

**There was something phony about this storm-lashed island – but how phony, even Hoke Martin didn't guess until he came face to face with the evil monstrosity that lurked in the black shadows of its underground.**



## Fiend's Masquerade

**A**NGRY winds whipped the waves as Hoke Martin's open motor boat sped toward the island. He was taking a chance, he knew, in trying to make it tonight, but the call had been an urgent one.

"I wouldn't risk it in this storm, mister," the old man at the beach resort had told him. "You're liable to get swamped."

But Hoke Martin was in a hurry and was chancing it alone. He couldn't miss the island, the boatman had said, if he kept the boat straight ahead.

Thunder boomed and lightning streaked the sky. Now the detective could make out a blur ahead of him that must be land. Grimly he wiped rain from his face.

A few minutes more and a flash revealed

a landing stage to his north in a little cove. Changing the course of the boat, Hoke Martin soon drew up to it.

This was the semi-tropical region of the South Carolina Sea Islands. Blasted palmettoes strained gauntly in the wind like tortured things. Salt spray cascaded over the sand dunes.

When he had shut off the ignition and made fast to the landing, he clambered onto the sea-blackened framework and made his way to shore. No lights were visible. A path led up through the palmettoes.

Three steps, and he brought up short.

What he saw, not fifty yards ahead of him, caused chill fingers of terror to creep up and down his spine. He could feel his heart

pounding; feel a sickening sensation in the pit of his stomach, as though he were going down in a fast elevator.

The form of a giant ape loomed there in the ghostly half-light, atop a sand dune, waving its arms.

Hoke Martin rubbed rain out of his eyes and looked again. He was not given to hallucinations. Years of criminal investigation had made him skeptical of most things, but there was no mistaking what he saw now.

He could feel his face burning. A slow trickle of sweat oozed down his forehead among the globules of rain water. He told himself that it could not be so—a gorilla running loose here, but there the thing stood.

A flash of lightning brought the figure out more clearly. It seemed to be beckoning, with ponderous motions of its hairy arms. Then it was pointing down at something in the sand.

A moment more, and it wheeled and ran into a strip of tawny marsh. For an instant there it disappeared in the sea-grass, then its head and shoulders became visible again. It reached higher ground, plunged out of sight on a hill heavily wooded with red cedar and pine.

Hoke Martin had his gun in his hand now. He advanced toward the spot where the gorilla had stood. All the while his brain was working furiously.

This section was wild enough. Alligators, wildcats, ten-foot rattlesnakes and bear were native to it. But certainly not gorillas. Some man was responsible for the gorilla being there—perhaps the client upon whom he was going to call—Dr. Richard Curtis, the famous plastic surgeon.

As he reached the spot, he saw the tracks first. Rain beat down, tearing the sand, but the tracks were still firm enough. At sight of the footprints, no doubt was left in Hoke Martin's mind. He had hunted big game in Africa and he knew. The prints were those of

a gorilla.

The intermittent flares of lightning ceased momentarily. He drew out a flashlight and scanned the ground for any further clue. The noise of the gale clamored over him with ear-splitting violence.

And then he saw the most amazing thing of all. There was writing in the sand. Big letters carefully traced, evidently with a heavy stick. The rain was washing them; they were fast disappearing, but they were plain enough to read.

LEAVE THIS ISLAND IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE!

Shaking his head in horrified bewilderment, Martin glanced about. He was alone in the storm. No man could have written that, because no man had been in sight when he reached the beach. The letters would have been washed away if they had been written before.

And the ape had pointed! Had clearly tried to draw his attention to the writing.

Flashes lit the sky again; thunder crackled and rolled like powerful drums across the heavens. Those eerie letters were now obliterated. The lanky detective pocketed his flash with a shrug and started grimly up the path.

**S**OMEWHERE ahead of him was the residence of Dr. Richard Curtis. Perhaps Curtis could offer some explanation.

As he leaned into the wind, making his way between gnarled cedar, gum and pine trees, Hoke Martin, thought of the genius upon whom he was going to call. A mysterious personality, Curtis was yet one of the most eminent scientists in the field of surgical anaplasty.

