



*A head, of mottled green and brown!*

# The Terror by Night

*By Charles Willard Diffin*

ONE by one the twelve men and women filed in and faced the prisoner. And the man before them, still mute, stood quietly, with his fine gray head erect, while he met with expressionless eyes the gaze of each juror in turn.

"Guilty," the foreman said, and the gray eyes, which had been so unyielding,

inscrutable, so unchanging through all the long days of the trial, locked with theirs steadily and unflinchingly.

Then the judge spoke, though only fragments of his denunciation reached the conscious mind of the man before him.

"... This hideous crime ... most cold-blooded— most revolting murder that has ever

... your education, your training, your wealth and standing in this community ... your refusal to defend yourself, if intended to elicit sympathy, has failed ... the court is glad there has been no recommendation for mercy....”

Until at last the bare white walls echoed again the fateful words they had so often heard: “The judgment of this court is that you shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead!” And only then did the steady gray eyes close, and, for an instant, the man falter like a fighter struck to the heart.

*Hanged by the neck until you are dead!* Only hard, calloused and unfeeling nerves can remain unmoved by those words, and this man was not entirely unaffected. But when the stern voice had ceased he bowed slightly toward the judge, then whirled quickly to face the spectators in the courtroom.

Somewhere in that crowded room was a pair of eyes that met his in understanding....

“They’ve had all the facts. Jim,” he called in a clear voice, and for one fleeting instant his lips twitched in a wry, enigmatical smile, “they’ve had the facts. When it’s all over, you give them the truth—the whole damnable truth! They won’t believe it, but tell them anyway—” Then the sound of the judge’s gavel.

FACTS sent that silent man to the gallows. Sent him with a smile on lips that had almost forgotten how to smile and with glad welcome for the release which only death could bring. He did not want to die—not by hanging—but, God knows, he certainly didn’t want to live.

“Tell them the truth,” he ordered. And, may God help him wherever he is now, this is the truth:

IN the darkened room Whitmore raised his head that had drooped sleepily. He could see nothing at first; but the touch of the table about which they were seated was reassuring. On his left was Jim; and Jim’s wife, Sally, was

seated at his right. One hand of each was held in each of his. Two or three others were there too, all good friends. Directly across from him, hidden in the darkness, was his wife, Betty Whitmore; and in the same concealing darkness there was, of course, the medium who was conducting the séance.

Even in the utter blackness of the great living-room where heavy drapes had been drawn across every window, Whitmore might have sent an unseen smile toward the blond head of the beautiful girl he called Betty. He was looking toward her now but he was not smiling. Rather, his eyes, wide in the darkness, were trying to focus upon something closer by.

Smoke in the moonlight—in a room that held neither smoke nor light! Lazily twisting convolutions of gray-green; almost invisible, almost unreal! Yet it was there, a ghostly mist that rolled lazily in the darkness where only its own dim light could be seen.

And then from the mist came something more substantial. Formless at first, it hardened, took on shape and substance, until it became a hand, a woman’s hand ... and Whitmore released the living human hand of the woman at his right and reached out in slow wonder to touch that other ghostly hand before him.

Slender, soft and warm, it clasped his own fingers; and then, while still he held it in amazement, it was gone, melted to mist within his grasp.

“Great!” he exclaimed when the lights were on. “That’s great, I tell you. You all saw it, but I touched it. I took right hold of it. It was real, material, a genuine materialization.”

“I don’t like it,” said Betty. “I don’t like it a bit, Jack. I’m going to be honest,”—her voice trembled a little here—“I’m going to admit I’m afraid.”

“Afraid?” laughed Whitmore. “Afraid of a woman’s hand? Great Scott, Betty, I didn’t know you were that jealous.”

ELIZABETH WHITMORE tried to smile in response, but appeared to find it difficult. “No,” she said slowly, and her lovely violet eyes were troubled as they rested upon her husband and the flush of enthusiasm that had swept his face. “No,” she repeated slowly. “Not afraid of a woman’s hand. But Jack, dear, what else is there where that came from? How do we know it will always be a *kindly* hand? How do we know it will be human?”

It was the medium who cut short Jack Whitmore’s roaring laughter. She was a foreigner, short and squat. The fat folds of her face perspired easily. But her eyes buried in those folds could still flash fire.

