

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 27                      CONTENTS FOR JANUARY, 1936                      Number 1

Cover Design . . . . . M. Brundage  
*Illustrating a scene in "A Rival from the Grave"*

A Rival from the Grave . . . . . Seabury Quinn 2  
*A tale of creeping horror that rises to a climax of sheer terror—an exploit of Jules de Grandin*

The Satin Mask . . . . . August W. Derleth 25  
*What weird doom made the wearing of that mask so deadly?—a strange and eery story*

Horror Insured . . . . . Paul Ernst 34  
*Another amazing story about Doctor Satan, the world's weirdest criminal*

In Davy Jones's Locker . . . . . Alfred I. Tooke 52  
*Verse*

The Dark Land . . . . . C. L. Moore 53  
*A story about an eldritch woman, so gruesome, so deadly that only the pen of C. L. Moore can describe her*

The Hour of the Dragon (part 2) . . . . . Robert E. Howard 72  
*A vivid weird novel of a thousand thrills—a tale of Conan the barbarian*

Gray Ghosts . . . . . Clarence Edwin Flynn 105  
*Verse*

Rendezvous . . . . . Richard H. Hart 106  
*The story of a ghostly ferry-boat on the Mississippi, and an engineer who refused to drink*

Return to Death . . . . . J. Wesley Rosenquest 111  
*A weird tale about a man suspected of being a vampire*

They . . . . . Robert Barbour Johnson 115  
*A dreadful horror waited on the stone slab in Dead Man's Canyon*

Weird Story Reprint:

    Dagon . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 118  
*An eldritch tale from an early issue of WEIRD TALES*

The Eyrie . . . . . 124  
*The readers of this magazine express their opinions*

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright 1936, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# Horror Insured

By PAUL ERNST

*'Another amazing story about the exploits of the sinister figure who calls himself Doctor Satan, the world's weirdest criminal—a tale of breathtaking incidents and eery power*

## 1. In Satan's Crucible

**I**T WAS noon. The enormous National State Building hummed like a beehive with the activity of its tenants. Every office spewed forth men and women on their way to lunch. The express elevators dropped like plummets from the seventy-ninth floor, while the locals handled the crowds from the fortieth floor down.

At the top floor an express elevator tarried beyond its usual schedule. The operator paid no attention to the red flash from the starter downstairs signaling the Up cages to start down as soon as possible. He acted as though he was beyond schedules, as indeed he was.

This elevator, though not entirely private, was at the disposal of Martial Varley, owner of the building, whose offices took up the top floor. Others could ride in it, but they did so with the understanding that at morning, noon and evening the elevator waited to carry Varley, whose appearances at his office occurred with time-clock regularity. Hence, if the cage waited inactively those in it knew why and did not exhibit signs of impatience.

There were half a dozen people in the elevator that paused for Varley to ride down. There was an elderly woman, Varley's office manager and two secretaries; and there were two big business



"He found himself gazing at a shimmering figure that looked like a lizard."

men who had been conferring with Varley and were now waiting to go to lunch with him.

The six chatted in pairs to one another. The cage waited, with the operator humming a tune. Around them, in the big building, the prosaic business of prosaic people was being done. Nothing farther from the abnormal or horrible could be imagined. Yet terror and death were there, in that cage, with the others.

The glass-paneled doors to Varley's

office opened. The operator snapped to attention and those in the cage stopped talking and stared respectfully at the man who came to the cage doors.

Varley was a man of sixty, gray-haired, with a coarse but kindly face dominated by a large nose which his enemies called bulbous. He wore the hat that had made him famous—a blue-gray fedora which he ordered in quantity lots and wore exclusive of all other colors, fabrics or fashions.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Ed," Varley boomed to one of the two business men in the cage. "Phone call. Held me up for a few minutes."

He stepped into the elevator, nodding to the others.

"Let's go," he said to the operator.

The cage started down.

The express elevators were supposed to fall like a plummet. They made the long drop to the ground in a matter of seconds, normally. And this one started like a plummet.

"Damn funny, that phone call I got just before I came out of my office," Varley boomed to the two men he was lurching with. "Some joker calling himself Doctor Satan——"

He stopped, and frowned.

"What's wrong with the elevator?" he snapped to the operator.

"I don't know, sir," the boy said.

He was jerking at the lever. Ordinarily, so automatic was the cage, he did not touch the controls from the time the top floor doors mechanically closed themselves till the time the lobby was reached. Now he was twitching the control switch back and forth, from Off to On.

And the elevator was slowing down.

The swift start had slowed to a smooth crawl downward. And the crawl was becoming a creep. The floor numbers, that had flashed on the little frosted glass panel inside the cage as fast as you could count, were now forming themselves with exasperating slowness. Sixty-one, sixty, fifty-nine . . .

"Can't you make it go faster?" said Varley. "I never saw these cages go so slow. Is the power low?"

"I don't think so, sir," said the operator. He jammed the control against the fast-speed peg. And the cage slowed down still more.

"Something's wrong," whispered one of the girl secretaries to the other. "This

slow speed. . . . And it's getting warm in here!"

Evidently Varley thought so too. He unbuttoned his vest and took his fedora off and fanned himself.

"I don't know what the hell's the matter," he growled to the two men with him. "Certainly have to have the engineer look into this. There's supposed to be decent ventilation in these shafts. And if they call this express service . . . Gad, I'm hot!"

Perspiration was bursting out on his forehead now. He began to look ghastly pale.

Fifty-two, fifty-one, fifty . . . the little red numbers appeared on the frosted glass indicator ever more slowly. The elevator would take five minutes to descend, at this pace.

"Something's the matter with me," gasped Varley. "I've never felt like this before."

ONE of the girl secretaries was standing near him. She looked at him suddenly, with wide eyes in which fear of something beyond normal comprehension was beginning to show. She shrank back from him.

"Get this cage down," Varley panted. "I'm—sick."

The rest looked at each other. All were beginning to feel what the girl, who had been nearest him, had felt.

Heat was beginning to radiate from Varley's corpulent body as if he were a stove!

