they closed their eyes. But still the world swam and swayed with

soundless clapping in their heads.

Perhaps it was yet another form of dying?

But then Jan opened his eyes. The dizziness passed. With an incredible amazement, even though his father's message had warned and tried to explain, Jan and Mara stared at the strange scene around them.

It seemed all, in motion. Everything was dwindling. And drawing closer. The nearby blue-green trees were shrinking down and coming nearer. The little shining brook was narrowing and already it was lapping against them. Jan could feel the movement under him. But he knew, what the message had said, it was his own body which was moving. Growing larger. He and Mara, swiftly now and with steady acceleration, growing gigantic so that everything else seemed dwindling into littleness...

Already the giant bodies of the two of them were sprawled over the ribbon of brook...

Jan staggered to his feet. To him, Mara was the same, unchanging.

"Quick now!" He tried to smile at her again. "Don't be frightened. I will lead us."

The letter had warned him what to do. The trees here now were down at their knees. The walls of the shining valley were shrinking, rushing forward. For a moment the voices of the panic-stricken Marans and Hittags were little squeaks down among the tiny trees. The valley walls came with a soundless sliding rush. Then one of them was here at hand, hardly waist high so that. Jan leaped up to what always before he had seen as a hilltop.

"I'll lift you, Mara. Quick."

Then he had drawn her up. There was a moment when the valley seemed just a little narrowing rift in the ground beside them. A moment more and it was a crack, so small that when they staggered to their feet again, hardly could they notice it.

Now a new vista of rocks and distant mountains was around them. Mountains that shrank with ever increasing speed, coming down, shifting forward. The scene closing together, until again, monstrous titans, they drew themselves upward.

There was no sense of time. Jan could tell nothing of that. It seemed a journey endless. Journey into largeness. He could envisage now that somewhere down among the tiny cracks and crevices at his feet lay the infinitesimal space which held the Maran and Hittag world...

Now the scene here, dwindling and closing together so swiftly, was shining with a new radiance.

Long since, the shimmering opalescence of the little world down there, had gone. The boulders, crags, and closing, shrinking mountains, were glittering with cold nakedness. Rocks of many facets, prismatic with light.

Overhead the sky was changing. It was a blur now; but in the blur there seemed to be light which was yellow. A blur of it far off to one side.

NOW A definite horizon seemed to have come around them. As Jan and Mara stood together, clutching at each other with the glittering ground shrinking under their feet, Jan could see that the tumbled landscape was all down lower than their heads. It spread out and stopped at an abyss. The brink made a distant circle around them.



Beyond it, there was the blur of empty sky coming down. There were shadows in the sky now. High up, monstrous moving shapes with the blur of yellow light on them.

The shrinking circle of the abyss came closer. And suddenly Jan's viewpoint changed so that he saw himself and Mara standing here gigantic. Enlarging giants with a little circular spread of glittering rock under them--a circle shrinking until presently in a step he reached its edge.

"Jump, Mara! Wait, I'll go first."

He jumped, and it was less than the .height of his head. Only waist high when he had lifted Mara down and they stood on a black undulating plain. Beside them now the white glitter of rock from which they had jumped was a little boulder. It shrank. A rock as big as one's head. Then smaller ...

Mara gasped, shaking as she clutched Jan. And all the world now was a chaos because there were immense titans who seemed to be standing in the far distance, back beyond the edge of the black plain.

Human shapes looming far up, with great spread of pink-white faces. They moved, and there was wind here.

Then a human hand came slowly down toward them. A hand far bigger than their bodies. A voice, roaring from high up overhead, said, "Careful, Hal. Not too fast."

A strange language. But Jan remembered. The message had reminded him of the queer language which his father and mother had taught him when he was still a child. They said it was the first language he had ever spoken. They had begged him never to forget it. When they had died, he had practiced it with Mara. Queer words.

His father had called them English.

"Careful, Hal--"

Now the monstrous hand had grasped them so that they were cradled in it. With a rush of wind they were off the black plain and down on a wooden ground, with the towering legs of a giant stretching up over their heads. But the giants were dwindling...

Then at last the growth had stopped, and Jan and Mara with a group of grave-faced men in size like themselves around them, stood in a room. Lights were overhead. Windows were there, with strangeness that Jan remembered he should call daylight outside them. Strange things, strange sounds out there.

HIS FATHER'S MESSAGE had told him what to expect. This would be a room in the Bureau of Standards, in a place called Washington. His new world. Strange new world for him and Mara and their child...

He stood holding Mara. Someone said, "They seemed to understand us."

"Yes," Jan said. "My father taught me."

Now he saw that the black plain was a smooth square of marble, with a hooded light over it. And in its center, a tiny grain of crystal quartz which held the world into which his father and mother had gone, when his scientist father had discovered the strange drugs so many years ago. Explorer into smallness.

His father and mother had remained there and guards night and day had watched the tiny fragment of quartz...

There was one scientist here they called Hal Matheson--a youngish,

goggled fellow, thin-faced with somber eyes. "My father was here to see them go," he said. "Then you would be Blanchard's boy? Your mother said, if you were a boy you would be called Jan."

"I am Jan," he said. Then he explained about Mara. "We came," he said. "My father's message told me to come, if terrible danger threatened--"

It was as though his words were timed by fate. One of the men cried out. As Jan turned to gaze at the marble slab, there seemed a tiny aura of something around the grain of quartz. Premonitory aura, and in that same split-second, there was a tiny puff of light. The grain was gone.

The end of a world. It was as swift, as simple as that--And as unimportant. Certainly of no moment here in the vastness of this other, teeming world...

Save perhaps as a symbol--A presage...a warning...

Someone here in the room laughed grimly. "Dissolution--hah! That could happen to the best of us--"

"Shut up, Hal! Don't be ghoulish--"

As though with macabre prophecy he had spoken at just the right instant; the windows brightened with a glare. Jan and Mara felt themselves falling, or knocked down. A whiteness so blinding beat here at the windows that they flung their hands to their closed eyes, yet still could not shut it out. Then it was gone, but there was a great clatter and roaring and breaking glass and the room shuddering around them and outside, a terrible, distant, immense roaring of horror...

Through the shattered window it seemed that Jan could see a vast column of vapour surging upward...

The voices and the shouts and running footsteps were a bewildering chaos, so that Jan could only crouch and hold Mara with her questioning gaze on him like a frightened The voices were shouting such strange things...

"An H-bomb fell in Virginia--"

"Missed us and fell in Virginia--"

"It's war! War!"

"So what?" That ironic, ghoulish laugh again. "You knew if we waited, we'd get the first one, didn't you?"

War...War...The cries of it were spreading everywhere...

And Jan crouched huddled, holding Mara...

Violence... Violence... He could think of nothing else. The horror of man wanting to create violence...

Then he was thinking of the blue-green sward outside Mara's dwelling, the tinkling splashing of the shimmering pool a background to Mara's music... Surely things like that must be the essence of what man really wants... If only he knew it... Now Jan and Mara were questioning each other with gazes of mute bewilderment. It seemed that their last haven had gone.

THE END

# The Golden Temple

By Ray Cummings



A Pyramid of Gold, Seen in a Fourth Dimension Machine, Whips Up the Avarice of Parks, so He Goes After It Ruthlessly, Murderously!

"SO you're at it again?" Parks spoke from the shadows of the laboratory doorway. "Any luck this time, John?"

John Sinclair was at his instrument table over in a corner of the big, dim laboratory. From where Parks stood in the doorway he could see that some of the mechanisms were glowing. The weird blue-green and red sheens from them illumined Sinclair's thin bent figure, painted his intent face lurid.

It glinted like unearthly fire in his shock of grey-white hair.

Sinclair did not look up.

"You, Rolf? What do you want? You can see I'm busy."

"Well, naturally I'm interested," Parks drawled ironically. He was a big, powerful fellow; a man in his thirties, with a handsome, though heavy-featured face surmounted by a close-clipped shock of bristling, reddish hair. He was Dr. Sinclair's cousin. In his heart Parks felt a little contemptuous of the weird, mysterious research work at which Sinclair always was puttering. Parks knew nothing of science, and he

cared less--except that possibly there might be some money in it for him.

The idea of profiting from some invention of Sinclair's had dawned upon Parks about a month before.

Sinclair had never yet explained anything he was doing. But he had admitted he was on the verge of some big discovery. He was wholly impractical, just a cracked, aging scientist.

"You get the invention workable," Parks had told him, "and if there's any merit in it, I'll be your business manager. We'll turn it into money. You need business skill to get anywhere, John. Many a good invention just dies, or goes for a song, because the inventor is not a businessman."

Sinclair had not answered. By nature he was a secretive fellow. But Parks knew he could handle him.

And handle the profits. He chuckled whenever he thought of that. Sinclair could be persuaded to put up the capital, and even if the thing was no good, Parks would get plenty out of it.

Old Sinclair would go back to fussing with more science, and never bother to check on what had happened to his capital.

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" Parks added.

"Come in," agreed Sinclair. "But keep quiet, will you?"

The older man was obviously tense, excited. Parks lounged into the room, scaled his hat to a bench and sat watching. On the table in front of Sinclair a dozen weird little mechanisms of vacuum tubes, wires and grids were all glowing with current.

FROM a big crystal, beams of colored lights were focused on a Lietenallic screen which stood upright on a white metal frame. And as Parks stared it seemed that on the screen colored images were taking form. A scene in weird, fantastic color -- a scene with movement in it.

"Got it!" Sinclair suddenly murmured. "At last--"

"Got what?" Parks demanded. "What is that? Motion picture machine? Television? The color scheme is cockeyed."

The blurred little scene seemed to show a red sky, with blue trees and an orange-colored river, rippled with little waves by a wind.

"The new world!" murmured Sinclair. "New to us, but so old, so different... What we could imagine--and yet so different, this reality."

He seemed to have forgotten Parks. He sat staring, trembling. His hand clutched a switch-lever. As he worked the lever the scene clarified.

A broad river with flat banks appeared. Graceful trees lined the banks. Figures were on the road near the river--a quaint looking cart, with a thick-necked animal drawing it slowly along. Men walked along beside the cart. Other men worked in a flat field nearby.

Parks sucked in his breath. What a weird scene! Were those human figures? Some seemed white; others black, like negroes. But there were others, too. These were fantastically garbed shapes in red and blue--men with angular long robes and striped headdresses which dangled down the backs of their necks.

One group was almost nude, brawny men with orange-red skin and round bullet heads. A group of them appeared by the road, milling

forward with half a dozen robed men lashing at them with long red whips.

"Weird," Parks said. "Say, John, where the devil are you getting that scene from?"

Still the absorbed Sinclair ignored him. Suddenly the viewpoint of the scene shifted a little so that a huge object by the river came into view. A golden temple, in the process of being built. It was a monstrous square structure of huge golden blocks.

GOLD! Fascinated, Parks stared breathless. Thousands of slaves, powerful, naked men with skins of white, black, orange and red, labored here. They were erecting the giant golden temple. Lashed by whips, a hundred or more of them, harnessed together, came along the road dragging one of the oblong golden blocks. It rested in a crude cradle of wood.

Pure gold! In a weird, iridescent sunlight, that sparkled with orange glints on the river, the great block of gold shone resplendent. Over by the big temple, which already had risen several tiers, myriad groups of the slaves toiled dragging more gold blocks. Slowly, precariously, they hoisted them with crude and cumbersome-looking contrivances of wood and rope, like giant blocks and tackles.

Fifty thousand slaves, working here in this day shift--a vast scene of unlimited man-power, pulling and shoving and sweating, with the cruel whips urging them as though in truth this were a desperate task so gigantic that to build this great temple in a lifetime needed desperate, unflagging haste.

Gold! Gold in quantity here beyond the dreams of any man of this Earth-world! The sight of it shot a stabbing thrill into Parks. Just a few chips from just one of these big blocks would be enough to last one a



lifetime!

"John," Parks gasped, "the gold--look at it! So that's what you've been after! You old fox! No wonder you didn't want to brag until you were sure. Well, you've done it. At least we can see it. The Fourth Dimension? Not this world, but still right here? I remember your lecture on that sort of thing..."

Come on--tell me--is it--is it possible for us to get there?"

"Yes, I can get there," old Sinclair murmured. Seemingly he was talking mostly to himself. "A Golden Temple? Not a bad name for it. A thing of enduring splendor--"

The rambling words exasperated the excited Parks. Always a man of hot temper, he leaned forward and seized Sinclair by the arm.