Born in a circus family, he had grown up in the atmosphere of the big top. He had become a physician. And then, with the war,

he had specialized in plastic surgery.

Newspapers had printed almost unbelievable stories of the miracles he had wrought with men's faces—faces that had been blown half off in the trenches and which he had restored.

After the war Curtis had continued his specialization. Surgeons all over the world consulted him. But he had grown more retiring, more of a scientist for the sake of science only, until finally he had retired to this remote island on the Carolina coast.

Many queer rumors reached the outside world. There was much speculation as to Curtis' activities. Certain it was that he had a laboratory here, but as to the exact nature of his experiments no one could say.

At a turn in the path, Hoke Martin saw the rambling structure which was the surgeon's home. It perched on the summit of the island. Through the driving rain it appeared starkly sinister. Several windows were lighted like evil eyes.

A few minutes more and he was pounding on the front door.

It opened to reveal a cadaverous figure in threadbare broadcloth. There was something about the man's face that told Hoke Martin he was a servant.

The eyes were cunning, narrow-slitted, and the cheeks were drawn and wrinkled with a peculiar hardness. Yet the man had that unmistakable air of servility about him. He was waiting for Martin to speak.

"I was called here from New York," the investigator explained after he had given his name and occupation. And, when the man made no move to admit him. "I was told that it was a matter of utmost importance."

The door moved and Martin stepped into a hallway. He removed his hat and raincoat. The man took them.

"Are you the butler?"

The man nodded. His attitude was puzzling; he seemed to be waiting for Martin to speak again.

"Please tell Dr. Curtis that I am here," the detective said impatiently, and ran fingers through his red hair. He was in none too good a humor, what with his hurried trip and the spectacle on the beach.

Bowing, the butler turned and went down the hall; left Martin standing by the entrance. Martin saw him open a door near the end of the hall and go into a room.

He waited. Would Curtis have any adequate explanation of the grotesque beast which had confronted him as he landed? Martin was doubtful.

In a moment the butler reappeared and conducted him into a high-ceilinged study. It was just such a room as Martin had pictured as a setting for Dr. Richard Curtis. Surgical charts and bookshelves lined the walls. Instruments lay about on tables.

The man who rose from behind a flat desk was of medium height and stocky. His clothes did not fit him well, yet he was distinguished. His eyes were the most impressive feature of his whole appearance. They burned with an intensity of intellect.

"Mr. Martin?"

"Yes."

"I understand that you are a private detective. Your presence here is a distinct surprise. To what do I owe this visit?"

Advancing, Martin wore a worried frown. The situation was growing complicated. First, an ape waving at him on the beach and apparently writing a message in the sand. Then, this man, for whom he had rushed south by airplane, denying that he even knew him.

"Are you Dr. Richard Curtis?" the detective asked.

"Yes." There was no cordiality in the reply. Its tone was that of a challenge.

"This morning in New York my secretary received a telephone call from Beaufort requesting that I come here as quickly as possible. Your name was used. Am I to understand you did not authorize the

call?"

Curtis' forehead wrinkled into a V. "Someone called you and used my name?"

"Exactly. I made the trip at considerable trouble and expense. In fact, I risked this storm to reach the island. The man from whom I rented the boat would not bring me. Is there nothing here which might call for the services of an investigator?"

Curtis waved a hand toward a chair. They sat down.

"No-o," the surgeon said thoughtfully. "I can think of no reason why you might have been called, nor anyone who might have called you. The whole thing—"

He broke off and turned in his chair, following Martin's gaze. The detective had sensed the presence of someone else near by and was looking at a girl who stood in the doorway. She was very pretty, about eighteen.

"Loretta!" Curtis said. "What are you doing here?"

"The storm frightened me and I came in and saw you two," she explained. "I did not mean to eavesdrop, but I could not help hearing part of your conversation." Her hand fluttered to her throat, nervously. She was under some kind of stress.

Her father jerked his head, motioning her to come in. Martin was on his feet.

"Then you heard what this private detective said," Curtis told her. "Do you know who might have called him?"

"Yes," she answered instantly, and moved forward. "I did."

Curtis rose. "You—you called him? When you went to Beaufort this morning?"

She nodded.