"Good heavens, man!" said one of the two business men. He laid his hand on Varley's arm, took it away quickly. "Why—you're burning up with fever. What's wrong?"

Varley tried to answer, but couldn't. He staggered back against the wall of the cage, leaned there with arms hanging down and lips hanging slack. There was

no longer perspiration on his face. It was dry, feverishly dry; and the skin was cracking on his taut, puffed cheeks.

"Burning!" he gasped. "Burning up!"

The girl secretary screamed, then. And the man who had put his hand on Varley's arm jerked at the operator's shoulder.

"For heaven's sake get this cage down! Mr. Varley's ill!"

"I—I can't," gasped the boy. "Something's the matter—it never acted like this before——"

He jerked at the controls, and the elevator did not respond. Slowly, monotonously, it continued its deliberate descent.

And abruptly a scream tore from Varley's cracking lips.

"*Burning!* Help me, somebody——"

The slowly dropping cage became a thing of horror, a six-foot square of hell from which there was no escape because there were no doors opening onto the shaft at the upper levels, and which could not be speeded up because it did not respond to the controls.

Screaming with every breath he drew, Varley sank to the floor. And those who might otherwise have tried to help him cowered away from him as far as they could get. For from his body now was radiating heat that made a tiny inferno of the elevator.

"God!" whispered one of the men. "Look at him—he really *is* burning up!"

The heat from Varley's body had become so intense that the others in the cage could hardly stand it. But far worse than their bodily torment was the mental agony of watching the thing that for a week had New York City in a chaos.

Varley had stopped screaming now. He lay staring up at the gilded roof of the elevator with frightful, glazing eyes. His chest heaved with efforts to draw breath. Heaved, then was still.

"*He's dead!*" shrieked one of the secretaries. "Dead——"

Her body fell to the floor of the cage near Varley's. The elderly woman quietly sagged to her knees, then in a huddled heap in the corner as her senses fled under the impact of a shock too great to be endured.

But the horror that had gripped Varley went on.

"*Look! Look! Look!*" panted the office manager.

But he had no need to pant out the word. The rest were looking all right. They'd have turned their eyes away if they could, but there is a fascination to extremes of horror that makes the will powerless. In every detail they were forced to see the thing that happened.

Varley's dead body was beginning to disappear.

The corpulent form of the man who a moment ago had been one of the biggest figures in the nation seemed to have been turned to wax, which was melting and vaporizing.

His face was a shapeless mass now; and the flesh of his body seemed to be melting and running together. As it did so, his limbs writhed and twitched as if still imbued with life. Writhed, and shriveled.

"*Burning up!*" whispered the office manager, his eyes bulging with horror behind their thick lenses. "*Melting away . . . burning up. . . .*"

It was so incredible, so unreal that it was dream-like.

The cage descended slowly, slowly, like the march of time itself which no man could hasten. The operator stood like a wooden image at the controls, staring with starting eyes at the heap on the floor which had been Varley. The two business men shrank together, hands to their mouths, gnawing the backs of their hands. The office manager was panting,

"Look . . . look . . . look . . ." with every breath, like a sobbing groan.

And Varley was a diminishing, shapeless mass on the floor.

"Oh, God, let me out of here!" screamed one of the business men.

But there was no way out. No doors opened onto the shaft here. All in the cage were doomed to stay and watch the spectacle that would haunt them till they died.

On the cage floor there was a blue-gray fedora hat, and a mound of blackened substance that was almost small enough to have been contained in it.

Twenty-nine, twenty-eight, twenty-seven. . . . The cage descended with its horrible, unchangeable slowness.

Twenty-five, twenty-four . . .

On the floor was Varley's hat. That was all.

The operator was last to go. Eleven, ten, the red numerals on the frosted glass panel read. Then his inert body joined the senseless forms of the others on the floor.

The cage hit the lobby level. Smoothly, marvelous mechanisms devised by man's ingenuity, the doors opened by themselves; opened, and revealed seven fainting figures—around a gray-blue fedora hat.

**T**HREE o'clock.

On the stage of the city's leading theater, the show, *Burn Me Down*, was in the middle of the first act of its matinee performance.

The show was a musical comedy, built around a famous comedian. His songs and dances and patter carried it. To see him, and him alone, the crowds came. Worth millions, shrewd, and at the same time as common as the least who saw him from the galleries, he was the idol of the stage.

He sat on a stool in the wings now,

chin on fist, moodily watching the revue dance of twenty bare-legged girls billed as the world's most beautiful. His heavy black eyebrows were down in a straight line over eyes like ink-spots behind comedy horn-rimmed glasses. His slight, lithe body was tense.

"Your cue in a minute, Mr. Croy," warned the manager.

"Hell, don't you suppose I know it?" snapped the comedian.

Then his scowl disappeared for a moment. "Sorry."

The manager stared. Croy's good humor and even temper were proverbial in the theater. No one had ever seen him act like this before.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Yeah, I don't feel so hot," said Croy, scowling again. "Rather, I feel *100* hot! Like I was burning up with a fever or something."

He passed a handkerchief over his forehead.

"And I feel like trouble's coming," he added. He took a rabbit's foot from his vest pocket and squeezed it. "Heavy trouble."

The manager bit his lip. Croy was the hit of the show—*was* the show.

"Knock off for the afternoon if you feel bad," he advised. "We'll have Charley do your stuff. We can get away with it at a matinee——"

"And have the mob on your neck," interrupted Croy, without false modesty. "It's me they come to see. I'll go on with it, and have a rest afterward. . . ."

The twenty girls swept forward in a last pirouette and danced toward the wings. Croy stood up.

"It must be a fever," he muttered, mopping at his face again. "Never felt like this before, though."

The stage door attendant burst into the wings and ran toward the manager. The manager started to reprimand him

for leaving his post, then saw the afternoon newspaper he was waving.

He took it from the man's hand, glanced at the headlines.

"What!" he gasped. "A man burn up? They're crazy! How could a . . . Varley—biggest man in the city! . . ."

He started toward the comedian.

"My God, could it be the same thing happening here? . . . *Croy! Croy—wait—*"

But the famous comedian was already on the stage, catapulting to the center of it in the ludicrous stumble, barely escaping a fall, that was his specialty.