"Stop that, will you?" he rasped. "What do you think I am? Here I've been waiting around all these months for you to produce something, and now you sit mumbling, ignoring me."

The grip on Sinclair's arm twitched the hand on the switch-lever. The current blinked out of the screen and the weird scene went dark.

Sinclair came out of his awed wonderment. He whirled on his chair. "Just what do you think you're doing, Rolf?" he demanded.

"I want to talk about it, cried Parks. "We've got a fortune here. I'm in it with you. You always said I was in it."

"Did I? I don't remember."

"Well, if you didn't, you implied it. I've waited around for months."

"Waiting because you're too lazy to work at anything. See here, Rolf,

if you want let's have it out right now."

"I want to know what you've discovered here. You say we can go after that gold? Some Fourth Dimension mechanism? That scene we saw—"

"Yes, I can go. I don't know. I wonder if I would have enough nerve!"

His voice wandered off. Again the exasperated Parks seized him.

"You don't want to share anything with me. Is that it?"

"That's it," Sinclair snapped. "I don't want any part of you, Rolf, and you've always known it. But I'm not thinking of money. Fame, achievement and the advancement of science, what do you know of things like that? And then old Sinclair's temper flared. "Take your hands off me. Get out of here. Get out and stay out. You've always been a nuisance all your life."

PARKS had no idea how it happened. Certainly he did not intend it. But Sinclair's sarcastic words made him see red. His fist lashed out, caught Sinclair on the jaw. With a little mumbling moan the older man fell sidewise, twisted in his seat and slumped to the floor. There was a gruesome crack. His head hit a projection of the metal table-leg.

Parks staggered erect, staring down. The goggling white face of Sinclair stared up at him. Sinclair was dead. For a moment Parks stood mute with horror and fear. Already he had a prison record and he had been seen coming in here tonight.

The thought of escape now leaped into Parks' brain. A trip into the Fourth Dimension might be the answer. Old Sinclair's musing words echoed in his mind: "Yes, I can go. I don't know. I wonder if I would have enough nerve!"

Parks had nerve enough -- now! There was no other way out. But where was the mechanism? And how did one operate it?...

Then Parks remembered a little black book in which old Sinclair always so meticulously recorded the results of his experiments. Would that tell what to do? Where was the book?

A panic of haste swept over him. At any moment someone might come in here. But with his fear, triumph was mingled. Mountains of gold ingots were in that other realm. He would find some way of bringing back enough of it to make him rich for life. With riches, any difficulties regarding this murder would be solved.

He found the notebook in a drawer of the table. Swiftly he riffled through it. Weird formulae, meaningless scientific diagrams met his gaze. Then he found the heading:

## TRANSITION MECHANISM

There was a diagram which illustrated a weird-looking skeleton headgear, with connecting wires to wristlets, a belt with a battery box, and wires down the legs to anklets. The scientific problems involved in the transition were meaningless to Parks. But a few phrases were intelligible: "An aura, which in effect is an electrolite field, will be created around the living body of the operator.

Within it, any objects close to the body of the operator, his clothing, his equipment, simultaneously will be affected."

Ah! So gold could be brought back! Parks, with triumph mounting in him, searched further through the pages. Here were directions for operating the mechanism. They seemed simple.

"With vibration-sorters automatically pre-set to my determined single

destination, after starting, no manual operation should be necessary."

Simple enough. And the destination was that weird scene which had appeared on Sinclair's image-grid. A further sentence confirmed it.

"In effect the physical transition is a mere reversal of the visual reception. An attuned following of the incoming eltolite vibration-rays. Note that this involves a journey in our Earth-space, automatically attained, an equivalent of a few thousand spatial miles which of necessity separate the co-existing realms.

A swift spatial transition, to the consciousness of the operator, perhaps only what would be termed a few minutes--"

Only a few minutes. No need for supplies, for food or water.

Parks found the skeleton transition mechanism in a box in a corner of the laboratory. Within a minute he had donned it. The tight fitting band he slipped over his forehead. The double-layer metal belt, with its dozen intricate little gadgets connected by wires to the battery, he buckled around his waist. More wires dangled from the belt to his wrists and ankles. All fool-proof. Parks chuckled.

Sinclair had planned better than he realized when he had made the contrivance so simple. Nothing much here to operate but a starting lever.

PARKS was ready. He lay down on the floor. And suddenly he realized that he was trembling. One cannot stand upon the brink of the Unknown without being afraid. But he mastered the fear. He pressed the little switch.

A tremendous shock ran through him. His senses reeled. This was followed by a gliding sensation as though he had been hurled into

eternity.

Next he realized that he had been unconscious. His senses were slowly coming back. Also he had not been hurt. Everything certainly must be all right...

Though he could not analyze it, it was just partial consciousness. He seemed to be floating, weightless, in a vast, humming grey abyss. Blurred shifting shadows like swirling mist flitted dimly around him. Everything was faintly humming, throbbing.

It could have been only a brief consciousness. Then pleasantly he slid again into dark and silent emptiness...

Queer. Had it all been imagination? Memory of the dead Sinclair, the laboratory room, that adventure .into the Unknown--were all those things hallucinations?

Abruptly Parks realized he was lying on a soft sandy ground. It was daylight. A warm day, with a gentle breeze. He raised himself up on one elbow and found he was dizzy. Those memories? Of course they had been real. The transition mechanism was on him now. It was no longer humming, throbbing.

He looked around at the strange scene. A placid blue sky arched overhead, sparkling with sunlight, speckled with fleecy-white, slowly drifting clouds. The place where he was resting seemed to be a flat, sandy desert. A river gurgled nearby. Flat banks and fringes of trees marked its edges.

Then Parks, not yet alertly conscious, with his mind slow of impressions, became aware of certain sounds. Men shouted stridently, whips cracked. The axles of, a crude vehicle squealed like a lost soul.

On a road near Parks a big primitive, woden cart with thick, solid wheels came into view. It was laden with grain. A thick-necked brown animal was drawing it. As Parks stared, the cart stopped at the side of the road. Cracking whips and shouting men's voices grew louder. The cart had drawn cumbersomely aside as a long, harnessed line of brown skinned men clad only with gee-strings went by.

After them they dragged a great stone block in a wooden cradle.

Sweating, a hundred or more of these panting slaves tugged at this gigantic square of stone. A group of men in queer triangular fabric-robos urged them onward with cracking whips. These whip wielders were sharp-featured and brown-skinned. Fabric headdresses protected the back of their necks from the hot sunlight.

The scene was the same one that had registered in old Sinclair's image grid. With confused, startled surprise Parks recognized it. But where had gone the fantastic color? This blue-grey river sparkled with normal sunlight. These men were all brown-skinned, though the brawny, muscular slaves were darker.

And the Golden Temple?

Quickly Parks turned and stared across the desert sand.

Well back from the river, behind a line of the fleecy green trees, towered a giant, partially finished edifice.

Thousands of drudging slaves with crude tools were hoisting great stone blocks into tier-like steps.

Already three tiers had been constructed. The materials they used were blocks--gray stone blocks.

A LITTLE knowledge is such a dangerous thing! Those fantastic colors of the image on Sinclair's screen were just aberrations of his light-color beams, distortions of reception through an intricate set of vacuums, prisms and filters. As though by the magic of alchemy the same aberrations, to Parks' unscientific and always avaricious gaze, had transmuted these huge stone blocks into gold!

The dazed, numbed Parks little realized he had staggered to his feet. That great edifice which was being built had a peculiar shape. He saw now that there were others behind it, far smaller than this one was destined to be. The smaller ones were finished. In the distance they stood out against the yellow sands of the desert like mute sentinels, picketing their vast domain.

A sudden shout sounded near at hand. Parks became aware that robed figures were rushing toward him. A long leather whip cracked like a pistol shot.

The weight of the lash on Parks' face sent him reeling. He stumbled and fell as the lash stung him again. Angry voices babbled in a strange language.

Hands seized him, jerked him erect. Ruthlessly, they stripped off the transition mechanism and most of his clothing.

In vain he screamed and fought. Again the lash knocked him down. It bit into his bare flesh as he lay trying to protect himself with futile hands. Existence became a prolonged agony of pain.

Then he was yanked erect and shoved roughly in among the harnessed slaves on the road.

With a broad leather halter about his chest he could do what the others were doing, straining forward dragging the huge stone block in

its cradle after them.

On the grey hot desert of Gizeh, that summer afternoon of 2876 B.C., the building of the Great Pyramid was well under way. The placid Nile nearby sparkled in the sunlight. A hundred thousand sweating slaves, lashed by the whips of a thousand overseers, for more than ten years had been toiling to erect these first few tiers. But steadily the great limestone blocks were being hauled into place. Immense task, to the glory of Khufu. Under the watchful, indomitable Cheops, the giant monument was rising.

Unceasing, toiling effort, on through the years. No one particularly noticed the pale-skinned, queer-looking slave, except that he was always clumsy and seemed to need more lashing than the others.



# Monster of the Moon

by Ray Cummings



Betrothed to mortal, promised to the Moon Master, Cylvia Kane goes to her last dread rendezvous with the creature who had fled the world, crying--"I go--but I will come back to claim my bride!"

THE small bungalow which was Cylvia Kane's home stood dark and silent on the declivity of the Canadian hillside. Trees of the lonely neighborhood arched somberly over it. From his seat at the controls of the little air-roller, with Cylvia, his fiancée, beside him, young John Deering gazed down, puzzled. It was now past midnight--he and Cylvia had been to a theatrical performance in the nearby city--but despite the lateness of the hour there should have been lights in the house.

"Strange," he said. "Dark as a cellar switchtube, Cyl. Even if your servants have all gone to bed, wouldn't you think they'd have left a light for us?"

Cylvia did not answer. She was a slim, exceedingly beautiful, dark-haired girl of twenty--boyish with her flaring bobbed hair, her snug white blouse open at her sleek rounded throat; and her black and white striped trousers snug down to her small, shiny black shoes. Mute with wonderment, she stared down at her home.

Deering expertly landed the roller on the stage-rack near the house.

Queer.

The door-slide at the back of the house was wide open.

Cylvia gripped his arm. "What's that, John? Look!"

A small, dark rectangular blob lay there on the rocky ground beside the path.

It was a suitcase belonging to one of the servants. Partly burst open, it lay as though hastily discarded by someone in flight. Cylvia clung to the stalwart Deering as they entered the dark house. Strange, this unnatural silence, this darkness.

The girl switched on the lights.

"Well," Deering muttered, "looks as though they had decamped."

The little house showed no signs of disorder, but Mr. and Mrs. Smithers, and their young daughter who was the serving maid, were gone. Had they been frightened away? There were signs of hasty packing of essential belongings--the belongings in the discarded suitcase.

"John! Oh John, come here! Read this!"

It was Cylvia's voice, calling from the living room. Deering joined her, where she was standing at the news ticker-tape. During their absence it had printed a few paragraphs--words strung on the narrow paper ribbon, printed by the teletype mechanism. The white ribbon trembled in Cylvia's hands as she held it spread out under the overhead tubelight.

"John, look! This news report--9:10 tonight."

Silently he scathed the long line of words: Mt. Forrest Observatory... Strange object seen outside Earth's stratosphere.

... A tiny cylindrical object with a comet tail behind it was observed at 8:50 this evening through the new reflecting electro-telescope of the Mt. Forrest Observatory. A brief glimpse, obscured almost at once by intervening clouds.

Distance possibly eight thousand miles. A descending object, dropping toward Eastern Canada. A vehicle arriving from Interplanetary Space? Mt. Forrest observer reports its aspects similar to rumored experimental ship of the missing Ralph Goff, seven years ago...."

"WELL," Deering murmured. Blankly he gazed at Cylvia; her obvious terror was astonishing. "Cylvia, what the devil--"

"That Ralph Goff," she gapped. "You--you've heard of him, John?"

Deering had, of course. The thing had happened seven years ago, when Deering had been a lad of seventeen. He had read, at that time, of Ralph Goff. A man of about forty; a crackpot, eccentric fellow who had gotten notoriety writing vitriolic assaults on mankind. He had been more or less a hermit, hating his fellow man--a misogynist, with weird ideas that he would like to start a hermit cult of others like himself. Deering remembered how the press and newscasters had jibed at Goff. And Goff had retorted that of all living creatures on Earth, the human race was the most villainous, the most murderous. His theory was that animals were superior in morals, in all ethics of conduct; even in latent intelligence.

"Sure I remember him," Deering was murmuring. "But Cylvia--what's it to you?"