“Monsieur laughs too easily,” she snapped. “Ze little lady, she is right. There is more things out there zan what you call human. Some are not human yet. In time zey will be—maybe! And some—” The eyes now were completely lost in the folds of that fat face that was twisted into lines of horror which seemed somehow absurd. She uttered a series of quick exclamations.

“Some of zese things, zey are not dead; zey have nevaire lived—not like you and me.”

Here she shrugged her ample shoulders in a gesture that was meant to be reassuring. “But nos-sing is to fear,” she told Elizabeth Whitmore. “I protect myself; I protect you, always!”

“All right,” Whitmore agreed. “You seem to know your stuff, anyway. I’ll take your word for all that.

“Twenty, I think you said.” He was writing a check and doubled the amount as he wrote, then slipped it into the woman’s hand. “We’ll expect you next week this same time. And in the meantime we may have a séance or two of our own.”

THE medium had reached the outer door, both Mr. and Mrs. Whitmore accompanying her.

She whirled sharply on them at Jack’s remark.

“No.” she said sharply. “*C’est impossible!* I forbid!”

And again Whitmore laughed, this time more to cover his annoyance than from any appreciation of the unintentional humor of this woman’s command.

“Oh, come now—” he began; and again she cut him short.

“Listen,” she exclaimed. “I tell you somesing—

“I did not do that which to-night you have behold. I am ze voice medium: always do my controls speak with ze voice. In all my life nevaire have I produced ze materialization. Someone else has made to accomplish this. It was yourself, I think, Monsieur, who was ze medium tonight.”

The door closed noisily, and Whitmore crossed to a big French plate to regard himself in the mirror. “J. P. Whitmore, Medium!” he announced. “Readings by appointment only. I’m going to be good, Betty; wait till you see me in my full regalia.”

Then, at sight of the troubled look in the violet eyes, he threw one arm about his wife and waltzed her gaily back into the room where the others waited.

“Ze circle, she will form about ze table,” he announced in burlesque imitation of the medium. “Boys and girls, you are about to see something real in the way of materializations.” He was reaching for the light switch as he spoke.

IT was perhaps a half hour later that Elizabeth Whitmore screamed. A heavy chair crashed in splintered fragments in the far corner of the room. Then her voice cut the darkness with the keen lash of terror:

“Jack, it’s touching me! Its hair—all matted and shaggy!” Again she screamed, “Jack, help me; take it away! Take it—”

She was still standing, a pathetic figure in the middle of the room, when the lights

flashed on. Her eyes were wide with terror, hands outstretched, as if warding off the thing those eyes had seen. And in that timeless second, while yet she stood stiffly erect, there dropped from her hand to the rug below three flecks of white foam that might have clung to the jowls and slavering mouth of some prowling beast.

Her eyes were still round with fright as she fell unconscious to the floor. Jack Whitmore leaped in the same instant and managed to save her from the worst of the fall. Her weight drew him down; he was half-fallen, half-stooped, above her when one of her hands that had been tightly clasped fell open directly below her face. And Whitmore threw himself back with a strangled oath.

“Look!” he choked. “Hair! Matted hair and flesh!”

He was staring at a dark mass in Elizabeth’s opened hand—a clump of clotted black hair—and, hanging to it, a mass of what might have been flesh from which every vestige of blood had been drained ... and his own eyes opened wide with horror as he saw that hair and flesh undergoing a change.

Its paleness turned purple; then was transformed to iridescent, brown ooze—until only a pool of horrible liquid lay in the palm of Elizabeth Whitmore’s inert, unmoving hand. The black clot of hair was the last thing to go ... then that, too, was gone, and in the nostrils of every person in the room was that stench which can carry only one suggestion—death and dissolution.

TO almost every man there comes at times that heart-freezing, blood-congealing sensation we know as fear. Yet Jack Whitmore, had he been pressed for an answer, might have admitted laughingly and with entire honesty that to him fear was an unknown emotion. And on this night, whatever there may have been of terror in the minds and hearts of the others in that room,

there was no least thought of fear to distort the calm judgment of J. P. Whitmore.

So, too, on the following night, though the horror of it was still with him, and though still at times he seemed to be filled again with that revolting odor, there still was no fear. Even horror had been mastered by a stronger urge.

Curiosity, and something more than curiosity—he was possessed by a wild, insatiable desire to know more of this. And even the imploring look in the lovely eyes of Elizabeth Whitmore could not deter him.