The manager, clutching the newspaper, stood in the wings with death-white face, and watched.

Croy went into a dance to the rhythm of the theme song of the show. He was terribly pale, and the manager saw him stagger over a difficult step. Then his voice rose with the words of the song:

"Burn me down, baby. Don't say maybe. Put your lips against my lips—*and burn me down!*"

**T**HE audience half rose. Croy had fallen to his knees on a dance turn. The manager saw that the perspiration that had dewed his forehead no longer showed. His skin looked dry, cracked.

Croy got up. The audience settled back again, wondering if the fall had been part of his act. Croy resumed his steps and his singing. But his voice was barely audible beyond the fifth row:

"Burn me down, Sadie. Oh-h-h, lady! Look into my eyes and *burn me—*"

Croy stopped. His words ended in a wild high note.

Then he screamed almost like a woman and his hands went to his throat. They tore at his collar and tie.

"Burning!" he screamed. "*Burning—*"

The manager leaned, shaking, against a pillar. The newspaper, with the account in it of what had happened to Varley, rattled to the floor.

It was the same! The same awful thing was happening to Croy!

"Curtain!" he croaked. "Ring down the curtain!"

Now the audience was standing up, some of them indeed climbing to their seats to see what was happening on the stage.

Croy was prone on the boards, writhing, shrieking. The canvas backdrop billowed a little with the heat coming from his body.

"Curtain!" roared the manager. "For God's sake—are you deaf?"

The curtain dropped. Croy's convulsed body was hidden from the sight of the audience. With the curtain's fall, he stopped screaming. It was as though the thing had sliced through the sound like a great descending guillotine. But it was not the curtain that had killed the sound.

Croy was dead. His limbs still jerked and writhed. But it was not the movement of life. It was the movement of a twisted roll of paper that writhes and jerks as it is consumed in flame.

The manager drew a deep breath. Then, with his knees trembling, he walked out onto the stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, trying to make his voice sound out over the pandemonium that ruled over the theater. "Mr. Croy has had a heart attack. The show will not go on. You may get your money at the box-office on the way out."

He fairly ran from the stage and back of the curtain, where terrified girls and men were clumped around Croy's body—or what was left of it.

Heart attack! The manager's mouth distorted over that description.

Croy's body had shrunk—or, rather, *melted*—to half its normal size. His features were indistinguishable, like the features of a wax head with a fire under it. His clothes were smoldering. The heat was such that it was hard to stand within a yard of him.

The big, horn-rimmed glasses slid from his face. His body diminished, diminished. . . .

A stage hand came racing back. Behind him trotted a plump man in black with rimless spectacles over his eyes.

"I got a doctor," the stage hand gasped. "From the audience."

He stopped. And the doctor stared at the place where Croy had lain, and then gazed around at the faces of the others.

"Well?" he said. "Where is Croy? I was told he was dangerously ill."

No one answered. One after another stared back into his face with the eyes of maniacs.

"Where is he, I say?" snapped the doctor. "I was told——"

He stopped, aware at last that something far worse than ordinary illness was afoot back here.

The manager's lips moved. Words finally came.

"Croy is—*was*—there."

His pointing finger leveled tremulously at a spot on the stage. Then he fell, pitching forward on his face like a dead man.

And the point on the stage he had designated was empty. Only a blackened patch was there, with a little smoke drifting up from it. A blackened patch—with a pair of comedy horn-rimmed glasses beside it.

## 2. *Lucifex Insurance Co.*

**I**N THE elevator control room of the Northern State Building, a man in the coveralls of an electrician bent over the

great switchboard. He was examining the automatic control switch of the elevator in which Varley had ridden down from his top-floor office for the last time in life; had ridden down—but never reached the bottom!

Grease smeared the man's face and hands. But an especially keen observer would have noted several things about the seeming electrician that did not match his profession.

He would have noticed that the man's body was as lithe and muscular as that of a dancer; that his hands were only superficially smeared with grease, and were without calluses; that his fingers were the long, steely strong ones of a great surgeon or musician. Then, if he were one of the very few in New York capable of making the identity, he might have gone further and glanced into the man's steely eyes under coal-black eyebrows, and stared at his patrician nose and strong chin and firm, large mouth—and have named him as Ascott Keane.

The building manager stood beside Keane. He had treated Keane as an ordinary electrician while the building engineer was near by. Now he gave him the deference due one of the greatest criminal investigators of all time.

"Well, Mr. Keane?" he said.

"It's about as I thought," Keane said. "A device on the order of a big rheostat was placed on the switch circuit. In that way the descent of the elevator could be slowed as much as the person manipulating the switch desired."

"But why was the elevator Mr. Varley rode down in made to go slower? Did the slowness have anything to do with his death?"

"No. It had to do only with the spectacle of his death!" Keane's face was very grim. His jaw was a hard square. "The man who killed Varley wanted to



be sure that his death, and dissolution, were witnessed lingeringly and unmistakably, so that the full terror of it could be brought out."

He straightened up, walked toward the door. "You've set an office aside for me?"

"Yes. It's next to my own on the sixtieth floor. But you aren't going to it yet, are you?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Well, there might be fingerprints. Whoever tampered with the control board might not have been careful about clues."

A mirthless smile appeared on Keane's firm lips.

"Fingerprints! My dear sir! You don't know Doctor Satan, I'm afraid."

"Doctor Sat——"

The building manager clenched his hands excitedly. "Then you already know about the phone call to Mr. Varley just before he died."

"No," said Keane, "I don't."

"But you named the man who called——"

"Only because I know who did this—have known since I first heard of it. Not from any proofs I've found or will ever find. Tell me about the phone call."

"There isn't much. I'd hardly thought of it till you spoke of a Doctor Satan. . . . Varley was leaving his office for lunch when his telephone rang. I was in his office about a lease and I couldn't help hearing a little of it—his words, that is. I gathered that somebody calling himself Doctor Satan was talking to Varley about insurance."

"Insurance!"

"Yes. Though what a physician should be doing selling insurance, I couldn't say——"

"Doctor Satan is not exactly a physician," Keane interrupted dryly. "Go on."