"I had to do something. You would not listen to me. I'm sorry, father. But something terrible is going on here. I've been here only two days, yet I can feel it. Something—horrible. And then last night Frank heard that voice."

HOKE MARTIN was peering sharply at the surgeon. Curtis turned slowly and cleared his throat. He was more the unruffled scientist than ever.

"My daughter has been off at school, Mr. Martin," he said slowly. His bushy eyebrows were bent. "This is the first time she has visited my island retreat. In fact, it has been several years since I have seen her. She's been abroad, at Grenoble, you know, and—"

He paused, fingering his throat.

"Go on," Martin said.

"Well, she's engaged to be married. She brought her fiancé with her to visit me. His name is Frank Holmes. I quite approve of him, except for one thing. He has hallucinations. This morning he told a wild tale of someone at his window last night, and a voice that warned him to leave the island."

"To leave the island—if he valued his life?" Martin put in, thinking of the sinister message in the sand.

"I believe that was the phrase Mr. Holmes used," Curtis replied. "How did you know?" And, when the detective did not reply, "Of course it is absurd. There is no one on the island except my daughter, my butler, who sometimes assists me in my experiments, Mr. Holmes and myself."

"No other servants?"

"None. Until my daughter and her fiancé arrived, there was no need for any. Snaggle, who is really a sort of man-of-all-work, cooked and looked after the house." The surgeon talked calmly and logically.

Martin came nearer the desk. "If there are no other humans on the island, are there any beasts that might be mistaken for humans?"

It was a thrust in the dark. Martin watched for reaction anxiously, but all he saw was puzzlement.

"Beasts?" The surgeon fingered his throat again. "Why do you ask that?" And, before Martin could answer, "Yes, I have several gorillas here which I use in my

experiments.”

Looking sharply at the girl, Martin said. “There was a gorilla running loose on the beach where I landed. I saw him quite distinctly.”

“What?” Curtis barked, rising.

“This gorilla waved his arms at me as a human might,” Martin went on. “He pointed to the sand. When I reached the spot where he had been, there was writing in the sand. The writing said for me to leave the island if I valued my life.”

Horror crept into the girl's face. She fell back, staring at him.

“Are you sure of this, Mr. Martin?” Curtis asked, alarmed.

The detective smiled. “Positive. I do not see things that do not exist. If I did, I wouldn't last long as an investigator.”

“Then one of my apes must have escaped from his cage.” the surgeon said. “Probably that was what you saw. But as to the writing in the sand—”

“I beg your pardon, sir.”

It was Snaggle, the butler, standing in the doorway. He seemed more cadaverous than ever. His threadbare black broadcloth emphasized the deathly hue of his skin.

“Well, what is it?” Curtis snapped.

“It's Mr. Holmes, sir. He—”

The girl gave a low, choked cry. “What's happened to him?” she demanded breathlessly.

“He's been murdered,” Snaggle announced.

Curtis strode forward. Martin watched the doctor and the servant with shrewd appraisal. His freckles stood out, as they always did when he was thinking fast.

“Murdered?” the surgeon echoed. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, sir,” Snaggle stated. “His body is lying at the north side of the house.”

the skies still were lit by flashes; thunder reverberated.

Martin was the first to reach the body. It lay in a crumpled heap beside the north wing. It was twisted unnaturally, one leg at right angles to the other. When the detective turned his flashlight on it, he saw that it was horribly mutilated.

Streaks of crimson were across the face and the chest, as if giant claws had torn the skin. The arms and legs seemed to be broken in a dozen places.

Switching off his flashlight as Loretta Curtis came running up, Martin turned to the surgeon.

“I believe you guessed correctly, doctor,” he said. “One of your gorillas is running wild about the island.”

Curtis pivoted.

“Get inside the house at once, Loretta. Lock yourself in. I'm going to inspect the cages.” He started away. Martin followed. The surgeon stopped. “Maybe you'd better go with her. The ape might have got into the house.”

The girl, catching sight of the gruesome object on the ground, screamed. The sound split the night like a ghastly knife.

Martin turned to the butler.

“You were the last one out. Did you leave the front door open?”