“Jack,” she said through bloodless lips, “—that *thing!* How can you want to know more—see more—of it? It “wasn’t”—she paused at a loss for a suitable word—“it wasn’t *decent*, Jack! I’ve tried to tell you—but I can’t!”

“No,” Whitmore agreed slowly, “it was too utterly damnable for words; but just what it was, just where it came from, I’m going to know.” And no arguments or entreaties from his wife could change that decision.

“You’ll not be there, nor any of the others,” he told her. “I don’t know that I can get the results alone, but I’m going to try, Betty.”

Entirely lovely was Elizabeth Whitmore as she stood beneath the rose light of her boudoir, her robe of filmy lace falling softly about her; and her husband took her in his arms for one moment to kiss away the tears which were so near the surface of those beautiful eyes. “Lord, but you’re an angel, Betty!” he exclaimed. “And don’t you worry—not for a minute. I can take care of myself.”

“AN angel,” he was repeating as he went down the broad staircase, “—and I think it’s something pretty damn close to the other extreme that I’m looking for to-night!” He jerked savagely at the weighted cord that drew

the heavy drapes across the living-room windows, then seated himself in the same place at the table.

He did not know how to bring the results he was after. He could only sit in the dark that was almost tangible, where it seemed that the blackness was something that he could reach out and actually take in his two hands. And at last the turmoil within his mind subsided. He was thinking of Betty, and, "Lord, but I'm one lucky man," he was telling himself, when something drove these wandering thoughts out of his mind.

It was not fear, but a prickling sensation that almost stung him as it moved swiftly up his spine. He knew now he had felt it the night before, and now there came, too, a lethargy that swept quickly through him.

How he knew it was the same thing that had returned, Whitmore could never have explained, but he knew it by some new and added sense when first that ghostly glimmering appeared in the far corner of the room. Certainly he could not have recognized it by sight for in this place of darkness his eyes were of little use. Only by some inner vision did he know that here was no clumsy body such as Elizabeth's description had led him to expect, yet knew, too, that it was the same fearful visitor as before.

A waving cloud of gray-green light that spread out over the floor, that reached almost to the ceiling! That and only that was all his straining eyes could see.

It had been light with a light of its own, like fox-fire in the woods, this unnamable thing in the corner of the room. Now, suddenly, it was dark, and still Whitmore knew that it was there.

HE forced his laggard muscles to raise one heavy hand to the holster under his arm. That hand held a .45 automatic when it dropped heavily back to his lap.

"This throws a heavy enough slug to

stop anything that's able to move," he had told himself an hour before. But now he was not so confident—not here in the dark where some strange power had already reached out to paralyze his muscles; where something that had become invisible still hovered, its presence made known to him by that strange sense. No, decidedly, even the clutch of a heavy caliber gun did not instill its customary confidence. And with that feeling of helplessness there came to Mr. Whitmore the knowledge of fear.

He tried to raise the gun and found it too heavy for his waning strength. He could not move; and suddenly, with a sharp abruptness that sent a chill along his spine, he knew that he must move; he knew with a knowledge that transcended all sense of sight or sound that something unthinkably beastly and vile was coming toward him, closer ... closer....

Jack Whitmore had yet to learn the full meaning of fear. The understanding of its uttermost depths was to come later. But, for the first time in his life, beads of cold perspiration gathered slowly across his forehead and trickled into his eyes. And then—

Those velvet shades he had drawn so savagely across the window were hung on iron rings; sharply now through the silence he heard them tinkle. He heard one slip with a tiny metallic clang, and, as the drapes fell of their own weight and adjusted themselves from the slight confusion into which he had drawn them, they opened to make one narrow crack, that a band of moonlight might throw itself softly across the middle of the room.

Just one narrow line of light, one single band of silver against the dull red of the rug—against that and on something else that caused Whitmore's breath to stop.

A HEAD, of mottled green and brown. It must have been a foot across; flat and triangular

like that of a venomous snake. There were leathery lips, wet and dripping; and curved teeth that shone yellow against the dark wetness of the jaws. There were fleshy tendrils like thick hair hanging from flabby-pouched cheeks, and above all this nameless horror were two eyes that the band of silvery light brought suddenly to life. Eyes of fire, eyes so full of hatred, of blood-lust, of demoniac fury that Whitmore's own eyes came to them in irresistible fascination.