"That's all there is to tell. The man at the other end of the wire calling himself Doctor Satan seemed to want to insist that Varley take out some sort of insurance, till finally Varley just hung up on him. He turned to me and said something about being called by cranks and nuts, and went out to the elevator."

Keane walked from the control room, with the building manager beside him. He went to the elevator shafts.

"Sixty," he said to the operator.

In the elevator, he became the humble workman again. The manager treated him as such. "When you're through with the faulty wiring in sixty, come to my office," he said.

Keane nodded respectfully, then got out at the sixtieth floor.

A suite of two large offices had been set aside for him. There was a door through a regular anteroom, and a smaller, private entrance leading directly into the rear of the two offices.

KEANE went through the private entrance. A girl, seated beside a flat-topped desk, got up. She was tall, quietly lovely, with dark blue eyes and copper-brown hair. This was Beatrice Dale, Keane's more-than-secretary.

"Visitors?" said Keane, as she handed a calling-card to him.

She nodded. "Walter P. Kessler, one of the six you listed as most likely to receive Doctor Satan's first attentions in this new scheme of his."

Keane was running a towel over his face, taking off the grease—which was not grease but dark-colored soap. He took off the electrician's coveralls, emerging in a perfectly tailored blue serge suit complete save for his coat. The coat he took from a closet, shrugging into it as he approached the desk and sat down.

"What did you find out, Ascott?" said Beatrice.

new form: If you do not choose to take out my horror insurance, you shall burn in slow fire till you are utterly consumed. It may be next month or next year. It may be tomorrow. It may be in the privacy of your room, or among crowds. Read in this afternoon's paper of what will shortly happen to two of the town's leading citizens. Then decide whether or not the premium payment asked is not a small price to pay for allaying the horror the reading of their fates will inspire in you.

Signed, DOCTOR SATAN.

Keane tapped the letter against his palm.

"Horror insurance," he murmured. "I can see Doctor Satan's devilish smile as he coined that phrase. I can hear his chuckle as he 'invites' you to take out a 'policy'. 'Well, are you going to pay it?'"

Kessler's shudder rattled the chair he sat in.

"Certainly! Am I mad, that I should refuse to pay—after reading what happened to Varley and Croy? Burned alive! Reduced to a shapeless little residue of consumed flesh—and then to nothingness! Certainly I'll pay!"

"Then why did you come to me?"

"To see if we couldn't outwit this Doctor Satan in future moves. What's to keep him from demanding a sum like that every year as the price of my safety? Or every month, for that matter?"

"Nothing," said Keane.

Kessler's hand clenched the chair-arm. "That's it. I'll have to pay this one, because I daren't defy the man till some sort of scheme is set in motion against him. But I want you to track him down before another demand is presented. I'll give you a million dollars if you succeed. Two million. . . ."

The look on Keane's face stopped him.

"My friend," said Keane, "I'd double your two million, personally, if I could step out and destroy this man, now, before he does more horrible things."

He stood up.

"How were you instructed to pay the 'premium'?"

For a moment Kessler looked less panic-stricken. A flash of the grim will that had enabled him to build up his great fortune showed in his face.

"I was instructed to pay it in a way that may trip our Doctor Satan up," he said. "I am to write ten checks of seventy-five thousand dollars each, payable to the Lucifex Insurance Company. These checks I am to bring to this building tonight. From the north side of the building I will find a silver skull dangling from a wire leading down the building wall. I am to put the checks in the skull. It will be drawn up and the checks taken by someone in some room up in the building."

His jaw squared.

"That ought to be our chance, Keane! We can have men scattered throughout the National State Building——"

Keane shook his head.

"In the first place, you'd have to have an army here. There are seventy-nine floors, Kessler. Satan's man may be in any room on any of the seventy-nine floors on the north side of the building. Or he may be on the roof. In the second place, expecting to catch a criminal like Doctor Satan in so obvious a manner is like expecting to catch a fox in a butterfly net. He probably won't be within miles of this building tonight. And you can depend on it that his man, who is to draw up the skull with the checks in it, won't be in any position where he can be caught by the police or private detectives."

Kessler's panic returned in full force. He clawed at Keane's arm.

"What can we do, then?" he babbled. "What can we do?"

"I don't know, yet," admitted Keane. "But we've got till tonight to figure out a plan. You come to the building as instructed, with the checks to put in the

skull. By then I'll have weapons with which to fight"—his lips twisted—"the Lucifex Insurance Company."

### 3. *Stroke and Counterstroke*

**T**HE National State Building is situated on a slanting plot in New York City. The first floor on the lower side is like a cavern—dark, with practically no light coming in the windows from the canyon of a street.

Near the center of that side was an unobtrusive small shop with "Lucian Photographic Supplies" lettered on it. The window was clean-looking, yet it was strangely opaque. Had a person looked at it observantly he would have noticed, with some bewilderment, that while nothing seemed to obstruct vision, he still could not see what was going on behind it. But there are few really observant eyes; and in any event there was nothing about the obscure place to attract attention.

At the back of the shop there was a large room completely sealed against light. On the door was the sign, "Developing Room."

Inside the light-proof room the only illumination came from two red light bulbs, like and yet strangely unlike the lights used in developing-rooms. But the activities in the room had nothing to do with developing pictures!

In one corner were two figures that seemed to have stepped out of a nightmare. One was a monkey-like little man with a hair-covered face from which glinted bright, cruel eyes. The other was a legless giant who swung his great torso, when he moved, on arms as thick as most men's thighs. Both were watching a third figure in the room, more bizarre than either of them.

The third figure bent over a bench. It was tall, spare, and draped from throat

to ankles in a blood-red robe. Red rubber gloves were drawn over its hands. The face was covered by a red mask which concealed every feature save the eyes—which were like black, live coals peering through the eye-holes. A skull-cap fitted tightly over the head; and from this, in sardonic imitation of the fiend he pretended to be, were two projections like horns.

Doctor Satan stared broodingly at the things on the bench which were engaging his attention. These, innocent enough in appearance, still had in them somehow a suggestion of something weird and grotesque.