"Oh John, I knew him. I was only thirteen then. He came to see father--to get father's financial backing in some wild scheme to establish a colony of animals--to breed them, train them, to bring out their latent intelligence.

To 'give them a chance,' that's what he said. And then he said, 'Some day animals win rule the world.'"

Blankly Deering stared at her. He recalled too, that there had been rumors that Goff, who had been a scientist, was working to discover the secret of spaceflight; that he was building a little spacerocket cylinder. And mysteriously both Hoff and his apparatus had disappeared. If he had discovered the secret of spaceflight, quite evidently he had used it to leave this Earth, which he hated, rather than share his secret for the benefit of mankind. . .

"But Cylvia," Deering was murmuring, "you're thinking now, if this Goff has come back--that he might look for you--come here--"

She nodded. "Oh John--I can remember the way he looked at me--my terror of him.

He was--he was so--"

The frightened words died in her throat. In the heat of the summer night, Deering had thrown open one of the window slides. The window here in the silent living room was a pallid rectangle from the moonlight outside. Was there a weird shadow there, for a second blotting out the moonlight? Deering thought so; thought he saw the moving blur of something monstrous... something unhuman--a flat head with a great bird-like beak.

But in that second it was gone. Cylvia gasped in terror, with a sucking intake of breath. "Oh John--something--something stalking us--"

Certainly the stalwart, husky young Deering was no coward. But nevertheless, a sudden chilling shudder was stabbing at him. He was unarmed; no weapons were here in the lonely little bungalow.

"Quiet!" he murmured. He reached, snapped out the light and the room sprang into darkness, with just the pallid sheen from the window. He stood with his arm around Cylvia as she shuddered against him. And then he heard it--they both heard, unmistakable, the sound of a weird croaking voice. And a queer flapping beat--like giant wings?

At the window, Deering stared out into the pallid darkness. There was a small rocky area under the trees beyond the window, with a little thirty-foot cliff nearby. Something was on top of the cliff--a round blob perhaps the size of a man. Moonlight was on it--monstrous round thing, with a beak. Its eyes were staring down at the house. Then in that instant, it launched itself awkwardly out into the air. A giant bird? Its stubby wings flapped. But they couldn't support it, merely checked its awkward flopping fall so that in another second or two it landed with a plop on the rocks.

Some weird monstrous bird? The thing leaped to its feet, for a second stared at the house. Horror was within the stricken, peering young Deering as he crouched with Cylvia at the window. The ghastly thing out there at the edge of the moonlight seemed to have a dark cloak partly enveloping it. And suddenly, with what seemed an arm and hand, it wrapped the cloak more closely around itself, and ran diagonally toward the house, ducking into a tree shadow, where it vanished.

"My God!" Deering muttered. "Cylvia--we've got to get out of here."

Out the widow, and run--try and reach their little air-roller.... Deering

had some such instinctive idea. But too late! Dimly he was aware of a sound in the dark room behind them. Cylvia screamed. A monstrous figure was here in the dark living room! Another was behind it--ghastly stalking shapes which quite evidently had come in through the rear door of the house. Deering had no time to do more than jump to his feet. Something whizzed through the air, crashed on his head so that all the world seemed to burst into roaring white light. He seemed to hear Cylvia screaming as his senses faded....

DEERING at last came to himself with the feeling that a long time had passed.

He was lying on a mattress, in what seemed a small cubby room. Light came from a small bull's-eye window--strange, pallid light, mellow, yellow-red. Stars blazed out there in a firmament of black. He was on a spaceship! He could hear, and feel, the dim throb of its mechanisms; the sucking whirr of air-renewers and ventilators and the hiss of rocket-streams.

Abruptly a door-slide behind him opened, and soundlessly slid closed as a figure came into the cubby. Deering, with his head still roaring, tried to get up on one elbow as he blankly peered. It was an upright thing some six feet high.

Man, beast or bird? He could not guess. The round blob of body supported by its two jointed legs was bluefeathered, with squat, powerful-looking wings, folded now under the dark cloak which loosely hung from its spindly neck. There was a face--a giant, rigid, beak, with little gleaming eyes above it.

It came forward with little mincing, hopping steps. And then Deering saw that it had short, jointed arms dangling under the cloak. Breathless, tense with horror, Deering stared as the thing came and bent over him. Monstrous bird-face; but somehow there was a weird

intelligence in the glowing eyes. Then the foot-long beak opened. A cawing voice said: "You--better now? You will not to die?"

English! The travesty of human voice which a giant parrot might have! But there was certainly more intelligence behind those staring eyes!

"You--you can talk?" Deering gasped. Then with a rush of horrified memory he thought of Cylvia. "There was a girl with me? Damn you--what did you do with her?"

"She--all right. No you worry--no need." Was that indescribable face grinning?

The pink skin crinkled under the little green, glowing eyes. The ghastly bill-mouth stayed open. "I am the Lunite, Lahgg." One of the jointed arms came up, with prehensile, parrot-like claws which tapped the feathered chest.

"Lahgg--important one."

"You take me to that girl, Cylvia," Deering said. "She is here on board?"

"Yes. But cannot--take you--for you stay here. The Great Master-Man--he is on board--tells me, keep you here--"

Deering's mind was racing. A Lunite? They were on their way, then, to the Moon?

Through the bull's-eye window now, from his changed position, he could see, out in the black firmament, a great mellow crescent. The Earth! And a pallid, streaming light from the other direction, which doubtless was the approaching Moon. The Great Master-Man? Could that be the villainous Ralph Goff?

" Sit down, " Deering offered. This thing--this Lunite, Lahgg--weird creature, but Deering could not miss its intelligence. The cawing, hideous voice--that was the physical limitations of its birdlike vocal apparatus; and the limping English--a language newly learned.

LAHGG was willing to talk--grotesque feathered shape squatting beside Deering.

And Deering listened, with an occasional question, piecing together the broken phrases and with his own imagination filling in the gaps. Upon the far side of the Moon--that side always unseen by Earthmen--in a giant, cauldron-like depression of the satellite, atmosphere was gathered. Like a great irregular-shaped sea, two hundred miles in length and width, and three or four miles deep. An area peopled by a single species--these weird Lunites. This Lahgg now described himself as one of the most intelligent of his kind. Perhaps it was a boast--or perhaps they were a moronic bird-people, living free as birds in the trees of their forest, for with the slighter gravity of the Moon their squat wings enabled them to fly awkwardly.

And into this, a human from Earth had come, organizing them, teaching them, showing them better, more complex ways to live.

"We--bird-animals," Lahgg was saying proudly. "Much better than Earth human-men.

More smart. More--he say moral. Human-people bad--"

Surely it was the misogynist Ralph Goff--he who had hated his fellow man--who had taught Lahgg this. Deering stared at the weird, beaked face. The skin was crinkled into little folds under the eyes, the great bill was grotesquely parted. It was as though the creature were grinning--ironically grinning.



"Your Master brought you on this trip to Earth?" Deering prompted.

"Yes. Our world he rules--his little Empire, see? Him, one human. No enough--so this trip--we get girl, you understand?" Abruptly Lahgg stood up, balancing on his spindly brown legs. "I bring for you food."

"You take me to that girl," Deering insisted. He tried to stand up, but he was still weak and dizzy and sank back.

Surely that was an ironic grin on Lahgg's monstrous face. "You do what Lahgg says," he commanded. "You only a human--kill you if bad. You third human for Lunite world. Master says--you slave. Very good for working--much work to do, building life like human-people."

Deering stared as the weird Lunite creature slid the door-panel and was gone.

Unquestionably the beaked, grotesque face was stamped with irony--a ghastly, leering grin that stabbed Deering with a shudder....

The remainder of the brief spaceflight was a blur to John Deering. Perhaps he was being kept drugged by the villainous Goff; he never knew. He ate the strange food which Lahgg brought; drank the liquids at intervals. Vaguely, once or twice amid the throb and hiss of the space-ship mechanisms, he could hear other cackling, cawing voices; once also the gruff voice of a man. And once he thought that he heard Cylvia....

Rounding the Moon... Deering, at last recovered, stood at his bull's-eye window gazing down at the gleaming pallid spread of Lunar surface now only a few thousand miles beneath the rocket-ship. Great jagged spires with sunlight and Earthlight on them. . . Familiar surface at which now he was gazing aslant.

There was the giant circular Tycho; and Copernicus... .

Then, hours later, a new surface was spread down there. Still giant peaks, tipped with slanting sunlight. He could see that twilight and a crescent purple area of night stretched ahead.... Then, in the twilight, as the little rocket-ship dropped lower, the tumbled spread of a turgid atmosphere, lying heavy in the vast moon-hollow, came in view; and presently they were into it.

Then through it--down into a twilight region. Tense, Deering stared at the lush, weird forest that presently was spread a thousand feet under the dropping, slanting ship. Gnarled, fantastic giant trees of seemingly porous vegetation were tangled into a jungle mass. Great blue and red vines interlaced them--vines with monstrous air-pods and huge flowers of vivid hue.... Off in the distance there was a thread of pallid river. Then it seemed that Deering saw things bobbing in the trees, or scurrying on the ground; the strange, wild Lunites, staring up at the vehicle as it passed....

"You come now--I take you. We land. " Deering swung at the voice of Lahgg behind him.

Arrival... Deering had been docile, while Lahgg bound his crossed wrists behind him. Whether the Lunite was armed or not he had never been able to determine; but it was obvious that any resistance would bring death--not only to him, but to Cylvia. The little ship now seemed a bustle of activity. Deering saw none of it. Lahgg herded him into a dim, tiny cross-corridor where stood an outer pressure slide. Then the ship landed. Through a bull's-eye beside him, Deering could see a dim vista of twilit forest. Weird scrambling blobs of creatures were out there. Then some other door of the ship had opened. For a second he caught a tense, anguished glimpse of Cylvia--a squat, cloak-enveloped man walking beside her, leading her away, with half a dozen of the grotesque Lunites hopping after them.

"Now--we go," Lahgg said. "I take you to Master-Man's home."

WORLD of the Moon. Deering had only a brief sight of it.... A little winding path through the fantastic lacery of brush; spindly giant trees, heavy with pods and monster flowers... Figures of peering Lunites crowded him and his guard; blobs of the birdlike forms hopping in the brush for a better view. And they were also overhead, running on the rope-vines, hopping from one limb to another.

The forest was noisy with their cawing, jabbering cries in the weird, Lunité animal language. Staring up, Deering saw their dwellings--thatched mounds, woven of dried vines and leaves, primitive as huge birds' nests....

Then presently the glade opened into a patch of undulating area of soil, with a little thread of river beyond it and the sullen heavy clouds close overhead.

The Master-Man's dwelling! It was a sprawled, patched one-story building, seemingly of porous log-struts, walled with monstrous dried leaves bound with vines.

But curiously it had a semblance of human habitation--a peaked roof; windows, each shrouded with a huge dried leaf; a door, and a little front veranda set pathetically askew.

Goff, the Emperor! Hater of mankind--so that there was nothing here which had come from Earth. Yet strangely he seemed to have wanted that this dwelling should be in human fashion.... And a little beyond it there were two or three others, smaller, now only partially built. And Deering saw too where, at a little distance past the huddled buildings, there was a field of soil where human food was growing.

Flickering torchlight showed in the doorway for which Lahgg was heading. They went through it, into a torch-lit room of crude, Earth-style rustic furniture, draped with the monster leaves.

"So, John Deering. Welcome to Lunaria." It was a heavy, guttural voice from a shadow of the room. Deering whirled. "I am Ralph Goff, once of Earth. Surely you have heard of me?"

A madman? Mad scientific genius? Was he that? This fantastic little house, even the man's ironic drawing of the word Lunaria, suggested it. Deering was stabbed with a shudder as he stared at the strange figure before him. Ralph Goff. A man of forty odd, with long, tangled, nutted black hair and a full black beard.

He was heavy-set; wideshouldered, deep-chested; no more than five feet tall, with thick, dangling, gorilla-like arms. Monstrous gargoyle shape. One shoulder was higher than the other, with a lump behind it. Under the huge beard obviously his face was ugly. He wore no Earth-clothes--disdainful of them, so that now he was dressed in a robe of plaited dried vine-frabric [sic]. Like a toga it draped his misshapen form. A wide belt was around his waist, with flash-weapons clipped to it. Those weapons at least were from Earth. The symbol of his power here.

"So?" he murmured again. "You stare, but you do not speak. Are you witless, John Deering?"