“I believe I did, sir,” Snaggle said, hoarsely. “You see, in the rush—”

“All right,” Martin told the doctor. “Do you need a gun?”

“No,” Curtis said. “I can handle him.” And he disappeared in the darkness, walking fast. Martin watched him go, then took the girl's arm. She was swaying, the back of her right hand pressed to her forehead.

“You seem to have had more foresight than your father, Miss Curtis,” he murmured.

Back in the house, they went to the study and waited. The girl slumped in a chair, her head in her hands. She was moaning very softly. Snaggle stood by, his face

**W**ITH one accord, they rushed to the front door. The rain had stopped, but

unrevealing of any emotion.

In ten minutes Curtis returned. He came through the doorway scowling. He looked more worried than at any time since Hoke Martin had met him.

"It's true," he said, clasping his hands before him. "One of my largest gorillas somehow broke the lock of his cage and is at large on the island now."

He went to his daughter and put an arm in a comforting manner over her pretty shoulders. She gave no sign that she welcomed his caress. Martin glanced at them with eyes that were lazy-lidded with speculation.

"Of course there is no way for this beast to reach the mainland," Curtis went on. "On the other hand, I'm afraid there is no way for us to capture him tonight. In these several square miles of junglelike growth, we would probably never find him at night, in the storm, and if we did, it would be very difficult to capture him."

"You think it best to wait until morning before beginning the search?" Martin asked.

The surgeon nodded. "I'm afraid that's the only thing to do." He turned to Snaggle. "Lock all windows and doors. We must—"

Martin coughed behind his hand. "Excuse me. I think I'd better bring in the—body."

"Yes," Curtis agreed. "Put it in the front room on the right as you enter. Do you want Snaggle to help you?"

"No," the detective said. "I can manage it alone very well."

He went out into the hall. Snaggle followed him and locked the front door behind him. The thunder and lightning had ceased. There was an ominous after-the-storm quiet, almost tomblike. Giant oaks, with trailing banners of Spanish moss, were spectral sentinels all about him.

The body had not been disturbed. Catching it by the arms, Hoke Martin hefted it across his shoulders, back to his back, so

as to avoid bloodstains. He called to Snaggle as he neared the front door.

Admitting him, the butler's face was an impassive mask. Martin went into the room Curtis had mentioned and dumped the body unceremoniously on the floor. Frank Holmes had been a very handsome young man. Martin spent several minutes examining the wounds and going through the pockets, but found nothing of interest.

When he preceded Snaggle back into the study, Curtis paused in pacing the floor.

"It's past midnight," the surgeon said. "There is nothing else we can do until daylight. I suggest we retire to our rooms and try to get some rest."

**M**ARTIN was installed in a south wing bedroom, on the ground floor. He sat smoking, turning the problem over in his mind for nearly an hour, until he was reasonably certain that the others were safely abed, if not asleep, in their locked rooms.

Then he switched out his light and crossed to the window. Moonlight filtered through scurrying clouds. He raised the window softly, climbed through it and dropped to the ground. His hall door was locked, so there was no way for the ape to get beyond that room even if it happened to get in.

For nearly an hour Hoke Martin prowled the grounds, his gun in one hand and his flashlight in the other.

He used the flash only occasionally. The moonlight was getting brighter. It shed a ghostly and strangely macabre aura over the place.

As he was about to return to his room, the lanky detective came across an abandoned well. It had an old-fashioned windlass with buckets on chains. He peered into its depths, without knowing exactly why he did so.

A faint glimmer of light, apparently about half way down the shaft, caught his

eye.

Martin strained his gaze toward it. One moment he could not be sure it was there; the next he saw it plainly. Straightening, he looked about him. The scene was dismal, silent as the grave.

His jaw hardening, Martin examined the chain, and the buckets. Maybe the glow he saw below was only some phosphorescent substance. On the other hand, it might be something that would help him solve the mystery of the gorilla who wrote in the sand.

The chain and buckets seemed strong enough. He arranged them, got on one of the buckets and began to let himself down into the well. The chain was old, with moist rust that rubbed off on his hands.

When his eyes were two body-lengths above the glow, he saw that his hunch had been a good one. His pulses quickened. The glimmer came from the opening of a tunnel.