They were little dolls, about eight inches high. The sheen of their astonishingly life-like faces suggested that they were made of wax. And they were so amazingly well sculptured that a glimpse revealed their likeness to living persons.

There were four of the little figures clad like men. And any reporter or other person acquainted with the city's outstanding personalities would have recognized them as four of the nation's business titans. One of them was Walter P. Kessler.

Doctor Satan's red-gloved hand pulled a drawer open in the top of the bench. The supple fingers reached into the drawer, took from it two objects, and placed them on the bench.

And now there were six dolls on the bench, the last two being a man and a woman.

The male doll was clad in a tiny blue serge suit. Its face was long-jawed, with gray chips for eyes, over which were heavy black brows. An image of Ascott Keane.

The female doll was a likeness of a beautiful girl with coppery brown hair and deep blue eyes. Beatrice Dale.

Her face was pale, but her voice was calm, controlled. She had worked with Keane long enough to know how to face the horrors devised by Doctor Satan calmly, if not fearlessly.

"From the control room?" said Keane. "Nothing. The elevator was slowed simply to make the tragic end of Varley more spectacular. And there is Doctor Satan's autograph! The spectacular! All of his plans are marked by it."

"But you found out nothing of the nature of his plans?"

"I got a hint. It's an insurance project."

"Insurance!"

Keane smiled. There was no humor in the smile. There had been no humor in his smiles—or in his soul—since he had first met Doctor Satan, and there would be none till finally, somehow, he overcame the diabolical person who, already wealthy beyond the hopes of the average man, was amusing himself by gathering more wealth in a series of crimes as weird as they were inhuman.

"Yes, insurance. Send in Kessler, Beatrice."

The girl bit her lip. Keane had told her nothing. And the fact that she was burning to know what scraps of information he had picked up showed in her face. But she turned obediently and went to the door leading into the front office.

She came back in a moment with a man who was so anxious to get in that he almost trod on her heels. The man, Walter P. Kessler, was twisting a felt hat to ruins in his desperate fingers; and his brown eyes were like the eyes of a horrified animal as he strode toward Keane's desk.

"Keane!" He paused, looked at the girl, gazed around the office. "I still can't quite understand this. I've known you for years as a rich man's son who

never worked in his life and knew nothing but polo and first editions. Now they tell me you are the only man in the world who can help me in my trouble."

"If your trouble has to do with Doctor Satan—and of course it has—I may be able to help," said Keane. "As for the polo and first editions—it is helpful in my hobby of criminology to be known as an idler. You will be asked to keep my real activities hidden."

"Of course," gasped Kessler. "And if ever I can do anything for you in return for your help now——"

Keane waved his hand. "Tell me about the insurance proposition," he said.

"Are you a mind-reader?" exclaimed Kessler.

"No. There's no time to explain. Go ahead."

Kessler dug into his inside coat pocket.

"It's about insurance, all right. And it's sponsored by a man who calls himself Doctor Satan. Though how you knew——"

**H**E HANDED a long envelope to Keane. "This came in this morning's mail," he said. "Of course I paid no attention to it. Not *then!* In fact, I threw it in my waste basket. I only fished it out again after reading the early afternoon papers—and finding out what happened to poor old Varley——"

He choked, and stopped. Keane read the folded paper in the long business envelope:

Mr. Kessler: You are privileged, among a few others in New York City, to be among the first to be invited to participate in a new type of insurance plan recently organized by me. The insurance will be taken out against an emotion, instead of a tangible menace. That emotion is horror. In a word, I propose to insure you against feeling horror. The premium for this benevolent insurance is seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. If the premium is not paid, you will be subjected to a rather unpleasant feeling of horror concerning something that may happen to you. That something is death, but death in a

"Girse," Doctor Satan's harsh, arrogant voice rasped out.

The monkey-like small man with the hairy face hopped forward.

"The plate," said Doctor Satan.

Girse brought him a thick iron plate, which Doctor Satan set upon the bench.

On the plate were two small, dark patches; discolorations obviously made by the heat of something being burned there. The two little discolorations were all that was left of two little dolls that had been molded in the image of Martial Varley, and the comedian, Croy.

Doctor Satan placed the two dolls on the plate that he had taken from the drawer: the likenesses of Beatrice Dale and Ascott Keane.

"Kessler went to Keane," Doctor Satan rasped, the red mask over his face stirring angrily. "We shall tend to Kessler—after he has paid tonight. We shall not wait that long to care for Keane and the girl."

Two wires trailed over the bench from a wall socket. His red-gloved fingers twisted the wires to terminals set into the iron plate. The plate began to heat up.

"Keane has proved himself an unexpectedly competent adversary," Satan's voice droned out, "with knowledge I thought no man on earth save myself possessed. We'll see if he can escape *this* fate—and avoid becoming, with his precious secretary, as Varley and Croy became."

Small waves of heat began to shimmer up from the iron plate. It stirred the garments clothing the two little dolls. Doctor Satan's glittering eyes burned down on the mannikins. Girse and the legless giant, Bostiff, watched as he did. . . .

**FIFTY-NINE** stories above the pseudo-developing shop, Keane smiled soberly at Beatrice Dale.

"I ought to fire you," he said.

"Why on earth——" she gasped.

"Because you're such a valuable right-hand man, and because you're such a fine person."

"Oh," Beatrice murmured. "I see. More fears for my safety?"

"More fears for your safety," nodded Keane. "Doctor Satan is out for your life as well as mine, my dear. And——"

"We've had this out many times before," Beatrice interrupted. "And the answer is still: No. I refuse to be fired, Ascott. Sorry."

There was a glint in Keane's steel-gray eyes that had nothing to do with business. But he didn't express his emotions. Beatrice watched his lips part with a breathless stirring in her heart. She had been waiting for some such expression for a long time.

But Keane only said: "So be it. You're a brave person. I oughtn't to allow you to risk your life in this private, deadly war that no one knows about but us. But I can't seem to make you desert, so——"

"So that's that," said Beatrice crisply. "Have you decided how you'll move against Doctor Satan tonight?"