"What do you want of me?" Deering demanded. "Where is Sylvia Kane? I want--"

"My slave who questions me--and I so quickly has wants? How amusing! Sylvia Kane is unharmed. Why should I harm her--she whom I have picked to share my little empire--my world?" His burning, deep-set eyes clung to Deering. Madman of course--but

mad, like so many others, only with his dreams--his lust to rule.

Queer, twisted mentality, this misogynist with his hatred of his fellow man--his contempt--his weird belief that animals, beasts and birds, are superior.

Beliefs, and lust perhaps born of his own twisted little body--a complex of inferiority. Weird trick of fate that enabled him to leave Earth, and stumble here upon these Lunite creatures whom he could rule.

"My little empire," he was saying. "You see its beginning, Deering? Myself and my Queen--the beginning of my little human dynasty. Interesting, isn't it?

Who would ever suppose, back on Earth, that the despised Ralph Goff would rise to such heights as this? A world of his own to rule. Thousands of his loyal subjects, to be taught by him until they are superior to all the damnable Earthmen who ever lived! Queer, isn't it? But it was my destiny--"

His hand was toying now with one of his jeweled little flash-guns. It made Deering's heart pound.... Was he about to be killed out of hand?

THAT girl--Cylvia Kane," Deering began carefully. "If I could see her--"

"But why not? She is here. In a few moments she will be given robes for the ceremony. You shall watch it, Deering--you who think you love her. Is that it?"

His deep-set eyes gleamed; his lips snarled back as he ripped out the words.

And then his voice ironically again was drawling, "My presentation of their queen to the Lunites--Ralph Goff, their human emperor, and his human queen, You shall see the ceremony, Deering.... You Lahgg--you take him outside now, where he can watch. But guard him carefully, Lahgg."

"Yes, Master." On Lahgg's monstrous birdlike face again Deering saw that strange leering look of irony.

Goff clapped his hands suddenly. "You, Meeta!" he called. "Come here!"

There was no answer. At the windows, and at the door, other bird-figures were crowding now, cawing, jabbering. Goff stared at them. Then he called again: "Meeta, come here!"

A Lunite appeared. A female, doubtless, with puffed, smaller feathered body and a top-knot of feathers above the flat upper curve of the head. A sudden wild fury was upon Goff that he had been kept waiting. "The Human-Master calls and you do not come!" he rasped.

"But Master, I was--"

"Silence!" Goff's hand at his belt suddenly snapped out a length of steel whipcord. He lashed it through the air with a skilled stroke so that it caught the creature, Meeta, across the face. Her cawing cry was a scream of pain.

Goff rasped, "Is my queen, the little human Cylvia, dressed and ready?"

"Yes, Master--almost."

"Then go back to her, and next time when you are called, come

quickly."

The little Lunite retreated. At the windows the others were weirdly muttering; but as Goff gazed at them they bopped back into the outer darkness.

Smouldering rebellion.

"You, Lahgg," Goff rasped, "take our slave now so that he may see my triumph.

You have an Earth-knife?"

"Yes, Master."

"If he gives you any trouble, I have taught you how the knife may be used to stab into his chest?"

"Yes, Master."

Shuddering, Deering had no recourse but to let himself be led from the house.

If only he could get his hands free.... This Lahgg--all these weird Moon-creatures--seemed flimsy, fragile. If he could get loose--perhaps get that knife which Lahgg was now gripping.

Preparations for the ceremony; ., . The little forest glade now was springing into torchlight as the excited Lunites assembled. Several hundred of them on the slope of the glade, strung in a crescent facing the house of the Master.

At a point in the lush forest glade some two hundred feet from Goff's dwelling, Lahgg paused. "We wait here," he said. "You watch--very important--human queen for us Lunites--"

Deering stood docile, but he was tense, alert. Another huge Lunité had quietly come and was standing with him and Lahgg--another guard with a gleaming steel Earth-knife in his taloned hand. Then suddenly a great cawing chorus of cries welled out through the torchlit forest. At the door of Goff's dwelling the Master had appeared, with Cylvia beside him. Deering stood with his heart seeming to pound in his throat as he stared. Cylvia, her slim, pink-white little body garbed now in a brief drape of red-blue dried fibre. Beautiful little woodnymph. A garland of vivid flowers was set like a crown on her head. There was terror on her pallid face.

Beside Deering his Lunité guard stood close, watchful. But now Lahgg had vanished. Goff was leading Cylvia from the house, toward where a little rustic platform had been erected for a throne-dais. The awed crowd was silent, watching. And then Deering saw Lahgg. He had appeared behind Goff and Cylvia--Lahgg stealthily moving toward them. The torchlight gleamed on his face, weirdly contorted now with his little eyes blazing. And the torchlight gleamed on the naked knife-blade in his hand. Murderous Lahgg! With a leap of horror, Deering realized it. Ghastly, ironic commentary on all living creatures--this little Empire, with work introduced into it, so that the Lunités were smouldering with rebellion and resentment. And here was one of them, this Lahgg, taught by the human Goff so that Lahgg himself now was lusting to rule. Lahgg to be the Master here--to dominate his fellow creatures in the fashion of mankind!

THE terrible thing happened so quickly that Deering for a moment was stricken into confusion. Goff and Cylvia were mounting the dais. One of the Lunité females, awkwardly attending Cylvia, suddenly incurred Goff's anger. He struck at her, brought from her a cry of fear and pain. It was like a spark thrown into gunpowder. The crowding Lunités abruptly were cawing with anger; milling forward. One of



them, with its great beak, pecked at Goff from behind. He whirled; his hand flicked to his belt, came back with a little flash-gun. Its bolt spat; the Lunite fell. A spark in gunpowder. Within a second the throng of bird-creatures was wildly milling forward with cackling, angry cries. Lahgg had jumped, but now Goff saw him--saw his stabbing blade. Goff's little gun spat again--stabbed through Lahgg who tumbled forward, sprawled at Goff's feet....

All within a few seconds. Then Deering was aware that the guard beside him had dropped his torch and fled. The spluttering, still-lighted torch lay here on the ground. Deering flung himself down, shifted backward. The torch flame burned into his hands and wrists--a moment of agonized burning flesh and then the dried vine-rope burned and came loose.

With giant leaps, here with the slight moon-gravity, Deering made for the platform. A wildly cawing group of Lunites got in front of him. He leaped over them--sailing, twenty foot bound--and landed beside Sylvia; caught her up in his arms.

"Oh--Oh John--thank God--"

"The spaceship!" he gasped. "If we can get to it--"

HE set her down, and she ran with him, giant sailing leaps, hand in hand. The little ship at the edge of the glade stood dark, momentarily deserted. At its opened door they turned to look back. Goff was still fighting. He had climbed to the summit of a small rock around which the angry creatures were milling, trying to leap up at him. And suddenly his last little flash-gun was exhausted. He flung it away; stood for a moment poised, with the torchlight painting him.

And Deering saw his face. Amazement, disillusionment stamped his features as he faced the wreck of his little empire.... Everywhere the

grotesque Lunites were running wild. They had fired Goff's flimsy dwelling; yellow-red flames were leaping from it. The other half-finished houses were burning.... Weird, milling throng of Lunite creatures--they had tried man's life, and now they were destroying it... repudiating it....

Wreck of an empire. For that second Goff stared at it. Then, with a last despairing cry, he hurled himself down from the rock, and the raging creatures leaped upon him--like vultures, pecking, clawing, pulling him apart....

"Oh John, hurry! Here they come!"

A group of the Lunites surged now at the spaceship. Deering shoved Cylvia inside--barely in time as the weird creatures hurled themselves wildly at the closed spaceship door.

Then with hissing rocket-streams, the small ship lifted, slanted upward.

The little spaceship slanted higher. A pall of smoke was settling down there now in the glade--turgid, black shroud to hide the ghastly scene of tragedy and death.... And overhead, out beyond the Moon clouds, amid the stars, the huge Earth hovered. Silently Cylvia and Deering stared up at it--great mellow disk of Earth, like a soft gentle beacon calling them home.

Forward to Missives and Missiles

# Clue In Crimson

By Ray Cummings

EText from [pulpgen.com](http://pulpgen.com)

Crack Detective 09/43



A tiny spot of blood was the only positive clue to the identity of Clark Douglas' murderer-- but Dr. Feather knew how to make that bloodspot talk!

THE big rambling bungalow of Clark Douglas--Willow Grove's fiery newspaper editor--stood bathed by the moonlight as Dr. Feather's limousine rolled swiftly up the tree-lined driveway.

"Park here, Kit," Dr. Feather said.

A physician's coupe stood under the porte cochere, with a police car and two motorcycles beside it. Dr.

Feather's eighteen-year-old daughter swung expertly to one side.

"Shall I come in, Father?"

"Why, of course, child... Oh, there's Sergeant Tripp now." Dr. Feather hopped agilely from his car; he was a small man, bareheaded,

dressed in a rusty black alpaca suit. The moonlight gleamed on his shaggy mane of iron-gray hair.

"Here we are, Sergeant," he called. "Is he still alive?"

The big police sergeant met them at the doorway. "Just about, an' that's all; Doc Allen's with him now.

He's still unconscious." Tripp sighed. "Guess he'll die without tellin' us anything."

"Dear me. That's too bad, Sergeant."

The silent Kit joined them as they went inside, into the dim bungalow's long central hallway. It was about two a. m. now--a warm summer night. Less than an hour before, the somnolent telephone operator in Willow Grove's Central office had been startled by a call for help--a choking cry coming from the home of Clark Douglas here at the edge of town. There was a crash, then silence, and the line remained open.

The operator had notified Sergeant Tripp. "Everybody was asleep when we got here," the sergeant was saying now to Dr. Feather. "I routed 'em out an' we found Clark Douglas lyin' on the floor of his study, where he had fallen with the telephone beside him. Stabbed, and pretty badly slashed. He's a big powerful man. Looks like the killer left him for dead. But he didn't die. He recovered enough to get to the telephone an' call for help. Then he dropped unconscious."

"You said something about a window in the study being broken open," Dr. Feather suggested.

"The screen is cut."

"And you don't think it's an inside job, Sergeant?"

Tripp rubbed his bluish jowls. "Somebody climbed in that window an' attacked him. That's pretty obvious. An', my Gawd, with those editorials Douglas writes, there's a thousand people in this county would like to kill him."

"I dare say, Sergeant. Who was in the house, family and servants?"

"They're all here now--you can look 'em over, Dr. Feather."

"My goodness, yes, I certainly shall. Who are they?"

"Couple of maid servants. An' a butler. Fellow named Butterworth. One of those 'Yes, sir, thank yon, sir,' butlers with a fishy stare. Damned if I can make anything out of him."

"And the family?" "Well, there's Douglas' wife. Handsome young woman. She's collapsed--Doc Allen's got her on his hands, too. An' there's a William Mallory, old friend of the family. Used to be in love with Mrs. Douglas--I got that out of one of the servants."

"Don't theorize too much, Sergeant. Good gracious, in every family people have motives for murder."

"Anybody else?"

"One other. Young Creighton Forbes. He's Mrs. Douglas' brother. Out of a job, living off Douglas' hospitality. But hell, Douglas himself, he's been attacking the gambling and liquor people in this county so you'd wonder he wasn't murdered every week. Looks like some outside thug cut that screen an'--Oh, here's Mallory now. . . No change in him, Mr. Mallory?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

WILLIAM MALLORY--this friend of the family, as Sergeant Tripp had characterized him--was a small man of thirty- odd, with sleek black hair, a pale, rather handsome face, solemn and grim now. He was clad in dressing gown and slippers.

"A physician?" Mallory said as the Sergeant introduced him to Dr. Feather. "Doctor Allen is--"

"My goodness no," Dr. Feather disclaimed. "Just a Ph. D. My primary interest is .crime detection."

"He's here to help me," the sergeant said.

"Oh, I see."

"But dear me," Dr. Feather added, "with a man on the verge of death--I'll help him if I can, of course.

I'd like to see Dr. Allen."

"He's here," Mallory started for the nearby doorway of a bedroom. But Dr. Feather's gaze was across the dim hall to where in a recess a tall young fellow in dressing gown and slippers was at a telephone.

Silently, Dr. Feather stared. To anyone not knowing the famous criminologist intimately, he would have seemed a fussy little man, impractical, genial, anxious to please everyone. But his alert birdlike gaze was missing nothing of the scene around him. He waited until Mallory had gone into the bedroom; then he murmured: "Who's that at the telephone, Sergeant?"

"Mrs. Douglas' brother--Creighton Forbes." In a moment Forbes finished his call and came toward them. He was younger than

Mallory, seemingly about twenty-five--a big blond fellow with his curly hair rumpled and his somewhat weak-chinned face grave with anxiety. His dressing gown flapped at his bare ankles.

