



One Drop of Death

by Wyatt Blassingame

PETER ANTHONY said: "Mrs. Anthony is probably in her room. If you'll wait a moment, I'll get her."

Mike Cave's lips held a hard, tight smile as he watched Anthony turn and begin to climb the stairs. There was something fishy about this whole business, he thought. Nothing that he could put his finger on and yet he had sensed it from the moment Peter Anthony had walked into the police station and laid the note before him.

It was addressed to Mrs. Anthony. Perhaps it was the bald threat that had made Cave suspicious. No extortion, no attempt to collect

money, but just that promise of death. It was gruesome, weird almost.

Things that are not human don't like human lives. You will be the first to die.

That was all it said in a ruled print that would be impossible to trace.

Peter Anthony had been almost too upset, Cave thought as he watched the slender, immaculately dressed man climbing the stairs. The papers had mentioned his philanderings of late. And it was Mrs. Anthony to whom the fortune actually belonged.

It was about ten seconds later that he heard the scream.

It was high pitched, bursting with terror; one terrific fear-torn shriek that ripped upward like a jagged flame—and stopped. In the same instant Peter Anthony screamed.

Cave's big body lurched into movement. With two strides, he reached the stairway and went pounding up.

He reached the top and whirled down the hallway. The second door on the left was open, spilling a yellow light into the dimness. Mike Cave's gun was in his hand as he reached that doorway and whirled through it.

It was a woman's bedroom, tastefully and expensively furnished. The large, low bed on the left was covered with a pink silk spread. Across the foot of the bed was a white satin evening gown, and on the floor were white satin pumps, the shoe trees still in them. And beside the shoes was the body of a woman dressed in underwear, her bare arms wide flung. From a small hole in the base of her throat a slow dribble of blood ran down over white flesh.

Peter Anthony was cowering against the right wall near the dressing table. His mouth made little terrified whimpering sounds as he stood staring at the open window, "it—it went out there!" he said. "It just jumped and—"

Mike Cave, crossed the room with four steps, it was a full twenty-five feet to the tiled court below and in the frosted moonlight nothing moved. He turned then to Mrs. Anthony. The hole in her throat was no larger than a small knife blade.

HE stood up and looked at Peter Anthony still crouched against the wall, staring at the open window.

"All right," Mike Cave said, "you can stop acting now. Where's the knife?"

Anthony bit his lips to still their trembling. "It—it took the knife with it."

"Through the window, I reckon, and jumped twenty-five feet to a tiled court without being hurt." Cave's voice was flat. "That's sort of superhuman, isn't it?"

Terror showed more plainly than before in Peter Anthony's thin, handsome face. "It wasn't human!"

For one long moment the two men stood facing each other. And again Mike Cave felt that eerie tingling along his spine. "All right," he asked, "what was it?"

"I—I don't know." Anthony's skin was a yellowish white. "It had just come through the window when I entered. It looked like an ape but there was something even more—more hellish about it. Before I could move, it had reached Martha and struck her with the knife. I tried to stop it but it just flung me out of the way and jumped through the window. It never even touched the sill."

"If it went outside," Cave said, "we'll find it. And—" he paused, looking hard at Peter Anthony— "if the weapon is still here, we'll find it."

Anthony did not seem to hear. He was looking at his wife as if he had not seen her before. "Is—is she—"

Cave said: "Yes."

He led Anthony out of the room, kept him beside him while he called headquarters, kept his eyes on the man until the inspector, fingerprint men, and the others arrived. Leaving two men to watch Peter Anthony, he followed the inspector into the room where Mrs. Anthony lay.

"Seems like she was about to go out," the inspector said, nodding at the evening dress and shoes.

Cave repeated what had happened, the story Anthony had told. "It all sounds like a lot of bunk," he added. "I'll give odds that her husband knocked her off. She was going to divorce him and it'll mean a fortune."

"All we have to do is find the weapon,"

the inspector said. “He didn’t have much time to hide it?”

“Not more than ten seconds.”

But they couldn’t find the weapon. The inspector had men take the room to pieces, look everywhere, even shake out the dress and shoes beside the bed. Peter Anthony was brought in, stripped and searched.

The inspector looked at Mike Cave. “Well?” he said disappointedly.

Cave rubbed big knuckled fingers across his chin. He was beginning to feel that weird tingling in his blood again. “He said it wasn’t human, that it jumped out that window, twenty-five feet, and—” His big jaw set. “That’s bunk.”

The men searched the house and grounds thoroughly once more. But they found nothing. Finally they went away. But Mike Cave stayed behind, sitting on the bed, fists clenched.

“Things that are not human—”

Hell, it couldn’t be that. But if they couldn’t find the weapon Anthony couldn’t be proved guilty.

Cave stood up carefully, went over the room again. Then he came back and sat on the bed beside the white satin dress gazing down at his big black shoes that made the thin white

slippers seem so tiny.

All at once he was surging to his feet, racing out of the room, calling for Anthony. Two minutes later he was back, the smaller man with him, looking as immaculate as ever in a black silk dressing gown.

“Well,” Cave said, “it almost worked, but not quite. You couldn’t wipe off the blood and one drop oozed through.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean,” Cave said slowly, “that the tree for a woman’s slipper, with the toe guard taken off, makes an excellent weapon. We looked in the shoes before, but the blood hadn’t oozed from under the toe guard then. Now—” He pointed down to the white satin slipper on the toe of which was a dull red stain.

Peter Anthony said very softly: “I see.”

He moved like a spring uncoiling. Cave lunged for him and missed. Then Anthony, head first, dove through the open window. Mike Cave’s gun was in his hand when he looked out, but he holstered the gun even as he stood there and then turned slowly.

“Things that are not human may be able to jump twenty-five feet to pavement without being hurt,” he said. “But folks that are human—they can’t.”