He stepped off into it and crouched. The tunnel was not more than four feet high. On hands and knees, he crawled forward.

A slight turn, and he saw a bright light ahead of him. It was some kind of underground chamber, and a large one. He could feel the blood pounding in his ears, feel the hammer of his heart.

At the end of the tunnel he crawled into the room and stood erect. A kerosene lamp flickered. Two large cages with iron bars faced him. The door of one of the cages was open, as was another door which seemingly led out of the dank room toward the house.

But it was the thing in the locked cage that held Hoke Martin's eyes riveted once they rested upon it.

It had all the features of a man—the forehead, the nose, the mouth, the chin, and the contour of its body. Beyond that the human semblance ceased. Its hair was a matted, filthy mess. Its face was streaked with dirt on the cheeks and nose, above the stubble of beard. Saliva drooled from its lips.

Hoke Martin approached. In his long

career as an investigator he had seen many queer things, but never a creature like this, a creature so horrible that it sent prickly sensations over his scalp.

It looked like a man, yet something told the detective that it wasn't human. The eyes were those of an animal. He decided to see if it could talk. He had seen, once tonight, an ape that could write. Maybe this thing could talk.

"Hello! Who are you?"

The thing gave no indication of comprehension. It stood there behind the bars, gripping them much as an ape might. It wore only a loin cloth. Its expression showed only curiosity.

**A**N inkling of the horrible truth came into Hoke Martin's racing thoughts. This thing was not a human gone insane. It was—

And then the voice came. Not from the thing in the cage. Not from any spot in the chamber that Martin could see clearly. It seemed to come out of a shadowy, cavernous corner of the ceiling overhead.

"You are the man who arrived tonight, the man I warned with writing in the sand."

Martin tensed, whirled. He could see nothing from which that voice might come. The words were queerly mumbled, as if the speaker had not used his tongue in a long time, yet they were distinct enough.

"Yes," the detective said, and waited.

After a moment the voice resumed. "I warned you. No good could come of your visiting this island. You may yet lose your life. Leave at once. Get off the island while you still have a chance." And the voice stopped, mechanically.

Martin waited, every nerve on fire.

"You are not going to leave?" the voice came again.

"No!" the detective whipped out. "I'm going to break this case if I have to stay here the rest of my life. Who in hell are you,

anyhow?"

There was a sound as if the owner of the voice were clearing his throat. Then, "You know not with what appropriateness you use the term 'in hell.' I am a man in hell here on earth. Shall I tell you the story?"

"Go on!" Martin blurted.

"Very well. I am a creature of the eminent"—the voice became brittle, mocking—"Dr. Richard Curtis, world's foremost plastic surgeon, the man who can work miracles grafting skin, changing faces.

"During the war, you will remember, he made over many faces that had been shot off. After the war he became so devoted to his science that he lost all human compassion. As a youth he had been reared among circus freaks, so he conceived the most ghastly project in the history of surgery.

"If it were possible to change part or all of a man's face by skin grafting, he reasoned, why couldn't he change a whole body? He decided to create by his own hands the two most horrible freaks of all time—simply to satisfy his own scientific curiosity to see if it could be done.

"He has been six years in the process. Six years on this island of horror. First he acquired a gorilla, as near to the human form as he could find. Then he ran an ad in the papers for an unattached young man who would travel with his employer.

"I answered that ad! God! He brought me here, used powerful drugs on me. And the same with the gorilla. Bit by bit, over these six years, he transferred my skin to the ape, and the ape's skin to me. It is not necessary for me to go into the horror of it. Your imagination will doubtless serve to tell you that, even though most of the time I was drugged.

"He even went so far as to break bones—particularly our jaw bones—and alter their structures. That Thing in the cage there is an ape. He looks like a man. He has the soft white skin and the face of a man. But he has

no soul. He is a gorilla.

"I am a man, but you would never guess it to see me. I have the head, the hairy body of an ape. Any person, looking at me, would not guess that I was something else. But I have the soul of a man, the brain of a man."

The voice stopped, suddenly.

Martin felt as if he were in the midst of some garish nightmare. He shook his head to clear it.

