



MANSION OF THE WALKING DEAD

by
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It was the perfect setup he had invented, so perfect he couldn't help but get himself killed in it!

GLOOMY, quiet, the lonely estate was gaunt, the bare limbs of trees drenched and moving under the lash of an early Spring rain. The utter forlornness of it struck Detective Mike Turner like a physical blow when

his departing cab left him at the foot of the winding path that led upward to the ancestral mansion of the clan Philips.

Indeed the two Philips brothers—Maurice and Frederick—now dead—either had been

hopelessly eccentric or incurably romantic to have ordered their estate laid out in this fashion. The house itself—unseen in the darkness—was a good eighth of a mile distant, uphill, and could be approached only by foot from this abrupt termination of the narrow and rutted road that led from the state highway.

It was rumored that the brothers wanted privacy and solitude, had distinct aversions to modernity. Which may have explained why they permitted automobiles to approach only so far. Not seeing them, they chose to ignore them.

Struggling up the hill and remembering that every resident of the mansion had had to do likewise, Mike Turner vowed that the brothers must have had constitutions that would shame the ox. In which supposition he was right—as he found out later.

“The entire family is nuts,” he growled. “Two couples are called to hear a will read, but the attorney don’t show up. They’re at dinner when—they say—a corpse goes waltzing through the library, big as life, and disappears. Then one of the wives gets smart and takes a powder away from there, only none of the three remaining nuts think that. She’s just gone, they tell me over the ‘phone, and they’re worried, fearing a snatch or a murder. Also some jewels are gone—an’ maybe that explains her taking a powder. Anyway I get hired to find out what’s what. I need the money—and what they need is a good psychiatrist who—”

The scream was shrill, piercing.

Turner’s muttered words choked in his throat. The eeriness of the great estate had been pressing down upon him like the insistence of the pitch darkness itself. Some men whistle past graveyards; Mike Turner’s phobia of the unknown went more to a slangy airiness to assuage a growing dread.

So with one fell swoop the scream tore away his protecting jauntiness and belittling muttering, and a chill slither of dread coursed up his spine and swirled freezingly inside his brain.

His bags dropped from his huge hands even as he spun about. He saw it then, incongruous and ghostly and repellent, the squat outlines of a building to his left—a mausoleum. Incongruous and rather ghastly, it was, since it was the only thing in or around the mansion that was modern.

The door of it banged open and shut and a figure sped through the brush on feet winged with panic or unearthliness. Mike Turner went after it, bounding like a mastiff. Wet, bare branches of untended trees lashed his face.

He was passing the door of the crypt when it swung suddenly outward and a figure wearing a burial shroud jarred like a dead weight against him. He threw up his hands to retain balance and something metallic whistled forward at the end of a fist and crushed itself against his chin. He fell forward against the shroud and his failing senses knew the repugnant stench of the grave. Then the thing of metal rose and fell again; felt but unseen....

The steady coolness of heavy rain gradually brought returning consciousness. The downpour had increased to torrential proportions, as though the very heavens were crying for a lost child.

Turner stood up unsteadily, feeling the cut on his chin.

His hands suddenly shook. Nervous reaction, he told himself, even as he sought in vain for footprints leading from the ornate cast-iron door. But then again the rain might have washed away all trace of his assailant. A ghost might not make footprints; but Mike Turner felt sure a ghost couldn’t clout a man the way he had been clouted.

Then he remembered the fetid aroma of the shroud. No ordinary man could have tolerated that loathsome, cassock-like and too-suggestive piece of apparel without becoming mentally and physically sick.

HE drew his automatic from a holster clip under his left shoulder. Then on reluctant feet he approached the crypt and pulled open the door.

He wasn’t a coward, neither was he such a fool as not to know fear. He tried to quiet his jumpiness by cold logic as he fumbled for his packet of matches. Far away, in the distance where lay the highway, a coyote bayed mournfully. Turner envisioned that crowded highway and wished that he might walk along it in the safety of speeding cars and death-dealing drivers.

The match flared. Seven metal coffins glinted in niches set into the blob of the white walls.

The eighth stood on end, the head held by rollers in the niche, the lower end braced against the floor. The lid was open and the oblong piece of glass, that sealed and preserved with airtightness the corpse, was shattered, as if the corpse might simply have stepped forward from his bed of white satin.

Turner's skin erupted goose pimples and his hand shook so the match went out, and the packet fell. Desperately, feverishly, bathed in cold sweat, he sought it.

For the coffin was empty, in chilling contradiction to the satin pillow and lining. There—the discolored, glutinous outline of a body, such as the sweat of decomposition might make.

His hot imagination ran wild. There were sounds of a body moving inside the crypt; brush crackled underfoot outside near the open door. Fleeting sounds—and gone, gone with the silent swiftness of ghostly wings.

Turner's clawing hand found the match packet. His quivering fingers snapped two matches before he struck a light.

His breath whistled, the gun in his hand jerked.