One instant only—one instant of utter horror, of a terrible conviction that here was nothing of earth; nothing, even, of hell. This was something that could have been nurtured only amid the dark recesses of some half-world!

One instant only while Whitmore's brain raced like an engine gone wild as if to make up for his deadened, helpless body. Then even that instant ended, and, where the moonlight had disclosed a thing of frightful visage, there -was only a viscous pool ... and still the moonlight shone wanly while that, too, vanished to blue-white mist and was gone.

Forgotten was the gun as it thudded upon the floor. Forgotten was all but one recollection—the remembrance of the brilliant light that would come with the opening of the door ... and somehow Whitmore lashed those reluctant muscles and forced them to carry him across the room in one drunken, stumbling run until he crashed heavily against the door, flung it open, and clung weakly to the paneled wood.

The blinding glare of light was about him; he felt that he was safe, yet there was that which drove him on. And his last blind rush across the room ended in a crashing of glass where he thrust his bare fist through a window that he might fill his lungs with air pure enough to wash them clean of the foulness they contained.

One wrist was bleeding where the

glass had raked it. He paid no heed but struggled to fling open the window, lean out, and let the nausea that had swept him have its way for, with the first touch of that soft moonlight, there had come to him again that intolerable scent of decay.

"I'M through!" Whitmore admitted. "Don't say another word, Betty dear, nor give it another thought. I know when I have had enough."

But he was evasive when his wife questioned him as to the happenings of the night before. Nor could he have had any slightest knowledge of the terrible forces he had put into motion; for he smiled happily into the violet eyes that smiled back as he said: "Never again, angel-child! There'll be no more of that devilry in this house.... Now, what show do you want to see to-night? I'll phone Jim and Sally to join us. I want to talk with Jim anyway—tell him about last night."

They returned well after midnight. Whitmore's man was waiting for him; he handed his employer a packet of papers. "They were left for you, sir," he said.

Jack Whitmore swore softly under his breath as he hurriedly inspected the documents. "It's that confounded subway extension matter," he explained to his wife. "You run along to bed, Betty; I'll follow after a while. I've got to go over an unholy mess of figures; got to be ready for a directors' meeting to-morrow."

He threw off hat and coat, switched on a shaded lamp at the table in his big living room, and, instead of taking the papers to his study, he dropped unthinkingly into the same chair he had occupied the night before.

The lamp made a circle of light upon the table where Whitmore scanned endless figures and estimates. He was not aware of the darkness that filled the rest of the room; he was not aware of his own solitude; and his mind was entirely engaged with the engineers'

report and what their test borings had disclosed.... The first sound that reached his ears went unheard.

CONCLUSIVE proof, this, of how far from his mind was anything more supernatural than the modern magic of the machine age in which he lived. The sound was repeated twice before he realized that he was hearing something like the whistling intake of an asthmatic breath. Then his head snapped up sharply, and, for a moment, he stared incredulously about him.

“Absurd!” he said half aloud; “I’ve seen men go to pieces—get the shakes—but, by the gods, I thought I was immune!”

His eyes had gone unconsciously toward that place where, one night earlier, they had stared into eyes of flaming red. He found nothing, although that same strange chill sensation along his spine had half prepared him to see a gray-green whirl of mist in the darkness. By sheer will power he brought his gaze back to the papers and the circle of light, and he forced his mind once more to concentrate upon the figures there.

“... And it is the recommendation of our Mr. Donnelly that further borings should be made at the points indicated on the attached layout—” He pushed the papers quietly aside; his mind refused to be coerced when, in his ears, there sounded again the labored breathing. And the same mysterious something that had spoken to him on that other occasion told him again that here was the loathsome, nameless thing, returned this time unbidden.

AND again there came to the stout heart of Whitmore that gripping fear, for, though he had not yet turned to look, he knew that this time the thing had come to him in the light. Dim, that light in the big room where it reflected and was diffused from the lighted circle of the table, but even this subdued glow

was brighter than the impenetrable darkness of those other nights ... and Whitmore realized that light, the only weapon he knew, was losing its effectiveness.

He did not turn at once; that chill that was gripping his heart was spreading in ever-widening waves throughout his body.

In all the high-ceilinged room there was but one sound: the whistling intake of that horrible breath through a tight throat, and a softer, deeper-toned *huff!* as the breath was released. This eery combination of sounds was repeating itself with gruesome regularity....