Keane nodded. "I made my plans when I first located him."

"You know where he is?" said Beatrice in amazement.

"I do."

"How did you find it out?"

"I didn't. I thought it out. Doctor Satan seems to have ways of knowing where I am. He must know I've located here in the National State Building. The obvious thing for him to do would be to conceal himself on the other side of town. So, that being the expected thing, what would a person as clever as he is, do?"

Beatrice nodded. "I see. Of course! He'd be——"

"Right here in this building."

"But you told Kessler he was probably miles away!" said Beatrice.

"I did. Because I knew Kessler's character. If he knew the man who threatened him was in the building, he'd try to do something like organizing a raid. Fancy a police raid against Doctor Satan! So I lied and said he was probably a long distance off." Keane sighed. "I'm afraid the lie was valueless. I can foretell pretty precisely what Kessler will do. He will have an army of men scattered through the building tonight, in spite of what I said. He will attempt to trace Doctor Satan through collection of the checks—and he will die."

Beatrice shuddered. "By burning? What a horrible way to——"

She stopped.

"What is it?" said Keane urgently, at the strained expression that suddenly molded her face.

"Nothing, I guess," replied Beatrice slowly. "Power of suggestion, I suppose. When I said 'burning' I seemed to feel hot all over, myself."

Keane sprang from his chair.

"My God—why didn't you tell me at once! I——"

He stopped too, and his eyes narrowed to steely slits in his rugged face. Perspiration was studding his own forehead now.

"It's come!" he said. "The attack on us by Satan. But it wasn't wholly unexpected. The suitcase in the corner—get it and open it! Quickly!"

Beatrice started toward the suitcase, but stopped and pressed her hands to her cheeks. "Ascott—I'm . . . burning up. . . . I——"

"Get that suitcase!"

**K**EANE sprang to the desk and opened the wide lower drawer. He took a paper-wrapped parcel from it, ripped it open. An odd array was disclosed: two

pairs of things like cloth slippers, two pairs of badly proportioned gloves, two small rounded sacks.

Beatrice was struggling with the snaps on the suitcase. Both were breathing heavily now, dragging their arms as if they weighed tons.

"Ascott—I can't stand it—I'm burning——" panted the girl.

"You've got to stand it! Is the case open? Put on the smaller of the two garments there. Toss me the other."

The garments in question were two suits of unguessable material that were designed to fit tightly over a human body—an unclothed human body.

Beatrice tossed the larger of the two to Keane, who was divesting himself of his outer garments with rapid fingers.

"Ascott—I can't change into *this*—here before——"

"Damn modesty!" grated Keane. "Get into those things! You hear! Quickly!"

Both were no longer perspiring. Their faces were dry, feverish. Heat was radiating from their bodies in a stifling stream.

Beatrice stood before Keane in the tight single garment that covered body and arms and legs.

"These gloves on your hands!" snapped Keane. "The sack over your head. The shoes on your feet!"

"Oh, God!" panted Beatrice.

Then she had done as Keane commanded. From soles to hair she was covered by the curious fabric Keane had devised. And the awful burning sensation was allayed.

There were eye-slits in the sacks each wore. They stared at each other with eyes that were wide with a close view of death. Then Beatrice sighed shudderingly.

"The same thing Varley and Croy went through?" she said.

"The same," said Keane. "Poor fel-

lows! And Doctor Satan thought he could deal us the same doom. And he almost did! If we'd been a little farther away from these fabric shields of ours——"

"How do they stop Doctor Satan's weapon?" said Beatrice. "And how can he strike—as he does—from a distance?"

"His weapon, and this fabric I made," said Keane, "go back a long way beyond history, to the priesthood serving the ancestors of the Cretans. They forged the weapon in wizardry, and at the same time devised the fabric to wear as protection against their enemies who must inevitably learn the secret of the weapon too. It is the father of the modern voodoo practise of making a crude image of an enemy and sticking pins into it."

He drew a long breath.

"A small image is made in the likeness of the person to be destroyed. The image is made of substance pervious to fire. In the cases of Croy and Varley, I should say after descriptions of how they perished, of wax. The image is then burned, and the person in whose likeness it is cast burns to nothingness as the image does—*if* the manipulator knows the secret incantations of the Cretans, as Doctor Satan does. But I'll give you more than an explanation; I'll give you a demonstration! For we are going to strike back at Doctor Satan in a manner I think he will be utterly unprepared for!"

He went to the opened suitcase, looking like a being from another planet in the ill-fitting garments he had thrown together after analyzing Varley's death. He took from the suitcase a thing that looked like a little doll. It was an image of a monkey-like man with a hairy face and long, simian arms.

"How hideous!" exclaimed Beatrice.

"Not as hideous externally as internally," said Keane. "This is a likeness of a creature named Girse, one of Satan's

followers, who is only prevented from being as fiendish as Satan by lack of genius for it. I wish it were the image of Satan himself. But that would be useless. Satan, using the ancient death, would be prepared for it himself."

"It's made of wax?" said Beatrice, understanding and awe beginning to glint in her eyes.

"Made of wax," Keane nodded.

He looked around the office, saw no metal tray to put the little doll on, and flipped back a corner of the rug. The floor of the office was of smooth cement. He set the image on the cement. With her hand to her breast, Beatrice watched. The proceeding, seeming inconsequential in itself, had an air of deadliness about it that stopped the breath in her throat.

Keane looked around the office again, then strode to the clothes he and Beatrice had flung to the floor in their haste a moment ago.

"Sorry," he said, taking her garments with his own and piling them on the cement. "We'll have to send down to Fifth Avenue for more clothes to be brought here. I need these now."

On the pile of cloth he placed the image of Girse. Then he touched a match to the fabric. . . .

**I**N THE developing-room, Doctor Satan fairly spat his rage as he stared at the two wax dolls on the red-hot iron plate. The dolls were not burning! Defying all the laws of physics and, as far as Satan knew, of wizardry, the waxen images were standing unharmed on the metal that should have consumed them utterly.

"Damn him!" Doctor Satan rasped, gloved hands clenching. "Damn him! He has escaped again! Though how——"

He heard breathing begin to sound stertorously beside him. His eyes suddenly widened with incredulity behind the eye-holes in his mask. He whirled.