A second coffin set in a far wall had moved on its rollers half out of its niche during the brief spell of darkness. The screw locks of its lid were loose, as if the corpse might briefly have raised the top and peeked out.

A bronze plaque above the niche read MAURICE PHILIPS—1889-1938.

Turner reached out his shaking gun hand and pulled at the metal handle near the foot of the casket. The rollers moved, the coffin pivoted slowly in the flickering light, balanced, then sagged slowly end-down against the floor,

A grunting curse of pain ripped itself from Turner.

The match had burned his fingers as it went out.

A hollow, echoing boom made him jump. In panicky-haste he struck another match. The coffin's jar against the floor had caused the lid to snap open.

He bent, holding the licking match flame over the air-tight plate glass. On the new white satin a mottled face, once white, stared with

sunken, closed eyes past Turner and into the dancing, deep shadows of the ceiling. The after-death beard stubble, now lifeless, curled inwardly. The gaunt, folded hands were long-clawed, the tips black and deteriorating into a yellow, dust-like dryness.

The dark shroud was in keeping with the brothers' aversion to modernity. But the lifeless folds of it weren't in keeping with a corpse, it was puffed on one shoulder, taut on the other and wrinkled, as if the corpse might have tossed and rolled restlessly.

The match swung higher as Turner pivoted. He studied the empty casket and the plaque over it: FREDERICK PHILIPS—1889-1929.

Turner looked again at both leaning caskets, and made precipitately for the slit of the partially-open door.

Outside, he sucked in lungfuls of fresh, rain-drenched air, tasting it, rolling it, like a man returning from death to life.

A flicker of light showed through the foliage. The mansion was not far distant.

Turner returned to the path, scooped up both bags in one hand. His automatic remained in his right hand; and he didn't feel a slight shame carrying it.

FOR the corpse in the sealed coffin had been dead for more than a year, and to all outward appearances had stepped from its own casket and crossed the mausoleum to lie down and rest in its twin brother's. Frederick was in Maurice's niche—and Maurice was—nowhere; but as sure as death itself he'd catapulted from the mausoleum and clouted Mike Turner with a metallic something.

Turner was muttering to himself now. Traversing these desolate, unkempt grounds, he knew fear. The wet branches of trees made jerky, creaky sounds, moving in bare, macabre ugliness against the lowering skies.

The mansion was squat and sprawling, made of thick stone walls, and to Turner's hot eyes bore a hideous resemblance to the mausoleum. But its lights were beacons of safe haven. Turner was glad to enter its musty, cavernous interior...

A dark-haired, milk-skinned, large-eyed woman admitted him to the mansion. She was

more composed than any woman he had ever met. Only a slight flickering in her eyes betrayed an inner, horrifying dread. She was, she said, the daughter of Maurice Philips, now the Princess Montoy.

Turner recalled the newspaper blurbs and the wedding, and the ill-concealed suggestions that this exotic heiress had purchased her title on the royal bargain counter.

But no matter. Certainly she was the perfect movie prototype of the haughty aristocrat, proud and arrogant while yet being cordial.

She led him into the reception room. A log fire in the hearth made shapeless, dancing shadows. A haggard-eyed young man, left hand and arm in a sling bandage, was propped against pillows on the divan. Flickering flames showed the dark line of his determined jaw and the wells of misery that were his sensitive eyes.

"My brother, Hal Philips," the Princess said formally.

"Thank God you're here!" Hal Philips' shoulders seemed to take on new strength. "My wife, Elaine, and the Prince have disappeared! Both vanished from the library!"

Turner felt a mysterious coldness. Gone now—two—not one.

"How did that happen?" he motioned to Hal's wounded shoulder.

Young Philips grimaced. "When my wife disappeared and I couldn't locate her, I started down the path, intending to summon police. The 'phone is dead. Near the mausoleum a voice—my father's, I think—warned me back. Instead I ran toward the voice. I got shot. I staggered back here."

"Your father!"

"It seemed so then—it seems certain now. Then sis here"—he jerked his chin at the Princess—"went to the mausoleum tonight. Uncle Frederick was in father's casket—and father was nowhere!"

Turner looked with new admiration at the woman, one capable of prowling forth alone at night to examine a mausoleum. He hazarded that only the most loathsome of events could have caused her to scream, that nothing in ordinary life could have shaken her composure, sent her like a wild thing crashing through the brush.

"I imagine I met your father," Turner said, rubbing the lump on his chin. "But—the 'phone. You called me?"

"That call apparently disagreed with the plans of a thief," the Princess said steadily. "We called you when Elaine and some loose jewels on my dresser had disappeared. We wanted to avoid the publicity the local police would subject us to. But later, when we tried to call the family attorney, whose telegrams had summoned us here, we found a strip of telephone wire had been cut away."

"When did the Prince vanish?"

"Toward dawn. The three of us kept searching the house," Hal said. "I was coming down the stairs from the second floor and looked into the library just in time to see a glowing death's head in the library move past the open doorway. I ran in there, snapped on the lights. It was empty, with only a blood-stained piece of the Prince's dressing robe lying on the rug. We've heard nothing more of him, have stayed close together at all times except when sis went to the mausoleum."