In that instant the mind of Jack Whitmore split sharply into two halves; he was two selves, and one of those selves swore and cursed at the other:

“Coward! Fool! Turn around, you poor damned idiot. There’s nothing there—nothing to be afraid of! And if there is anything there, you’re man enough to wring its ugly neck!”

But that other self stood in frozen, terror-stricken immobility. Not until the rasping breath grew perceptibly louder did Whitmore move. Then there clamored in his brain one thought, repeating itself over and over: “It’s coming! It’s coming nearer. In another minute it will touch you!” It was the thought of that touch that gave the man strength to turn slowly about.

AT first there was nothing! Then half-way between him and the far corner of the room, amid the heavy shadows, was something darker even than darkness itself. Those white papers gleaming in the bright light had been blinding; there was time needed for Whitmore’s eyes to adjust themselves—time in which every second seemed like a lagging hour.

Dimly in that darkened room he saw first only the outline of a body, a stooped, shrunken body it seemed. The figure of a man, standing motionless. Then, while Whitmore watched, that creature of the shadows took

one halting, forward step, and even in the dim light Whitmore could see the sunken cheeks, the long, matted, gray hair that hung in a bedraggled fringe half over the face, as ragged seemingly as the tattered fragments of cloth that clung to the gaunt frame below.

Then one hand was slowly raised, a hand more like a claw of some carrion bird than anything resembling a human hand. But it came tremblingly upward to the face and brushed aside the hanging hair, and, with that, Whitmore for the first time saw the eyes!

They were cavernous eyes, deeply sunken in their sockets, which, in that emaciated face, were like the two black openings in a skull; yet from their shadowed depths they blazed as Whitmore watched, blazed redly with the same menacing look he had seen in the reptilian eyes that had stared at him the night before.

It was the same *thing!* Whitmore knew in one intuitive flash that these horrible bodies were so many disguises for a still more horrible, more venomous and loathsome creature that was using them for some terrible purpose. And as before it announced its coming in a manner unmistakable.

The charnel-house odor which assailed the senses of the helpless man was almost more than human nerves could bear; and still Whitmore stood, not moving, beside that big table with its single light where a scattered litter of papers shone whitely. And the thing came on.

THAT single light shed a mellow glow; it reflected softly throughout the room; shone dully here and there on polished mahogany and lost itself at last in the neutral tints of the textured walls. And with equal delicacy it illumined the face from which Jack Whitmore could not remove his horrified gaze.

Not one single muscle of that face moved; and, rigidly set in the cold grip of death, there was no mistaking the meaning of

the waxen pallor nor, more horrible yet, the discoloration that spread across half the face. Only the flashing hatred of those eyes gave visible manifestation of the fearful light that had forced itself into this body.

And for Jack Whitmore, standing there unmoving, hardly breathing, time lost all meaning and measure; all comprehension of normal things, all memories of the every-day world were lost. They were erased from his mind as if they had never been, and in all the great universe there was nothing but this nameless horror, nothing but two eyes that blazed redly with malevolent menace meant unmistakably for him.

One slow step; another as dreadful, as inexorable; and another— and, with that slow measured approach of something which had no right to existence in the world of living men, the fear which had been born in Jack Whitmore's heart that other night seemed to have reached its full stature. Had one of those dreadful claw-like hands reached within his breast to close about his heart, that deathly clutch could have been no colder than the grip of the fear that seized upon him now. Dimly he felt his whole body shiver; there were spasms of trembling that jerked and twitched at his deadened muscles.

SOME part of Whitmore's mind was reaching deep among buried memories for phrases half forgotten. His lips were moving stiffly.

"Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness ..." he murmured. But Whitmore was afraid, and the ghoulish visitant came slowly, haltingly forward; inch by inch it forced the helpless, dead body to drag itself along in the dim light.

Closer! And now one bony, claw-like hand rested upon the table....

Closer yet it came, and the hand at the end of an arm whose thinness was apparent through the half-rotted cloth came slowly up

and out— out toward Whitmore's face!

Reaching and straining it hung there until the dreadful body took one last forward step ... and with the first touch of long fingernails to his cheek, that other half of Whitmore's mind, that self which had never yielded, took quick command. The response of his muscles might have followed a tremendous electric shock.

One hand which had hung limply at his side shot up and out. It contracted into a hard fist, and that fist came up from below carrying all the force and driving power that Whitmore's heavy body could impart.