"I've been 'phoning for a nurse as Doctor Allen suggested," Creighton Forbes explained to the Sergeant.

"He doesn't want an ambulance-- not for now, anyway. Says he's afraid to move him."

There seemed no question but that Clark Douglas was dying. He lay with closed eyes, unconscious here on the bed to which they had carried him from the study where he had been working late into the night on an editorial.

From the bedroom doorway, with the alert-eyed silent Kit beside him, Dr. Feather stood gazing at the big inert form swathed in bandages. The face was livid; the bloodless lips were parted slightly with a faint gasping, rattling breath. At the mouth a bloody foam was gathered. In a corner of the room the dark-haired William Mallory and young Forbes had joined Mrs. Douglas, who lay enveloped in a negligee in a wicker chair--a blond woman twenty years younger than her husband. Quite evidently she was a very pretty woman; but she was disheveled now and her face, devoid of make-up, was splotted with tears. Beyond question she was on the verge of hysterical collapse.

Silently Dr. Feather turned away, motioning to the rotund little physician who was at the bedside, to come to the door.

"I'm Dr. Feather," he said softly. "I'm here to help Sergeant Tripp. But Dr. Allen, if I could be of any assistance to you--"

Allen glanced in at the prostrate woman and moved further from the

doorway. "I guess it's only a matter of minutes," he said in an undertone. "A stab-wound in the back, and he's pretty horribly slashed. Most of the bleeding's internal now." Allen grimaced. "He's lost so much blood it wasn't hard to staunch the external wounds. It must have been a horribly ferocious attack."

"Dear me," Dr. Feather murmured. "And you don't think he'll recover consciousness? If he did, he might be able to tell us who did it."

ALLEN shook his head. "I'm afraid he's going to take what he knows with him."

"Now let me show you the study," Sergeant Tripp said impatiently. "That man's goin' to die-- nothin' we can do about it. So this is a murder case, Dr. Feather. An' clues get cold--"

"So they do, Sergeant. Yes, they certainly do. Are there any clues?"

"That's the hell of it," Tripp admitted. "Somebody cut the window screen an' climbed in.

That's all the evidence there is, unless you can spot some. Now how can I go out an' round up a thousand influential people that Mr. Douglas made enemies of?"

"You can't. Obviously you can't, Sergeant." The study of Clark Douglas was down a long narrow hallway, in a separate wing fairly remote from the rest of the big bungalow. At the doorway, again Dr.

Feather paused, silently regarding the mute scene of tragedy.

It was a big room, with windows on three sides. At a mahogany desk between two of the windows lay the unfinished editorial which Douglas had been writing--a few sheets of scrawled manuscript with



a lead pencil beside them. The chair at the desk had been overturned. The rug there was scuffed. Another smaller chair nearby was lying on its back; ornaments on a side table were scattered to the floor. Further away, a taboret with a small chair before it, had evidently held the telephone. The taboret and chair were overturned now and the instrument lay on the floor between them.

The room gave every evidence of the grim desperate struggle Clark Douglas must have waged for his life against his ferocious assailant. And his blood from the horrible slashing made the side rug and a patch of the polished hardwood floor, the floor by the taboret and the telephone instrument itself, a strewn shambles of crimson.

"Dear me," Dr. Feather murmured. "It looks fearful, doesn't it, Sergeant? There must have been quite a bit of noise here, don't you think?"

"The door to the hall was closed," Tripp said. "If the people in the house were all asleep, they wouldn't hear it way off here. They didn't, matter of fact. The first they knew anything was wrong was me arrivin' an wakin' 'em up."

Little Dr. Feather nodded. "I agree with you on that, Sergeant. But the attacker would be afraid he was heard, just the same. Which undoubtedly is why he didn't stop to verify more thoroughly whether or not his victim was actually dead."

"Here's where he got in." Tripp led Dr. Feather to a window directly across the room from the desk.

"With Mr. Douglas at that desk, his back would be toward this window, see?"

"Well, yes," Dr. Feather agreed. "Yes, I get that point. I certainly do,

Sergeant."

Kit now was poking about the room, examining the widespread patches of crimson stain, stooping down silently peering, almost snuffing like a little hound on a trail.

"Didn't find any weapon," the Sergeant said. "He took it with him. Guess he went out the window, same way he came in. There's a stone walk through the garden just outside. He must have followed it out to the back road."

The blinds of all the windows in the study were fully drawn except this one, which was only half way down. The lower sash was up; and the big square opening was covered with a copper mesh screen. Two long slashes had been made in it—one vertical, one horizontal. They crossed at its center and the four triangles of mesh had been bent inward, making a hole fully large enough to admit a man.

"He stood on the walk out there, reached up an' cut this hole," Tripp was saying. "That was easy."

Dr. Feather didn't answer. With a magnifying glass and a tiny flashlight, he was examining the mesh of the cut screen. Then he straightened.

"My goodness, Sergeant, there's quite a bit wrong with these theories of yours. There certainly is. A man, outside, cutting this screen— well, the knife would bend all the tiny cut ends of the screening inward. But these little prongs are all bent outward. This screen was cut from inside the room, Sergeant. Just a plant to make you think that one of Mr. Douglas' reputed thousand enemies came from outside and attacked him."

THE Sergeant stared. "Good Lord, I never thought of that."

"The killer didn't either. And there's another thing--dear me, Mr. Douglas obviously wasn't asleep at that desk. He was writing. You can see where his pencil trailed off when he was attacked. Probably the first blow was that stab in the back. And he wasn't stone deaf, was he?"

"Well, no," the Sergeant admitted. "Not that I--"

"Then wouldn't he have heard that screen being cut, Sergeant? That's something else you and this excited assassin didn't seem to think of. It was pretty obvious from the beginning."

"Here's something queer," Kit suddenly called. The girl was over near the desk, kneeling on the floor, gazing intently down. "Come look at this, Father."

As Dr. Feather and the Sergeant turned toward her, from the open doorway of the study came another voice: "Is there anything I could do to help you, sir?" A tall, dark, angular man stood in the doorway. He was holding a faded dressing gown awkwardly around him. It made him look grotesque; but his dignity rose above it so that he stood erect with his bare feet in worn Chinese sandals planted squarely under him.

"Who are you?" Dr. Feather demanded. .

"I'm Butterworth, sir. Jennings Butterworth."

"The butler," Sergeant Tripp murmured. "What do you want, Butterworth?"

"One of your men told me that Dr. Feather was here." The butler's gaze went to the kneeling Kit, and then came up to Dr. Feather's face. "I thought you might want to question me, sir."

"Eh? Oh, well not now, Butterworth," Dr. Feather said. "We're busy here now."

The butler bowed slightly. "Thank you, sir. What I meant, sir, I've been in service here with poor Mr.

Douglas for nearly ten years. Whatever you wish to know about the family, sir--"

"Later," Dr. Feather said. And Butterworth, trained to obey even the unspoken word, bowed with dignity and withdrew. Dr. Feather exchanged a glance with Kit; the frowning Sergeant slammed the study door.

"My goodness," Dr. Feather commented, "if it does happen that we need family information, I imagine that butler can tell us plenty. What was it you found, Kit?"

"These blood stains, father. Look at that one. Doesn't it seem unusual?"

Dr. Feather knelt beside her. "Well, good gracious yes, it certainly does, Kit."

"What's that mean?" Tripp demanded.

"This blood, Sergeant," Dr. Feather explained. "Enough time has passed and it's drying--pretty thoroughly clotted. But here's some of it that's quite wet. Dear me, that certainly is queer, Kit."

A patch of hardwood floor was before them. It was blood-stained--blood which by the passage of time had coagulated in contact with the air. But a little of the blood here, and also back nearer the desk, was wet, with less time having passed, seemingly, in which to clot it.

"Now what the devil," the Sergeant muttered. "Does that mean that Mr. Douglas--"

LITTLE Dr. Feather was on his feet. His eyes were flashing. "Dear me, Sergeant," he exclaimed, "that reminds me--here we are neglecting that dying man. I wonder if he's still alive." He started for the study door.

"But listen," the Sergeant protested. "Let's keep on with this, Dr. Feather. My God, what you've proved already--that faked cut screen--chances are we've got the killer right here in the house. Let's nab him--what you figure this wet an' dried blood means? If Mr. Douglas--"

"I was thinking, father," Kit said quietly, "if you want me to do any routine lab work--"

"Of course I do, child. I believe a blood transfusion might be advisable, Kit. If Dr. Allen thinks he can stand it. If he hasn't died already".

"But listen," the Sergeant pleaded. "Can't we go on with this investigation?"

"My goodness, Sergeant, please don't annoy us now."

With Kit and the disappointed Sergeant following him, Dr. Feather hurried back into the main hallway. In the recess, William Mallory sat at the telephone, with Mrs. Douglas' brother-- young Creighton Forbes--standing back against the wall. As Dr. Feather appeared, Mallory concluded his conversation and hung up; and he and Forbes came forward.

"I was 'phoning for an ambulance," Mallory said. "He's still alive. Doctor Allen thinks it might be advisable to try moving him."

"It would kill him," young Forbes exclaimed. "He's going to die--but if only he'd recover consciousness, just for a minute--" With the thought that Douglas might tell who had attacked him, young Forbes' big thick fingers clenched into fists.

"I'll speak to Allen," Dr. Feather said. "My goodness, if a transfusion would help him we must try it."

"Shall I get the things from the car, Father?"

Kit interjected.

"Yes, of course. Hurry, child."

The girl moved swiftly away. Dr. Feather went into the sick room. Mrs. Douglas had been taken to her own room now, with the servants attending her. On the bed Clark Douglas still lay unconscious, faintly breathing, with his face white as chalk and blood-foam on his lips which Allen occasionally wiped away.

For a moment, Dr. Feather murmured vehemently with the physician, then he hurried back into the hall.

"A transfusion is possible," he said. "Dear me, yes, it certainly is. His heart seems to have strengthened a little. That's why Dr. Allen ordered the ambulance. If it should strengthen further, we need donors for the transfusion, gentlemen. Dr. Allen was worried--there would hardly be time to get professional donors."

"You mean, it might bring him to consciousness?" Sergeant Tripp demanded. "I never thought of that, Dr.

Feather. I see what you're getting at."

"Or it might save him," Dr. Feather retorted. "That's the most important thing."

"Professional donors?" young Forbes murmured. "Why, that isn't necessary. I'll give my blood, of course."

"If it's the right type," Dr. Feather said. "My girl Kit can type you all. The type to match Mr.

Douglas'--you understand that, of course. You, too, Sergeant--you're young and strong. And where's that butler? Dear me, I forgot all about that butler. If this transfusion is possible, we'll do it right away--the hospital can send the necessary equipment."

HE HERDED them all into another room. From Dr. Feather's big limousine which in effect was a traveling laboratory, Kit came with sterile needles and glass slides. During the moment it took her to secure the blood samples of the possible donors, Dr. Feather hurried again into the sick room. His eyes were sparkling when he returned.

"His heart is holding out," he said. "It responded to the last stimulant pretty well. Allen agrees with me--if it seems that he can, stand the transfusion, we'll order the apparatus from the hospital and perform it right here. I'll see if we can round up a professional donor, just in case there's no one here of the right type."

You've finished, Kit? Well, that's fine. Get a sample of Mr. Douglas' blood--then type them all up.

Hurry, child."

"You think that he will live, sir?" Butterworth, the butler, said suddenly.

"You think that this may bring him back to consciousness?"

"Well most certainly that's what we're all hoping," Dr. Feather said.

With a grinding of brakes, presently the ambulance arrived. Dr. Feather ordered it to wait; and he had telephoned again to the hospital. Two other resident doctors of the hospital staff were coming with the necessary equipment to give the transfusion here. Then suddenly Dr. Allen came from the sick room, with one of the white-robed hospital internes behind him. The rotund little physician was grave, solemn with disappointment.

"I'm really sorry, gentlemen," he said. "That strengthening of his heart--that sometimes occurs, you know, just before the end. But it did encourage us. I'm sorry, indeed, but it's too late for us to help him now. He's gone.

"Oh, dear me." There could be no question of the poignant regret on Dr. Feather's face and in his voice.

"Oh, good gracious, that's too bad, Doctor Allen. I hoped we had a chance of saving him. I really did."