Girse was staring at him with frenzy and horror in his cruel little eyes. The breath was tearing from his corded throat as though each would be his last.

"Master!" he gasped imploringly. "Doctor Satan! Stop——"

The skin on his face and hands, dry and feverish-looking, suddenly began to crack.

"*Stop the burning!*" he pleaded in a shrill scream.

But Doctor Satan could only clench his hands and curse, raspingly, impotently. He had never dreamed of such a possibility, was utterly unprepared for it.

Girse shrieked again, and fell to the floor. Then his screams stopped. He was dead. But his body moved on, jerking and twisting as a tight-rolled bit of paper twists and jerks in consuming fire. . . .

"Keane!" whispered Doctor Satan, staring at the floor where a discolored spot was all that remained of his follower. His eyes were frightful. "By the devil, my master, he'll pay for that a thousand times over!"

#### 4. *The Screaming Three*

AT HALF-PAST twelve that night a solitary figure walked along the north side of the National State Building. The north side was the one the Lucian Photographic Supplies shop faced on; the side street. It was deserted save for the lone man.

The man slowed his pace as he saw a shining object hanging from the building wall about waist-high, a few yards ahead of him. He clenched his hands, then took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

The man was Walter P. Kessler. And the flourish of the white handkerchief in the dimness of the street was a signal.

Across the street, four floors up in a warehouse, a man with a private detec-

tive's badge in his pocket put a pair of binoculars to his eyes. He watched Kessler, saw the shining object he was approaching, and nodded.

Kessler drew from his pocket an unaddressed envelope. In it were ten checks made out to the Lucifex Insurance Company. He grasped the receptacle for the checks in his left hand.

The receptacle was a cleverly molded skull, of silver, about two-thirds life size. There was a hole in the top of it. Kessler thrust the envelope securely into the hole.

The skull began to rise up the building wall, toward some unguessable spot in the tremendous cliff formed by seventy-nine stories of cut stone. Across the street the man with the binoculars managed at last to spot the thin wire from which the silver skull was suspended. He followed it up with his gaze.

It came from a window almost at the top of the building. The man grasped a phone at his elbow.

He did not dial operator. The phone had a direct line to the building across the way. He simply picked up the receiver and said softly: "Seventy-second floor, eighteenth window from the east wall. *Hop it!*"

In the National State Building a man at an improvised switchboard on the ground floor turned to another. "Seventy-second floor, eighteenth window from the east. Get everybody."

The second man ran toward the night elevator. He went from floor to floor. At each floor he opened the door and signaled. And on each floor two men, who had been watching the corridors along the north side, ran silently toward the other local elevators, which had shaft doors on every floor all the way up to the top. At the same time a third man, at the stairs, drew his gun as he prepared to guard more carefully yet the staircase,



rarely used, threading up beside the shafts.

And on the ground floor within fifty yards of the man at the switchboard, a chuckle came from the masked lips of a red-robed figure who stood straight and tall in a red-lit room.

Across the street the man with the binoculars suddenly picked up the phone again.

"Damn it—they tricked us. Somebody took the money in on the sixty-third floor!"

Changed orders vibrated through the great building. And the red-robed figure in the room at the heart of the maze chuckled again—and moved toward the bench.

Doctor Satan picked up one of the dolls remaining there. It was the image of Kessler. He placed it on the iron plate, which was already heated by the wires trailing from the socket. He watched the little doll broodingly.

It writhed and twisted as the heat melted its wax feet. It fell to the plate. And from the street, far away, sounded a horrible scream.

Doctor Satan's head jerked back as if the shriek were music to his ears. Then, once more, his hissing chuckle sounded out.

"For disobeying commands, my friend," he muttered. "But I knew you'd be obstinate enough to try it——"

He stopped. For a second he stood as rigid as a statue swathed in red. Then, slowly, he turned; and in his coal-black, blazing eyes was fury—and fear.

**T**HERE was an inner door to the developing-room. But the door was locked, and it still stood locked. It had not been touched. Neither had the outer door. Yet in that room with the red-robed figure was another figure now. That of Ascott Keane.

W. T.—4

He stood as rigid as Doctor Satan himself, and stared at his adversary out of steel-gray, level eyes.

"It seems we are alone," Keane said slowly. "Bostiff, I suppose, is retrieving the money from Kessler. And Girse? Where is he?"

Doctor Satan's snarl was the only answer. He moved toward Keane, red-swathed hands clenching as he came. Keane stood his ground. Satan stopped.

"How——" he grated.

"Surely *you* do not need to ask that," said Keane. "You must have penetrated the secret of transferring substance, including your own, from one place to another by sheer power of thought."

"I have not!" rasped Doctor Satan. "Nor have you!"

Keane shrugged. "I am here."

"You discovered my hiding-place and hid here while I was out, a short time ago!"

Keane's smile was a deadly thing. "Perhaps I did. Perhaps not. You can provide your own answer. The only thing of importance is that I *am* here——"

"And shall stay here!" Doctor Satan's harsh voice rang out. The fear was fading from his eyes and leaving only fury there. "You have interfered in my plans once too often, Keane!"

As he spoke he raised his right hand with the thumb and forefinger forming an odd, eery angle.

"'Out of the everywhere into the here,'" he quoted softly. "I have servants more powerful than Girse, whom you destroyed, Ascott Keane. One comes now —to *your own destruction!*"

As he spoke, a strange tensiety seized the air of the dim room. Keane paled a little at the blaze in the coal-black eyes. Then he stared suddenly at a spot in thin air to Doctor Satan's right.

Something was happening there. The air was shimmering as though it danced

over an open fire. It wavered, grew misty, swayed in a sinuous column.

"'Out of the everywhere into the here.'" Doctor Satan's voice was harsh with final triumph. "The old legends had a basis, Keane. The tales of dragons. . . . There was such a thing, *is* such a thing. Only the creations the ancients called dragons do not ordinarily roam the earth in visible form."

The sinuous misty column at the right of the red-robed form was materializing into a thing to stagger a man's reason.