Where or how he struck the thing Whitmore never knew. That other self which was in control was shouting frantically to him, driving him in one backward spring towards the drawer in the end of the table, and his searching hand found the long flashlight that he sought, and pressed the switch.

No dim light then; Whitmore had had this lamp made for his own use underground. The beam which he directed toward a huddled mass on the floor seemed in that dark room like a blazing headlight of a locomotive. It was like a solid bar of light, like a torrent of liquid force that battered and poured upon that huddled heap of rags and flesh ... and the thing which had maintained a semblance of wholeness in the dim light lost all form, became a pool of utter horror, and then was gone. And only the strangling air of the room told of that vileness which had lately been there.

IT was a pale and shaken man who left his car that following day to walk up to a house whose door bore a card announcing that within could be found one Madame Zembla. Whitmore's sleepless eyes in his fear-paled face seemed almost as dark and sunken as those other terrible eyes had been.

All this, it seemed, was noted by the searching eyes in the medium's fat,

expressionless face. "Ah," she said softly, without waiting for Whitmore to announce his errand. "It is zat you have done as you say. You would have your own way about this. And now...." She shrugged her broad shoulders disdainfully and waited for Whitmore to complete the sentence.

"For God's sake—" began Whitmore. There seemed no words by which he might convey to another human even a faint understanding of this dreadful truth.

"Oui" said the Madame softly. "*Pour le ban Dieu*—and for the sake of your little lady who was 'fraid. Now tell me," she demanded sharply, "is it that you have done— what?"

And Jack Whitmore told—not as Mr. Whitmore, capitalist and builder of subways might have spoken condescendingly to a disreputable charlatan; this was another Whitmore who spoke contritely and humbly and who implored the fat, ill-dressed woman before him to come to his aid.

"It is," she said at last, "zat you have left ze door open, and there has walked in a somesing that seizes any dead body it can for to make it live. You have left it open, that door, and once open, it is hard to close. It may be I can help, but, of a truth, it is *dificile!*"

WITH this promise of help another thought came uppermost in Whitmore's questioning mind. "This thing," he stated abruptly, "it was alive, I tell you. I don't mean the body. That was dead, dead! I mean the thing that was in that body.

"Where did it come from? Where is it now? Are there," he demanded, "things like that in the world of the dead? Is that what we have to meet when we go on from here?" For the first time in his life, J. P. Whitmore had turned his inner vision away from the things of this world toward a future that seemed highly problematical, and the visions he saw with that inner gaze were disturbing.

Something of this may have shown in his face, so pale and drawn; his hoarse tones may have hinted at the questions he had been asking himself. At least, there was something which made the medium lean forward and place one pudgy hand on his knee. "In your language," she said, "you have ze— what you say?—quotation: 'a little knowledge is a so-dangerous thing,' and even ze little knowledge you have, it is all bad.

"No," she stated, and her voice rang clearly with conviction, "there is heaven and there is hell—though not such a hell as you might think. We will know more about both of them some day, I think, you and I." She touched herself swiftly in the sign of the cross, then went on:

"But zis thing, it comes from neither place; it has, perhaps, escaped. There are those over there who will help us to send it back where it belong....

"No, not to-night," she told Whitmore. "My help, it is needed by others than you. But to-morrow night I come."

With one sharp look she checked Whitmore's hand that had half withdrawn a bill-fold. "This," she told him, "is not a matter of ze money. It is a matter of somesing even more important—*vraiment!*—a great deal more important!"

THERE was a door—how well he knew it now—a door to some hideous half-world that held things neither of heaven nor hell, nor yet of the world of men. And he had left that door open!

J. P. Whitmore at his beautiful home some hours later faced the oncoming night with trepidation ill concealed.

"No, no," he said with unwonted irritation, "don't wait for me, Betty dear. You go along. I—I've—some matters to attend to, some very important matters.

"Jack," she began hesitantly, "you're not going to—"

"No; there'll be no more of that," was Whitmore's brusque response.

Jack Whitmore who had known pretty women beyond number had found, as others have done, that true beauty is confined to the few. Betty Whitmore's position in that restricted group could not be questioned. With beauty of form and feature, and that added beauty which comes from something within, the wife of J. P. Whitmore had all of loveliness that might be desired.

And Whitmore could not face that appealing figure standing at the foot of the broad staircase; he could not meet the troubled look in her eyes gone suddenly deep and dark. He could only repeat his reassuring words and hope they might bring greater conviction to his listener than they did to himself.