There was disappointment on the face of Sergeant Tripp also. "An' now be won't ever tell us anything of what happened," the Sergeant exclaimed. "Well, that's that. Please, Dr. Feather, you did your best for Mr. Douglas an' this is a murder case now. Can't we go ahead with--"

"My goodness, Sergeant, don't talk like that." Little Dr. Feather's voice suddenly hardened. "You want me to go ahead and catch the murderer for you? Why, that's just what I've been trying to do, right along.



My girl Kit and I, we've used all the wits we've got. We certainly have. Haven't we, Kit?"

The girl had quietly joined them. "I have the analysis now, Father," she said. "It's as we thought."

"Oh well that's just fine, Kit."

The group of men numbly stared as Kit handed Dr. Feather her memorandum: the Sergeant, with the physician beside him; William Mallory, friend of the family, small, dark-haired, standing with his hands deep in the pockets of his dressing gown; and the big blond brother-in-law of the victim, young Creighton Forbes, with jaw dropped and his face flushed with excitement. And to one side, unobtrusively against the wall, Butterworth the butler stood grimly staring.

In the silence, Dr. Feather fumbled in the pocket of his faded black jacket and produced his spectacles, put them on and carefully read his daughter's notes. "Quite right, Kit," he said at last. Then with his spectacles back in his pocket, he turned to Dr. Allen.

"I believe this will interest you especially, doctor," he said. "This thing turned out to be a sort of medical problem, my goodness yes, it certainly did. You see, there in the study my girl Kit found that some of the blood on the floor was clotted, just as it should be. But some of it wasn't."

He paused, but no one spoke. Then he suddenly swung on young Creighton Forbes. "I forgot to mention," he went, on, "your blood is the right type, Forbes. It would have been you who gave that transfusion, if only Mr. Douglas had lived to take it."

Young Forbes gulped. "That's too bad," he murmured. "I mean, I

would have been glad to be the donor, of course."

"Dr. Feather smiled faintly. "Yes, of course you would."

"And this--this other thing?" young Forbes stammered, "Blood there in the study that isn't clotted?"

What's that mean?"

"That of course, was queer," Dr. Feather said. "My girl Kit took a sample of the clotted blood. The normal blood, you might say. It came from Mr. Douglas. But the other blood came from the murderer!"

Kit analyzed it and found that it was very unusual blood indeed. Deficient in lime salts and calcium salt.

And a deficiency in fibrin- ferment. My goodness, yes, a marked deficiency of all three elements which cause our blood to clot. So we know that this murderer is a haemophilic. That's why we wanted samples of everyone's blood. Just to identify the murderer!... Oh, dear me, stop him, Kit!"

THE pallid William Mallory's hand had suddenly come from his dressing gown pocket with a small revolver. For a second it looked as though wildly he might fire at the man nearest him and bolt for the hall doorway; then with a hysterical cry he turned the weapon toward his temple. But like a cat the alert little Kit was on him, seizing his wrist, expertly twisting his arm so that the weapon clattered away and he screamed with pain.

"Stand still," Kit panted. "You shouldn't try a foolish thing like that.... His right hand is bleeding, father.

He must have bruised it in the attack on Mr. Douglas and made it

bleed. He had it covered with collodion, powdered over, but I've opened it again now."

"So he did it?" young Forbes gasped. "You damned dirty murderer! I can tell you why he did it, Dr.

Feather. He's so damned conceited he thinks he can marry my sister, now that she's a rich widow, just because she once thought she was in love with him. And he wanted Mr. Douglas to invest in a business he's trying to start. Mr. Douglas wouldn't. But my sister was in favor of it. So the damned dirty--"

"I heard him, sir, having pretty angry words with Mr. Douglas earlier this evening," the butler said from across the hall. "That is what I wanted to tell you, sir." Dr. Feather waved it away. "There he is, Sergeant. Have your men watch him pretty closely. I shouldn't be surprised if he tries suicide again.

Haemophilics are often depressive."

Then when the hall had quieted and the hysterical Mallory had been led away, Dr. Feather faced the triumphant Sergeant Tripp. "It's a curious disease, that haemophilia, it certainly is, Sergeant. It's hereditary, but only the females can transmit it. And a female never gets it. Goodness, that's queer. She's immune to it, and she gives it only to her male offspring."

"I've heard of them," Sergeant Tripp said. "Bleeders."

"Quite so, Sergeant. An uncontrollable bleeding is often apt to follow wounds. The Spanish Royal Family--everybody has heard of them. And there are quite a lot of haemophilics here in America, more than you'd think. In Reading, Massachusetts there's a famous family of them. For two hundred years, down through seven generations, the

males have been bleeders."

Little Dr. Feather was beaming as he lighted a big black cigar and offered one to Tripp. "I'm glad my girl Kit and I were able to help you, Sergeant," he added. "Good gracious yes, I certainly am."

THE END

# The Scalpel of Doom

Ray Cummings

EText from [pulpgen.com](http://pulpgen.com)



A doctor is not supposed to use his knowledge to slay. Yet there came a time when this small-town medico had to operate with... The Scalpel of Doom

LOTS of things, particularly unpleasant ones, can get crowded into an hour. I've had it happen to me often, but never quite like that hour which began at about midnight, one evening last summer. And I never thought I'd have occasion to kill a man. Every doctor worries that sometime he might make a little mistake, or even just an error of judgment; his patient would die--and the doctor would forever after blame himself. But this wasn't anything like that. I wanted to kill this fellow, and I did. I can't say I'm exactly sorry, but it gives you a queer feeling just the same.

I was alone in my office, that summer night. I live in a little stucco house near the edge of Pleasant Grove Village, with my office and reception room occupying about half its lower floor. My wife and young daughter were away for a week at the beach. I was alone on the premises, that night at midnight. I'd had quite a tough day at the hospital--two operations, one of which had turned out to be more serious than I had anticipated, and a long steady grind of routine calls that had kept me going until about eleven-thirty. I had just decided to

go to bed when a car stopped outside. Hurried footsteps came up the walk; my night bell rang.

It was a slim, dark-haired young girl. She wore a black, somewhat shabby raincoat and hood. Which struck me as odd, because it was a hot summer night, with a full moon in a cloudless sky.

"You Dr. Bates?"

"Yes," I said. "Come in."

She shook her head. I couldn't see her face very well because of the hood. Her voice was low, agitated.

"You got to come, doc," she said. "I got a--a patient. I guess he's hurt bad." She gestured toward the car at the curb. It was a big, black limousine, a really handsome affair. "I'll drive you," she added. "It ain't far. Hurry, doc. Please."

"A patient?" I said.

"A patient--for you. He--he's my brother. You'll hurry, won't you?"

I got my hat and bag. She stood in the doorway. She was trembling. My hall light was on her. She was young, quite pretty--a pale, drawn face framed by bobbed black hair.

"Somebody hurt?" I said. "An accident? Why didn't you drive him to the hospital? There's one here in Pleasant Grove."

She backed out of the light into the dimness of my porch. "I couldn't, doc. I'll tell you about that. But please--you gotta hurry--he could die."

I climbed into the front seat of the car with her and we rolled away, heading north out of Pleasant Grove.

She drove swiftly but, it seemed, skillfully.

"Where is he?" I said.

"Over near Palenburg. I'll bring you back, doc. You--do your best for him, won't you, doc?"

"Of course," I said. The factory town of Palenburg was about ten miles north. "There are doctors in Palenburg," I said. "A hospital, too. Why didn't you--?"

"I couldn't. He's--in the--a place in the woods."

AT THE crossroads, we turned west. I knew this region pretty well. The country west of Palenburg is unusually wild--wooded hills with hardly a house. The girl drove grimly, silently.

The front seat was dark, with just the glow reflected from the lighted instruments of the panel. Beside me, on the inside of the right-hand door, there was a plush pouch. On impulse I reached into it.

A pair of man's gloves--handsome chamois skin--were in it. And a few letters. I glanced at one. It was addressed: George J. Livingston, The Oakes, Palenburg.

I put the things back. "What's your name?" I said.

"Jenny Dolan."

"You work for Mr. Livingston? Is that it?"

She turned her head, flashed me a startled glance. "Mr.--who?" Then she looked frightened, sullen.

"Or maybe you just borrowed his car?" I said. "Look, Jenny, hadn't you better tell me all about this?"

"No! No--"

"Why not?"

"I can't! I promised him!"

"Your brother?"

"Yes. Oh doc--" I had put my hand on her shoulder. I'm forty years old, with grey hairs coming. To me, I'm still a pretty husky young fellow, but to her--well, I was old enough to be her father. She evidently felt that. At my touch and my gentle tone, she suddenly wilted out of her grimness. "Oh, doc, you wouldn't--you wouldn't do anything against him? I'm trustin' you--"

She was tearful. She turned toward me. "Watch the road!" I said sharply. We had wobbled toward the ditch. She brought us back.

"Take it easy," I said. "If you've promised him not to explain to me--that's okay. How far is it from here?"

"Not far." She was slowing us down. Then she turned from the highway into a little side road that wound up into the forested foothills of Black Mountain. So far as I could judge we were about three miles from Palenburg. The car bumped over the little rocky road. Then it was so steep we had to go into low gear.

"You know, don't you," I said, "if he's got a gunshot wound or been stabbed or anything, I have to report it to the police?"

"No, no! That's what he said you'd do! Oh doc--"



"Don't get excited," I said. Which sounded insane. She was pretty pathetic, in a panic of terror, trying to drive the car with one hand and grabbing appealingly at me with the other.

"Doc, he's only a kid. Only eighteen--my twin. You--you won't let him die, will you? Doc, I had to come and get you--"

"Of course. If he's that bad, we'll have to get him to the hospital--"

"That's what I told him! But you can't! Oh please--"

She suddenly stopped the car. "What's the idea?" I said.

"We're here. It's--he's right near here--"

The little road had petered out into almost nothing. I climbed out. Around us there was only black, somber woods, with the moonlight vaguely filtering down through the tree branches....

"This way, doc."

I followed after her as she led me into the woods. Now I'm certainly not versed in woodcraft, but I guess my nerves were on edge, my senses sharpened. At all events, it suddenly seemed that I heard a crackling in the underbrush off to one side, behind us. I reached forward, gripped the girl's shoulder.

"Wait!" I murmured. "Quiet!"

We stood silent. It was so quiet I could seem to hear my heart thumping against my ribs.

"What is it?" Jenny whispered.

"I thought I heard something, off there." I vaguely gestured. But there

was obviously nothing to hear now. "Go ahead," I said. "It wasn't anything. Or maybe an animal--"

We were in a little patch of moonlight. On the girl's face there was a new terror. "You heard somebody--"

"Somebody?" I murmured. My hand was still on her shoulder. I shook her. "Look here, do you figure somebody's around here following us?"

"No! No, of course not!" She pulled away from me. "Why would there be? There's only Tom--and he's hurt--"

I LET it go, and followed her as she plunged deeper into the woods. We had only gone a hundred yards or so from where we left the car until I saw that a little tumbledown shack was ahead of us. Once it may have stood in a small clearing, but the thickets and underbrush were close around it now--a small, deserted, practically uninhabitable building with half its roof gone. We were almost on it before I could see a faint gleam of yellow glow through one of its broken windows which was blocked on the inside with newspapers.

"Come in, doc."

The broken door creaked as she pulled at it. Instantly from inside came a voice. "Who's there? Keep out of here! I warn you, I got a gun!" It was a weak, shaky voice with a frenzy of desperation in it.

"It's me, Tom," the girl said softly. "It's all right, I've brought the doc."

The boy lay on an old blanket on the bare wooden floor of an empty room. He was dressed in trousers and shirt, a shirt with one shoulder torn and a crude, bloody bandage there. Beside him there was an empty, broken wooden box, with a lighted candle, a pitcher and glass

of water. Nearby, another blanket was spread. On the floor, in a corner, there were a few articles of food, tinned goods and a loaf of bread.

"Oh, hello, doc, I guess I'm glad Jenny got you." He was a slim, masculine version of the girl—a good-looking boy, with black hair clipped close to his head.

His face was pale and drawn; his lips bloodless. His dark eyes, fixed on me as I knelt down on the blanket beside him, were glistening with fever.

"I'm all right, doc." He tried to smile. "I cut myself. Just an accident, doc."

He was far from all right. He had been stabbed in the shoulder, just missing the lung. He'd lost a lot of blood; but for a healthy young fellow, it didn't seem a dangerous wound, if infection was kept out of it.

But he couldn't have stayed here very long, neglecting it.

"Not too bad," I said cheerfully. "But you were right in getting me, Jenny. Have you any fresh water?"