Keane found himself gazing at a shimmering figure that looked like a great lizard, save that it was larger than any lizard, and had smaller legs. It was almost like a snake with legs, but it was a snake two feet through at its thickest part, and only about fourteen feet long, which is not typical serpentine proportion. There were vestigial stubs of wings spreading from its trunk about a yard back of its great, triangular head; and it had eyes such as no true lizard ever had—eight inches across and glittering like evil gems.

"A dragon, Keane," Doctor Satan purred. "You have seen old pictures of some such thing, painted by artists who had caught a glimpse of these things that can only visit earth when some necromancer conjures them to. A 'mythical' creature, Keane. But you shall feel how 'mythical' it is when it attacks you."

**A** HISS sounded in the dim room. The serpentine form was so solidly materialized now that it could scarcely be seen through. And in a few more seconds it was opaque. And weighty! The floor quivered a little as it moved—toward Keane.

Its great, gem-like eyes glinted like colored glass as it advanced, foot by foot, on the man who had pitted himself against Doctor Satan till the death of one

of them should end the bitter war. But Keane did not move. He stood with shoulders squared and arms at his sides, facing the red-robed form.

"'Out of the everywhere into the here,'" he murmured. His lips were pale but his voice was calm. "There is another saying, Doctor Satan. It is a little different. . . . 'Out of the *hereafter* into the here!'"

The unbelievable thing Doctor Satan had called into being in the midst of a city that would have scoffed at the idea of its existence, suddenly halted its slow, deadly approach toward Keane. Its hiss sounded again, and it raised a taloned foot and clawed the thin air in a direction to Keane's left.

It retreated a step, slinking low to the floor, its talons and scales rattling on the smooth cement. It seemed to see something beyond the reach of mortal eyes. But in a moment the things it saw were perceptible to the eyes of the two men, too. And as Doctor Satan saw them an imprecation came from his masked lips.

Three figures, distorted, horrible, yet familiar! Three things like statues of mist that became less misty and more solid-seeming by the second!

Three men who writhed as though in mortal torment, and whose lips jerked with soundless shrieks—which gradually became not entirely soundless but came to the ears of Satan and Keane like far-off cries dimly heard.

And the three were Varley and Croy and Kessler.

A gasp came from Doctor Satan's concealed lips. He shrank back, even as the monstrosity he had called into earthly being shrank back.

"'Out of the hereafter into the here,'" Keane said softly. "These three you killed, Doctor Satan. They will now kill you!"

Varley and Croy and Kessler advanced

on the red-robed form. As they came they screamed with the pain of burning, and their blackened hands advanced, with fingers flexed, toward Satan. Such hatred was in their dead, glazed eyes, that waves of it seemed to surge about the room like a river in flood.

"They're shades," panted Doctor Satan. "They're not real, they can't actually do harm——"

"You will see how real they are when they attack you," Keane paraphrased Satan's words.

The three screaming figures converged on Doctor Satan. From death they had come, and before them was the man who had sent them to death. Their eyes were wells of fury and despair.

"My God!" whispered Doctor Satan, cowering. And the words, though far from lightly uttered, seemed doubly blasphemous coming from the lips under the diabolical red mask.

The hissing of the dragon-thing he had called into existence was inaudible. Its form was hardly to be seen. It was fleeing back into whatever realm it had come from. But the screaming three were advancing ever farther into our earthly plane as they crept toward the cowering body of Doctor Satan.

"My God!" Satan cried. "Not that! Not deliverance into the hands of those I——"

The three leaped. And Keane, with his face white as death at the horror he was witnessing, knew that the fight between him and the incarnate evil known as Doctor Satan was to end in this room.

The three leaped, and the red-robed figure went down. . . .

There was a thunderous battering at the door, and the bellow of men outside: "Open up, in the name of the law!"

Keane cried out, as though knife-blades had been thrust under his nails. Doctor Satan screamed, and thrust away

from the three furies, while the three themselves mouthed and swayed like birds of prey in indecision over a field in which hunters bristle suddenly.

"Open this door!" the voice thundered again. "We know there's somebody in here——"

The shock of the change from the occult and unreal back to prosaic living was like the shock of being rudely waked from sound sleep when one has walked to the brink of a cliff and opens dazed eyes to stare at destruction. The introduction of such a thing as police, detectives, into a scene where two men were evoking powers beyond the ability of the average mortal even to comprehend, was like the insertion of an iron club into the intricate and fragile mechanism of a radio transmitting-station.

Keane literally staggered. Then he shouted: "For God's sake—get away from that door——"

"Open up, or we'll break in," the bellowing voice overrode his own.

Keane cursed, and turned. The three revengeful forces he had evoked for the destruction of Doctor Satan were gone, shattered into non-existence again with the advance of the prosaic. And Doctor Satan——

Keane got one glimpse of a torn red robe, with clots of deeper crimson on its arm, as the man slid through the inner door of the room and out to—God knew where. Some retreat he had prepared in advance, no doubt.

And then the door crashed down and the men Kessler had stubbornly and ruinously retained in his fight with Doctor Satan burst in.

They charged toward Keane.

"You're under arrest for extortion," the leader, a bull-necked man with a gun in his hand, roared out. "We traced the guy that took the dough from the skull here before we lost him."

Keane only looked at him. And at something in his stare, though the detective did not know him from Adam, he wilted a little.

"Stick out your hands while I handcuff you," he tried to bluster.

Then the manager of the building ran in.

"Did you get him?" he called to the detective. "Was he in here?" He saw the man the detective proposed to handcuff. "*Keane!* What has happened?"

"Doctor Satan has escaped," said Keane. "That's what has happened. I had him"—he held his hand out and

slowly closed it—"like that! Then these well-intentioned blunderers broke in, and——"

His voice broke. His shoulders sagged. He stared at the door through which the red-robed figure had gone. Then his body straightened and his eyes grew calm again—though they were bleak with a weariness going far beyond physical fatigue.

"Gone," he said, more to himself than to anyone in the red-lit room. "But I'll find him again. And *next* time I'll fight him in some place where no outside interference can save him."