"No, no; nothing of that sort, Betty! Just business, my dear. Now run along." He turned without the customary good-night kiss and entered the living room.

HE was to remember that last caress he had failed to give—remember it while he stared with hot, dry eyes unseeingly into a future where there was only darkness and in which there was nowhere an answer to the questions that hammered and beat within his brain ... but now Whitmore was thinking only of light.

He switched on every lamp in the room, then dropped into his big chair and resolutely forced his eyes away from that far corner toward which they turned fearfully.

There were business papers upon which he tried vainly to focus his attention; he threw them aside for a book. That too failed.

He found a pencil in his hand: reached for a pad of paper and made meaningless marks—meaningless to him, although their significance to a psychiatrist might have been startling. From geometrical figures the pencil point passed on to more rhythmic, swinging lines. It was some time later that Whitmore realized, with a start, that his hand was

moving unguided by himself.

The paper where he had been writing was black with a crisscross of confused marks over its upper half, while, below, it bore regular lines. Here was the writing of a cramped hand where one word was repeated over and over throughout all the lines.

J. P. Whitmore's big sprawling chirography was as individual as the man; had he consciously tried, he could not possibly have imitated the crowded, vertical letters of this writing at which he stared. But neither, for that matter, would he have written the one word, "don't," again and again.

Only in the last line did an additional word appear. And here this repeated command became, "Don't go—don't go."

WITH an abruptness which indicated the nervous tension that possessed the man, Whitmore suddenly revolted against his own inexplicable conduct.

"To hell with it!" he exploded, hell with it all! I'm sick of it; sick—sick—sick! Sitting up here like a scared schoolboy, afraid of the dark, afraid to go to bed."

He crossed swiftly and snapped off a master switch, and without another look toward the threatening darkness behind him, he passed out of the room and up the broad stairs where Betty Whitmore had stood.

He saw her through the door that connected their two rooms. She was asleep, breathing softly and regularly, and from some window of her room a broad band of moonlight threw itself irregularly across her bed. It showed the regular rise and fall of her breast, showed, too, the faintest ghost of a smile that tugged at the corners of her lips as, even in sleep, some memory moved her to that ever-ready mirth.

And Whitmore's eyes shone with tenderness and admiration as he tiptoed quietly away and reached for the switch that plunged his own room into darkness. But from

where he lay he turned that he might look through that open doorway where a band of moonlight lay caressingly across Betty's bed.

HOW long he slept Whitmore never knew. He knew only that he had gone to sleep with a mind at rest; and farthest from his thoughts was any suspicion that the repeated warning of "Don't go—don't go" might have ended with the words, "to sleep!" But he knew it when he awoke—knew it with a certainty that sent that gripping hand of fear once more about his heart.

What was it? Where was it? Something threatened, some danger more terrible than any that had come to him before. Almost it was as if a voice had been shouting to him, as if it were this voice that had wakened him, and with that he knew that the warning concerned his wife.

Betty! She was alone in her room! He cursed the muscles that were slow in sending him out of bed and toward that communicating door.

And at last Whitmore learned the full meaning of fear. Like one who has been dashed through treacherous ice into the black waters waiting beneath, that inner self which was the real Jack Whitmore found itself plunged down and yet down into depths of nerve-gripping terror whose frigid chill checked his heart in the very middle of a beat. And this fear was all for his wife.

That band of moonlight had moved. It lay now across the pillow where Betty's face would have been.

*Would have been!* For Whitmore, his rush checked for one frozen instant as he reached the doorway, stared with straining eyes; yet where his wife had been he could see only an irregular blur.

Horrified, stricken with a paralysis that left him clinging to the doorway for support, he saw that blur take form and become a furred animal whose hair, like that of a

monkey, was long and stringy.

ONE strangled cry escaped from his throat, and at the sound the crouching thing leaped to the floor with a motion too quick for the eye to follow. Creatures of the wild can do it; they can move so quickly that it is as if they were in two positions at the same instant. And this nameless thing that had been huddled over the face and figure of lovely Betty Whitmore was abruptly there no longer, but stood beside the bed looking squarely at the man..., And Jack Whitmore, who now knew fear learned also to recognize hate.