"Who killed Frank Holmes, the fiancé of Loretta Curtis?" he asked. "Did you?"

"Holmes!" the voice came, startled this time. "Did you say Holmes?"

"Yes," Martin snapped.

"Good God! Earlier tonight I released that ape in human form—released it believing that it would seek out and kill its torturer, the surgeon. It returned with blood on its hands and I believed Curtis dead. You say—it killed the young man?"

"Yes."

For the space of a minute the voice did not resume. Then it came through thickly. "I am sorry—as sorry as a creature like me can be for anything not himself. But that is over. Come! Do you believe what I told you?"

Martin hesitated. "Well—"

"If I show you myself, and show you proofs in Curtis's own handwriting, will you believe me?"

"Naturally."

"Good. I come down." And the owner of the voice dropped to the floor of the cavern in the wall where he had been concealed.

His face was as much like a gorilla's as any Martin had ever seen. His body was covered with coarse hair—the hide of the real ape. But Martin caught the gleam of intelligence in his eyes.

The ape-man moved forward, toward the door which opened in the direction of the house.

"Follow me."

MARTIN holstered his gun and followed him through the doorway, up a short length of tunnel in which he did not have to stoop, and into a laboratory. The laboratory was clean and elaborate, with the latest equipment. It had the acrid tang of chemicals.

The ape-man went to a filing cabinet. He opened a drawer and produced a sheaf of papers.

"There is the proof," he said. "In the handwriting of Dr. Richard Curtis. Complete records of every stage of the experiment. Every change, every day, over the whole six years."

The detective took the papers and scanned them. The ape-man was telling the truth. Skeptical as he was, no doubt was left in Martin's mind. Pocketing the papers, he looked up, and—

"Raise your hands quickly, both of you!"

Dr. Richard Curtis stood in a doorway. An ugly, snub-nosed automatic nestled in his right hand. His eyes were two jets of flame that took in the tableau understandingly and with a malignant cunning.

His finger tightened on the trigger. The gun was aimed at Martin. White stood out on the knuckles of the surgeon's gun hand.

Suddenly the ape-man plunged forward, his gorilla arms outstretched.

The automatic roared, belched lead and flame. The bullet took the ape-man in the chest, but on he came. His plunge was as relentless and as fully controlled after the shot as before it; he seemed possessed of the fury of the beast in whose guise he masqueraded.

With a swoop, he knocked the gun from Curtis' hand. The surgeon leaped aside. Momentarily the ape-man was off balance, and in that moment Curtis threw himself back through the doorway from which he had emerged.

Hoke Martin was after him like an expertly released arrow. The ape-man

recovered balance and followed.

Curtis swerved through an aperture and onto open ground. He was running with incredible speed for his stocky build. Abruptly he gained the cover of a clump of bushes, tore his way around and over a tangle of jasmine and honeysuckle vines.

His pursuers lunged after him, through the thick growth.

The chase continued for nearly half a mile. Sometimes Martin and the ape-man gained, sometimes they lost but always they could hear or see their quarry.

"He's heading for the sea cliff!" the ape-man shouted.

In a twinkling, the pursuers halted at the edge of a precipice and looked about them. Dr. Richard Curtis was nowhere in sight. They looked over the precipice.

Bursting white waves piled up on the rocks two hundred feet below. Their spewing crests, lashed by the recent storm, beat with cutting intensity at the base of the cliff.

And there, on the most jagged rock of the group—a rock that was a projecting splinter—was the impaled and lifeless form of the surgeon.

"Damn!" said Martin fervently. "What a way to end a career as the world's greatest plastic surgeon!"

At a slight sound behind him, the detective whirled. What he saw caused his right hand to jerk toward the gun in his armpit holster, caused him to crouch for action.

The gorilla in the skin of a man was there, walking steadily forward. Somehow it had escaped. The beast's arms, despite their grafted white skin, were long and powerful. They clutched forward.

In that instant the ape-man, by now gory with his own blood, catapulted himself between Martin and the monster who was attacking. The two creatures crashed together, fell to the ground and rolled over in a battle to the death.