There was a rusty old pump in a corner of the room, but it worked. That kid was stoical. I guess I hurt him plenty. But in fifteen minutes or so, I'd done all I could with emergency cleaning and a fresh bandage.

"Okay," I said. "Now we'll talk. You two kids have got to—"

I didn't get any further than that. I was too startled. There was a lumpy place under the blanket. I chanced to notice a little end of fabric sticking out. I reached, pulled at it. It was prison garb.

"Oh," I murmured. "I see. That's--"

Again I stopped. I was looking into the shaking muzzle of a little black gun which the boy had drawn from under the blanket up by his head. I was certainly dumb not to have gotten that gun away from him when I first came in.

"Now, now," I said, "don't be silly. I won't do you any harm, Tom."

"You're damn right, you won't!" he snarled. "You get out of here! Oh, I'll pay you all right! Jenny'll drive you home! But you ain't goin' to turn me in, because I won't be here by the time you can get the cops!"

"Tom! Tom!"

That girl could have cost me my life. It was nip and tuck whether that kid's shaking, feverish finger pulled the trigger or didn't. It didn't. The girl shoved away his arm so that I reached, grabbed the gun and twisted it from him. I tossed it, sliding, across the floor. That was another fool trick of mine. I should have dropped it into my pocket.

"Now," I said, "you listen to me, you two. You're okay, Tom, if you get the right treatment. A transfusion, maybe. That wound's got to be fixed up properly. I'm not asking you how you got it; I'm taking you to the Pleasant Grove hospital--"

"No! You're crazy! You know damn well that I broke out of jail! I won't go back! I got things to do!

You can't--"

I let him rage. "You'll die if you don't go," I said. "Infection will get in that shoulder. It's there now, very likely. Suit yourself, if you want to sit here and die--"

That got the girl. She flung herself down by her brother. "Tom, you listen to him! I ain't goin' to let you die! You listen to him!" Then she turned to me, clung to me. "Doc, he's a good boy. They put him in jail for killin' a man in a robbery! But he didn't do it--"

"Jenny, you shut up!" the boy growled.

"I won't! He's right, Tom! You gotta go back! You can't jus' keep runnin' from the law--not when you're hurt! Doc, if you knew all about it, you'd stand by him! They had no right to send him up! It was my husband did it--"

"Jenny, you shut up, I tell you!"

But he couldn't shut her up now, and she babbled it out. She was married to a fellow named Greer, Jim Greer. A man about thirty, a seasoned criminal.

"He's got a record under some other name," the girl was saying. "I know it damn well, by a lot of little things he said. Anyway, he got Tom into this robbery thing. Jim killed the man. It wasn't Tom, he never even had a gun."

THE thing had happened only a year ago. Nothing very novel; you read about things like that often.

They'd broken into a rich man's home, made away with jewelry and cash. But the victim caught them at it, got killed. In the getaway, Tom had been able to hide some of the loot in the garden. Jim Greer had gotten away; but Tom was seen by the gardener, who had taken a shot at him, brought him down with his leg full of buckshot.

"An' Tom took the rap for the whole thing. Second degree murder," the girl said. "He could have squealed on Jim--Jim was the killer!"

"He would have lied out of it," Tom said. "Anyway, Jenny had a baby coming. I couldn't very well drag--"

"I see," I said. "So you went up for the killing too. And this Jim Greer--"

"I thought he loved her," the boy said. "I thought he'd treat her right."

"My baby died," Jenny said. "He died when he was born, an' Jim--he wasn't there--he was drunk. He never did come back to me. He's got a girl somewhere else, over in Mechanicsville, I think. Anyway, I'm through with him."

And she had told her brother, in the jail, about it. "I had to get out," Tom said. "See? I just had to!"

"To get revenge on him?" I suggested.

"No, no!" Jenny gasped. "Tom didn't want to hurt him!"

"The hell I didn't," Tom muttered. "I got out of the jail. Never mind how, it was one of those lucky breaks, me and another guy, but they caught him right away. That was last night--"

"He wanted to get hold of Jim, an' maybe make him confess an' take the murder rap," Jenny put in.

"Anyway, I live in a little house in Palenburg--me an' another girl, an' she's away for a week. I'm workin' in a factory there."

She had phoned her husband, persuaded him to come to her cottage. Then Tom had jumped him.

"He hadn't treated Jenny right, that was the main thing," Tom was

saying. "So I asked him what the hell he expected to do about it."

And this fellow Greer had retorted that what he wanted was his share of the loot Tom had hidden after the robbery.

"Can you beat that?" the boy demanded. "To hell with the murder rap I took for him, to hell with my sister, all he wants is some money!"

In the fight, Tom had been stabbed. Greer had fled, fearing that the neighbors had been aroused by the noise. But they hadn't been. Tom and Jenny had come here, where she had hidden him, bringing him food; hoping he'd get well so they'd be able to get away....

"I've got the money," Tom was saying. "Doc, give us a chance. She stole that car in Palenburg tonight.

That's okay, we won't hurt it. We'll jest beat it somewhere, Jenny an' me, an' we'll leave the car where it'll get found. I swear it, doc, give us a chance!"

Just a couple of kids, all mixed up. You read about lots of them like that.

Page 6 "This fellow Greer," I said. "You don't think by any chance--"

I didn't finish. Somehow a sudden uneasiness had jumped me. My mind went back to that noise in the woods as the girl and I came here. Thinking back to it now, it did seem that I could remember there had been a car behind us on the way here. Then I had forgotten it.

I MET Jenny's eyes. "I thought he was around my house today," she murmured suddenly. "I thought I saw him, but I wasn't sure."

Had Greer trailed us here? I felt suddenly trapped--the three of us here in this lonely little shack, and a killer outside.

It was no idle, crazy hunch! I had no time to get up from the floor. The door creaked. A figure loomed in the doorway, a big burly man with a gun in his hand, leveled at us.

"So here we are again!" he said. "Nice little family party, an' the doc to fix you up! Ain't that sweet?"

Tom lay stiffened on his blanket, with his fevered, burning eyes on the advancing figure. I sat numbed beside him. Jenny was sitting on the other aide of Tom, staring with a hand upflung to her mouth.

"Okay," Greer said. "Now, let's have that money, Tom!"

"You--you damned--"

Across the room, on the floor, I could see Tom's little revolver where I had flung it. It could have been a million miles away, for all the chance I had of getting it.

"Come on, where is it?" Greer demanded. Then he saw an impulsive gesture of Tom's hand toward the head of the blanket. "Okay," he said. "So that's where it is--"

He stooped, reached for it. As it happened, his gun was pointed at me. Tom didn't think of that; I doubt if he thought of much at anything. Wild, fevered, with a rush of frenzied strength he rose up on the blanket, grabbing for Greer's throat. The gun went off. By good luck, the bullet didn't go into my chest. It went into my left arm with a stab like a white-hot poker. Greer straightened and staggered back.

"So that's the idea, is it?" he roared. "Okay, you asked for it--the whole damned three of you! His gun spat again, at Tom, this time, but it missed his head, the bullet hitting the floor with a thud.



I guess one acts without conscious thought in a thing like that. My instrument bag was beside me; it was open. I reached in, found a scalpel and clung to it. Greer was near me. I rose up in time to knock his arm as he fired again. And then I slashed with the scalpel--ripped it across his throat.

I better not go into details. That slash, with all the wild strength I could put into it, wasn't anything like a surgeon's delicate incision. Greer went down. I don't think he lived more than a minute or two....

A little later, I had Tom down in the big limousine, lying on the back seat, with Jenny sitting beside him.

They'd get Greer's fingerprints from the body. His true identity would be established. His old prison record would be pinned to him.

Silently, with my left arm hanging limp, I drove the stolen car out of the woods, heading for the Pleasant Grove hospital. Doctors often have tough days. But I sure didn't want any more like this.

# **The Dead Man Laughs**

**Ray Cummings**

**EText from pulpgen.com**

**Popular Detective, January, 1938**

**The Dead Man Laughs**

**—as a Scientific Sleuth Tackles the Riddle of A Mysterious  
Fire!**

**A Dr. Feather Story**

**By Ray Cummings**

**Author of "Murder in the Fog", "Death Under the  
Microscope," etc.**



"I'M GLAD you happened to be in town, Dr. Feather," Captain Allen said. "Read that." He tossed a letter across the desk. Dr. Feather and Kit, his daughter, read it attentively.

Police Captain Allen Police Station Maple Grove, N. J.

Dear Sir:

If anything should happen to me, I want you to know my grandson killed me.

Yours truly,

Ezra Kaine.

"He's certainly to the point," Dr. Feather commented dryly as he handed back the letter. "What'd you do about it?"

"Nothing yet. I just got it," Captain Allen said. "I've heard of old Ezra Kaine--eccentric, miserly sort of fellow. Crotchety as the devil. Lives with his grandson in the Johnson Apartments, over on the West Side. The grandson works in New York--"

"Crime prevention is out of my line," Dr. Feather said. "But if that note is authentic, I suggest you'd better ask him what he--"

THE distant wail of the village fire siren echoed through the frosty night air--a long and two short blasts.

"The West Side," Allen murmured. "Quite a coincidence."

Dr. Feather and Kit exchanged glances. The police captain grabbed the telephone.

"It's the Johnson Apartments, all right!" he exclaimed as he slammed down the receiver.

"Dear me," Dr. Feather murmured. "It may not be a case of crime prevention. Shall we go, Captain?"

It was nearly one A.M.--a Saturday night in November. Dr. Feather's big limousine was parked in front of the police station. Kit jumped

behind its wheel, with Dr. Feather and Allen after her. Down a distant cross-street, Maple Grove's fire engine went with screaming siren.

At the west edge of the village the Johnson Apartments stood in a big, somber, tree-shrouded garden--an old-fashioned dingy-looking frame building of three stories, divided now into half a dozen apartments. The fire engines already were there; the place was in a turmoil, with pedestrians and cars miraculously arriving.

"I guess they've got it out," Dr. Feather observed. "We'll stay here, Kit."

Captain Allen had leaped out and run into the house. Smoke was pouring from some of the windows.

On the dark front porch several of the partly clad tenants were gathered with their belongings around them. But quite evidently the fire was already under control.

Then suddenly Captain Allen came dashing from the house. His face was grim.

"The fire--" Dr. Feather began. "It's out," Alien said. "Amounts to nothing now--one of the lodgers fortunately discovered it almost at once. But old Ezra Kaine--he's dead!"

"Dead, Captain? Dear me--why--" He seized Allen and lowered his voice. "Not murder, by any chance?"

"Dead in his bed up there," Alien said grimly. "I phoned for some of my men--for the Kaine's family physician, and the medical examiner. You can't tell--"

"Come on, Kit, let's go in." Like a little bird Dr. Feather hopped from

his car. On the front porch three men and a woman, tenants of the building, were gathered, excitedly talking, trying to explain to each other what had happened.

"Here's his grandson," Allen said.

The young man--Bob Kaine, a tall, dark- haired youth, pajama-clad--had just appeared from within the house.

"Did the smoke overcome him?" he exclaimed. "When will the doctor be here? He's dead."

He turned to rush back, but Dr. Feather stopped him.

"Wait! I'll go with you. Come on, Captain." The owner of the apartment house also in his pajamas, with a dressing gown over him, came forward. He was Thomas Johnson--a small, grey- haired widower.

"Lee Polter here discovered it," Johnson started explaining. "I was in bed--Polter came home--"

They were in the hall now, starting up the stairs. The firemen were tramping the house; the hall was wet with hose water and littered with charred woodwork which the firemen had chopped away.

Within a minute Dr. Feather had the main facts. Thomas Johnson had been in his apartment on the ground floor asleep. Lee Polter--a tall, blond young artist who had a studio on the second floor--had just arrived home.

"Coming up the stairs I smelled the smoke here in the storeroom," Polter told them.

The storeroom was off a landing halfway to the second floor. It was

wrecked now, with the firemen chopping at its walls.

"I opened this door," Polter said. "It was just a little fire on one side of the room--hadn't been going more than half a minute, I guess. But Lord--it sure was burning with pep."

"Incendiary?" Kit murmured. But no one heard her save Dr. Feather.

Polter had aroused the house. Old Ezra Kaine was sleeping alone in his big apartment on the second floor. On the third floor there was a Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

"We heard the rumpus," Smith said now. "Polter and I tried to put the fire out--Johnson phoned in the alarm--"

The excited group had reached the top of the stairs. Dr. Feather suddenly turned to young Kaine, the grandson.

"And where were you?" "Me? Why--why, I was trying to get in to my grandfather--to wake him up.