That same red fire was in the creature's eyes; it might have been a reflected glow from some smoldering pit of hell. Here was hatred, yet not a human hatred; nor was it the ferocity of a wild beast. Here was something that defied all words or thought to compass it, and it shone from narrowed eyes in the head of a great cat-beast like nothing Whitmore had ever seen.

Still that dreadful paralysis held him in its grip. He knew, though his eyes were fastened on the beast, that his wife was in her bed. He sensed too that that regular breathing had ceased. He heard her give one feeble, gasping moan.

In the moonlight a curtain fluttered. The soft breath of the summer night touched Whitmore's face, and his own indrawn breath died strangling in this throat, as again there came to him the horrible stench of putrefying flesh.

There was no measure of time, nor none to measure it. In one instant the throbbing, beastly carcass was standing erect, held there by that hideous something within it that gave it the semblance of life. In the same instant, while yet that one feeble moan whispered through the room, it was back where it had been.

IT landed, straddling awkwardly the silken

folds under which was the lovely figure of Betty Whitmore. Her head that had fallen to one side upon the pillow was swung face upward as the creature landed. And now Whitmore could see in that band of moonlight that which transcended all else there had been of horror.

Her eyes were closed in a face that was waxen pale; her lips, soft as the innermost petals of a rose, had gone dry and colorless; and suddenly those lips were covered by a beastly mouth in a face where decay had already left its mark.

The scream that burst from Whitmore's tight throat was that of a raging animal. He launched himself in one spring that threw him heavily against the bed while his two outstretched, straining hands tore frenziedly at something of flesh and fur into which his fingers sank.

Then he found himself standing once more; he was breathing heavily, mumbling over and over in a broken, hollow voice, while he stared with unbelieving eyes at the thing upon the soft floor-coverings of Betty's room.

A dead thing!—yet a thing where the workings of death had been thwarted. And now that process of dissolution, which by some devilish magic has been checked, went on with terrible speed, and before his eyes, Whitmore saw that which darkness should always conceal.

Betty! It was his next conscious thought. Betty was safe. But Betty must not see this! He tore his eyes away, then turned swiftly with the sudden realization that Betty needed help.

HE must get a doctor at once. His arms were outstretched to reach her, to raise her up—but they were checked. For the figure that had been that of Betty Whitmore, the silent body that had lain so quietly was galvanized to life; while yet he reached forward, it snapped abruptly to a sitting position. Then, in the

merest flash of time it threw itself out from under the silken robes, the soft, rose-colored coverlets that had sheltered Betty Whitmore, and sprang from the bed.

And still the moonlight followed it. Still that broad band of silver touched softly on those features that Jack Whitmore had loved. And the eyes that stared back in fierce triumph were red with the fires of hate, red as some glowing reflection from the deepest pits of hell, and the rose-petal lips drew back in an animal snarl.

Only for a moment did Whitmore see this malevolent transformation. Then between him and the face of his wife that had become so unbelievably beastly there came other pictures.

So plainly he saw them! They blocked out even the face, distorted with fiendish exultation....

There was the open door ... and through that door there came a formless, slow-rising cloud.... In its folds were faces, horrible faces, of what had once been animals and men, and Whitmore, staring at that ever-moving spectral cloud, knew that within it was a nameless horror, something beyond the comprehension of men. It had found the open door and was using these putrescent bodies as a vehicle. It was imparting to them its own quivering, vibrating life and it was seeking another, more desirable way to manifest itself. It was searching for a living human being

whose soul it could displace!

STILL it was a small thing which broke the spell in which Whitmore was held. A bit of lace at the V-shaped throat of the dainty robe that Betty had worn! It rose and fell softly in the moonlight with the regular breathing of that horrible breath that had been blown into her body ... and with that Jack Whitmore went quite mad.

Betty was dead. He knew it without any emotion. She was dead; and this—this thing!—

The throat above that lace-edged robe was white and soft. Jack Whitmore's hands were still about it when the police broke in; his fingers were sunk into that soft flesh with a grip they loosened only with difficulty....

"The poor young thing," said an Irish officer compassionately as he stared at the body on the floor, at its soft half-opened lips, its drooping lids. "Like an angel she looks! ... And why did you do it?" he demanded of Whitmore. "Only a fiend from hell—"

He did not complete the sentence, nor did Whitmore reply. There had begun for him the long silence which was to last throughout the trial; which, except for that outburst in court, was to continue until his death.

"They've had all the facts," he cried. "Give them the truth—the whole damnable truth. They won't believe it, but—"