The detective tried to get in position for a shot—a shot that would end the life of the beast who looked like a man. But the fight was so swift, the figures were so lightning-like in their twists, that he could not get in his bullet where he wanted it.

He had decided to throw himself bodily into the conflict when it happened.

On the brink of the precipice, the two struggling figures toppled, hung for a split second, and then fell over. Down they crashed—together, entwined.

They bounced off sharp, jutting edges of rock in their descent and at last hit with a sickening thud on the salt-sprayed boulders in the sea.

Hoke Martin peered over. He felt nauseated. He imagined he had heard the crunching of the bones as those ill-treated bodies had found their doom together.

Even as he looked, a big wave came roaring in and covered those two bodies and the nearby form of Dr. Richard Curtis. Water churned furiously over them. When the wave receded, none of the bodies was to be seen.

**T**REMBLING, the detective stood erect. He still had the evidence in his pocket—the laboratory records in Curtis's own hand. But the creatures were gone with their creator.

Determinedly he got a grip on himself and started back toward the house. Snaggle, the butler, and the girl, Loretta Curtis, were doubtless still there. He wondered what he could tell them.

A slight wind was rising again. It whispered through the gum, tupelo, cypress and pine trees.

At a turn in the path, Martin froze in his tracks. A gun not fifty feet ahead of him blazed. The detective's revolver flashed out and its explosion, mingled with the echoes of the first shot.

The butler was there, in the open, firing with the same deliberate calm he had

displayed throughout the night.

Martin dodged behind a moss-covered boulder. Within its shelter, he took careful aim. A bullet chunked a piece of rock off not five inches from his face and zoomed on past him. The lanky detective did not waver. He tugged trigger.

With the recoil, he knew that the shooting was over.

The butler jerked once, took two faltering steps forward, swayed backward, almost off balance, and than forward. His legs gave way beneath him with a slow, sagging motion. He crumpled like a length of chain.

Martin rose from behind the rock and strode forward.

Gasping, a crimson hole in his chest, Snaggle glared up at him. "You—you got me, damn you!" the butler rasped. "But the doctor will pay you for it! He—I told him not to let her bring that man here. I told him! But he would do it!"

He paused, fighting for breath. "No place for a girl and her beau. So I warned him, talked to him in the night—outside his window. No good. Too late!" Then he twitched and lay still.

The detective didn't have to feel the pulse or the heart. He had killed men before—not from choice, but from necessity. Shooting a man to death was not a pleasure.

He had known when he pulled the trigger that the butler's life was gone. And now, as he looked at the body, he saw the darkening smudge over the heart, the glassy, turned-up eyes that denoted only death.

Stooping, he picked up the lifeless form and hung it over his shoulder like a sack of meal. It was strangely light. The man had been very thin. He had been thin in body and thin in mind—thin in everything except his devotion to his master.

With slow and measured gait, Hoke Martin walked back to the house. He left the front door open, for there was no one else on

the island now but the girl and himself. Wearily he put the body in the same room with that of Frank Holmes.

Trudging up the stairs, he drew on his imagination to spare Loretta Curtis the horror of her father's death.

She came to the bedroom door quickly when he knocked. Evidently she had not been asleep. As the portal opened, he looked for a moment into her wide, frightened eyes. Many times he had borne news of death, but this time seemed the most difficult of all.

"My father—" she began.

Martin said nothing.

"He's—" She swallowed hard. "Tell me!"

"Yes," the detective whispered. "Your father is—dead."

She trembled and fought for control. She won. "How did it happen?"

"The same man who killed your fiancé,"

Martin told her. "Snaggle. He also killed your father. He went—insane. Fought with your father on the cliff. Knocked him over. The body was washed away."

She put her hands to her eyes. Her shoulders shook. Then after a sob, "What became of the—murderer?"

"I shot him to death," Martin said. "He attacked me. There was nothing else to do."

Gently he led her to the bed and let her fall upon it. He pulled covers over her and left, closing the door. The girl had never known of those two creatures of terror. There was no need to tell her now.

In his room, the detective got the laboratory records out of a pocket and looked at them. He wondered if he would ever find it necessary to tell the truth, to use those records to clear up the case. For the girl's sake, he hoped he never would.