And now he's dead--"

"Don't you live with him?" Dr. Feather said. "I--well, yes I do. But we had a quarrel." "He was sleeping on the third floor," the big burly Smith put in.

Mrs. Smith, a chubby little blond woman added, "We offered him a room with us, but--"

"I gave him a single room on the third floor," Johnson said. "We knew, in a day or two, the trouble--"

DR. FEATHER and Captain Allen exchanged glances. "Trouble?" Allen echoed. "What trouble?"

"My grandfather and I had a fight," young Kaine admitted. "He--we disagreed about a girl friend of mine. He--you might as well know--I've nothing to hide. You tell them, Mr. Johnson. You heard the argument."

Quite evidently everyone knew of it, Old Ezra Kaine had been infuriated. He was going to disinherit his grandson. And he threw him out of the apartment. Said he was afraid to have him there.

"He was pretty crotchety," Johnson said. "He didn't mean it--so I just gave Bob a room upstairs."

The firemen had come, Dr. Feather now learned; and when the locked door of Ezra Kaine's apartment was finally broken in-- "We found him--well, like you see him now," Johnson said solemnly.

The hall door of the Kaine apartment opened into a small hall; then an interior door led into the bedroom. There was almost no smell of smoke here. Quite evidently the fire could not have caused the old man's death.

With the excited group crowding behind him, Dr. Feather stood in the bedroom doorway. It was a small room, with only one door and one window. Both were open now. Dr. Feather asked about them.

"No, they were both closed when we burst in," Polter answered.

The dead man lay in the bed--a wizened old man, with the covers almost completely enveloping him.

His glazed eyes stared unseeingly. But on his face was a queer grimace--with his lips parted as though he had died upon the brink of a laugh!

Dr. Feather turned suddenly. "Captain, take everybody downstairs, will you? My girl Kit and I will look this over for a few minutes. When the doctor comes you can send him up here."

Alone in the room, Dr. Feather and little Kit for a moment stared at each other blankly.

"Dear me, it looks very queer, Kit," Dr. Feather said.

"It could be murder, couldn't it, Father?" "Well, I suppose so. But that note that old Kaine wrote--I can understand it. A crotchety old man--angry--they get the obsession sometimes that their life is in danger--"

"Especially if they're rich," Kit agreed. "That note was just a gesture of anger. To make trouble for his grandson. I don't believe for a minute that boy Kaine--"

"Don't theorize, child." They were examining the body now. It was still warm. "Dead only half an hour or so," Dr. Feather murmured. "Just before the fire was discovered."

And there was not a mark of violence on the body! No wound. No evidence of poison. The old man, who had locked himself in the bedroom, seemingly had simply died, awake in his bed! And died, about to laugh!

"There's something queer here, Kit," Dr. Feather said, cocking his head birdlike to one side.

"The fire was queer," Kit agreed. "You heard what that young artist--that Lee Polter said? A little fire, but it must have burned so briskly--"

They stared at each other. "We'll take a look at that storeroom presently," Dr. Feather agreed. "This laugh on his face, Kit, I can't



understand--"

DR. FEATHER was still examining the body. Kit was searching the room--its closets, its walls and floor--

"Father, come here," she exclaimed excitedly.

There was a picture fairly low on one interior wall. Kit had moved it, and behind it there was a small hole--a break in the old plaster and wood.

"A mousehole," Dr. Feather decided. "Only you don't find one halfway up a wall. Now where could this lead to?"

Kit was shining her light into it. Then she smelled it.

"No odor, Father." Then with a finger prying into it, she added, "A rubber tube in here!"

They verified it. A half-inch rubber tube ended here. Where did it lead?

"We'd have to pull the house down to find out," Dr. Feather said lugubriously. "Wait, child, let me think--"

For a moment he stood pondering. "No lethal gas coming through this tube to kill him. True, he was in a small closed room, but somebody would have smelled the gas. And the body would show signs of it--and he wouldn't have died with a laugh on his face!"

But something had come through the tube-- some lethal weapon--of that Dr. Feather was convinced.

What was it?

"There were two crimes," Kit said slowly. "A man is murdered, and then there is an attempt to burn down the house. There must be some connection, Father."

Dr. Feather was pondering deeply. "Yes, of course, Kit. It would be pretty coincidental when a man is murdered to have the house catch fire almost immediately afterward."

"Especially with a queer fire," Kit commented. "I don't see how it could be anything else but incendiary--"

"If the murderer set the fire"--Dr. Feather was talking softly, thinking aloud--"then the most obvious reason was that he wanted to burn down the house to destroy evidence of the murder."

"Exactly," Kit exclaimed. "That seems obvious--"

"Yes, it seems obvious, Kit. And yet, I don't know--"

"What, Father?"

"Well," he said, "this is a mighty clever murder, Kit. Would the murderer go to such extremes to make sure?" Again Dr. Feather pondered. "I'm puzzled, child," he said at last. "Let's take a look at that storeroom, Kit. We don't know yet that the fire was incendiary. Or, if it was, we don't know that it was done by the murderer."

They went to the storeroom. It was littered with furniture, boxes of rubbish, barrels, old trunks--all wrecked and wet now with the fire and water. There had evidently been quite a litter of papers--the ashes were strewn about.

There was no evidence that gasoline or anything of similar inflammable nature had been used here. The wet, charred objects all

had a normal smell.

"No ashes of gunpowder or other explosives," Dr. Feather said. "But this fire--as that man who discovered it said--certainly burned with a queer briskness. Look where it jumped from here, to here, Kit." He pointed to a drape that had burned, and, several feet away, another pile of charred cloth, with an area of wood between them which had not ignited.

"Queer, Kit," he continued. "For the fire to have made that jump, the ignition point of this cloth must have been materially lowered. At a much lower than normal ignition temperature, it ignited from the heat of those burning drapes. Something lowered the ignition point of things in the room. And look at that paper ash. I would say, Kit, even without a chemical analysis, that that paper burned with abnormal briskness, and abnormal thoroughness." He snapped his finger triumphantly.

"Then you're sure now that the fire was incendiary, Father?"

"Yes, I am, Kit. And I'm almost positive the murderer did it. If we could find some evidence that ties them together--"

KIT had been prowling the room. "Look here!" she suddenly exclaimed.

She was stooping down by the baseboard. There was a hole there in the old wall--a hole quite similar to the one in the murder room upstairs, with a similar small end of rubber tube leading--somewhere.

"Well, the same man committed both crimes, that's obvious," Dr. Feather declared. Again he was pondering. "And the motive--"

"If only we knew where the pipes lead to," Kit was murmuring.

"But I think I do, child!" Dr. Feather jumped to his feet. His eyes were flashing now. "Everything fits in perfectly. The murder, the fire, the method! You didn't notice those men's hands? You ought not miss anything, Kit! Come on, we'll take a look."

Whatever it was he had seen, Kit had missed it. Chagrined, she silently followed him down the stairs.

The doctor had come now and was starting up to see the dead man.

Some of Allen's uniformed men were just arriving. The inmates of the house were still crowded here in the lower hall. They gazed at the policemen with startled surprise.

"What's the matter?" Polter demanded. "Why the police?"

"You all go into Mr. Johnson's apartment," Dr. Feather ordered. "You go with them, Captain. Kit and I will join you presently."

Young Kaine stared blankly. Johnson said, "I don't understand--"

But Dr. Feather and Kit had vanished. He led her outside to the dark porch.

"The cellar, Kit," he murmured. "I want to take a look down there. Now how the deuce can we find it without asking?"

They had seen two or three doors in the big lower hall, one of which probably led downward. But Dr.

Feather wanted no one to see them go. They prowled the dark outer walls; found a small side door. Kit pried it open quickly. A small half-flight of stairs led downward.

The big cellar was clean and neat. Stairs led evidently to the upper main public hall. The big old-fashioned coal furnace was going. Several coal bins were partly filled. Dr. Feather and Kit poked silently about with their flashlights.

"Here they are, Kit!" he said presently. From out of the ceiling two small rubber pipes, side by side, came down close along the wall--two little black rubber tubes that buried themselves in the mound of coal in one of the bins.

"He didn't have time," Dr. Feather said exultantly. "It's good we got here quickly. Kit. At the first chance, since he found the house didn't burn down, he'd have destroyed this evidence."

Two coffinlike boxes were buried in the coal, "with the tubes leading into them!

"There you are, Kit," Dr. Feather chuckled. "Just as I figured. If I don't startle him into confession--good heavens, there'll be enough routine police evidence here, of course. And the motive--" He stood for a moment in thought.

"You wait here, Kit," he added. "I'm going up and send them all down. Don't show them anything! Just keep them here till I come. I'll be detained upstairs a few minutes."

In the hall upstairs he herded them all to the cellar.

"You stay with them, Captain," he ordered. "My girl Kit is down there--I'll be there in a moment."

It was five or ten minutes before he joined them. And as he faced them he said abruptly: "Ezra Kaine was murdered!" His raised hand checked their exclamations. "You, Mr. Polter," he continued, "you

discovered the fire--"

"Why--why yes, I did," the young artist agreed. "I told you--"

"And it was burning briskly! Abnormally briskly! Well, the reason for that was that a little rubber tube led a gas from a cylinder down here in this coal bin up to the storeroom. The murderer started the fire--the gas in the room fed it nicely!"

Dr. Feather held up his hand sharply. "Don't ask me any questions! My goodness, I'm telling you as fast as I can! The same gas was introduced previously into old Ezra Kaine's bedroom. He breathed it--he woke up. He didn't feel sick. He died--well, just when he was about to laugh! The gas killed him--I imagine because he had a very weak, perhaps an impaired heart."

Dr. Feather swung suddenly on the pallid grandson. "Did he have a weak heart, Mr. Kaine?"

"Why yes--yes, he sure did. But I don't understand--"

"Neither did I, at first," Dr. Feather said grimly. "But here was a dead man, without any sign of poisonous gas in him--an autopsy wouldn't show a thing. And the murderer tried to burn down this house and all this evidence--"

Dr. Feather had seized a shovel; uncovered an end of one of the boxes. Within it was a steel cylinder, with a pressure gauge on top.

"Oxygen!" Dr. Feather said. "The gas of life! But too much of it intoxicates you--over- stimulation. It will race a weak heart, cause death. And it makes you want to laugh, with its intoxicating quality. That's why the dead man had that queer contorted laugh on his face! It's a perfect murder weapon! It evaporates out of the blood very

quickly--an autopsy wouldn't show it.

"And with the same weapon, this murderer expected to burn down the house. Things burn very quickly indeed, with an excess of oxygen in the air! The ignition point is lowered by the oxygen--things ignite at an abnormally low temperature--and they burn very thoroughly. If Mr. Polter hadn't discovered the fire--grab him, Kit!"

Like a little cat the girl leaped upon Johnson, the house owner, when he tried to make a bolt for the outer door. Then he stood sullen, as the astonished, triumphant police captain seized him.

"He's your man, Captain," Dr. Feather said. "You'll find plenty of routine police evidence here to convict him. My goodness, yes--fingerprints on these cylinders, and his fingerprints around all that carpentry he did on the house, leading those tubes upstairs. And the motive--"

"Oh, you've got me all right," Johnson growled suddenly.

"You set the fire because your old house here is well insured," Dr. Feather said. "I was searching for a motive. Covering up the murder was one. But then the murder was pretty neatly covered up already.

Why burn the house; who would have another motive for doing that? You, Johnson, were the logical person."

"Yeah," Johnson muttered sullenly. "The damned old dump is heavily insured--"

"But that wasn't your motive for killing Ezra Kaine," Dr. Feather said. "I've just been searching your apartment. Naturally, since you expected the house to burn down, you didn't hide things.

Wasn't it a question of some raised rent checks? Ezra Kaine's rent checks?"

"You go to the devil," Johnson growled as the triumphant captain led him away.

There was a moment when Dr. Feather and Kit were alone in the cellar.

"I muffed part of this one, Father," the girl said lugubriously. "How did you figure the cylinders were down here?"

"Johnson's fingernails were extra clean, Kit--newly cleaned, it seemed to me because his hands were rough and chapped--the hands of a man who works around a place like this and would seldom have clean nails. In fact his fingernails really looked suspiciously--most incongruously clean, Kit. And then I saw that the skin of his hands was abraded in several places. There was coal dust in the abrasions, and it didn't come out when he washed his hands!"

Dr. Feather was smiling as he regarded his chagrined young daughter.

"You've got to notice little things like that, Kit, or I'll never make a good detective out of you!"