"And what did you see there?" Turner turned toward the shapely Princess, his keen eyes questioning.

"I was examining the empty casket when I happened to glance behind me. Reaching across the top of father's casket—where Frederick's body is now—was Frederick's corpse."

Her composure wavered, her hand shook, her face paled.

"His head was glowing, his loose mouth slavering and his black fingers were almost touching me. I screamed and ran just as he swung his body over the casket and out of the niche. I think his shroud caught on the coffin locks, because I heard him fall."

Turner shook his head. "It don't make sense. Your father's body is gone; yet this thing you imagine is a corpse resembles your late Uncle Frederick Philips."

THE Princess shivered. "It's a corpse! Nothing—nothing alive could be so hideous! And it is Uncle Frederick. I saw his right hand."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"His knuckles were smashed when he was a

young man and pieces of silver were grafted into the knuckles when the bones were reset.”

Despite himself, Turner’s spine crawled with purely animal terror. He remembered the flickering metal of the hand, metal that decomposed skin might have bared.

“Pshaw,” Hal said in false encouragement, “it’s got to be a burglar, a jewel thief. But why he should dress as a corpse—”

“It’s not as simple as that,” the Princess said. “There’s something supernatural and dreadful—as if eyes were always watching me, luring me on to do something I cannot understand. I’ve had to fight against a strange call that’s grippingly hypnotic. Telepathic, I guess it should be called. And in my subconscious mind there is always Uncle Frederick.”

“Servants?” Turner asked.

“None,” Hal said. “The mansion has been empty since father’s death.”

Turner’s eyes roamed over the room. It was spotlessly clean, well-kept. His feelings of eeriness grew more intense.

Lights reflecting from ceiling-high—and dustless—shelves of books in the library to his left contradicted Hal’s belief of untenancy.

“A body gone—jewels gone,” Turner mused. “They make a queer combination.” Perhaps the loss of jewels was a blind covering the main purpose of the bizarre happenings, sparkling alibis for—what?

“How did you meet the Prince?” he asked the Princess.

“Through the family attorney, George Arud, and Hal met Elaine through the Prince. Why?”

Turner pulled at his lip, “Detectives,” he said, “have suspicious minds, especially where big money is at stake. It seems strange that the Prince and Elaine should both disappear. I believe they would come into fortunes if you two met with—let’s call it—disaster.”

“That statement is sordid!” the Princess fairly spat out.

“Your father’s will has not been probated,” Turner pointed out. “Who else—beside yourselves—would benefit from it?”

“Charities—numerous ones—” Hal said. “But sis and I—I know—are sole beneficiaries unless—”

“If nothing happens to you,” Turner grunted. He leaned his head back against the cushioned chair back, looked at the electric fixtures.

“Lights and telephones,” he spoke as it to himself. “Queerly modern for two men who hated modernity so much.”

“Concession to mother,” the Princess explained. “Father wasn’t the bug on old-fashionedness that was Uncle Frederick. This ghastly barn was Frederick’s idea. He was a brilliant architect, a good sculptor, but had the instincts of a hermit. A queer man, an odd man, very intense and sensitive, bitter when hurt—and dangerous. Like father, he was exceptionally large and strong.”

“An unlucky man, too,” Hal said. “He only loved once—and that was tragic.”

“So-o?”

The Princess went on: “He adored father’s bride madly when father brought her here to live. He couldn’t stand seeing her lavish her affections on father, so he fled to Paris. His body was sent back here to the family crypt in 1929.”

“And your mother?”

“She disappeared 20 years ago while on a lone trip to New York. Father never ceased searching for her, but without success. At first he thought Frederick—queer and bitter soul that he was—might have had a hand in it some way. But Paris police reported Uncle Frederick hadn’t left the city in years.” Her eyes had softened when she spoke of her mother and the brittle veneer of sophistication she had woven about herself seemed to sag.

“Odd yarn,” Turner murmured.

THE Princes hesitated, then. “Yes—odd—but—don’t take me too lightly if—if I tell you that this dreadful thing I feel, the influence I have to fight against somehow seems to hinge around mother’s disappearance.”

Hal looked at Turner. “Sis is not given to imaginative flights of fancy,” he said slowly. “It’s up to you to figure it out. I’ve tried—and can’t.”

Turner frowned in puzzlement. Of course the corpse that walked idea was out. The telepathic tug that the Princess felt was entirely possible; science admits it as a form of hypnotism. Its effect on a strong-willed woman such as the Princess

Monroy would be negligible were she awake and constantly fighting it. Possibly the missing Elaine was made of softer stuff, attuned to a call not directed at her. But the supernatural idea was fantastic. It was—

As if impelled by a magnet, Turner's eyes lifted and looked through the library doors. Mortal terror gripped his heart with icy fingers. It was there, hunched and swaying, a grotesque thing, immense, obscenely vile, cast back unwanted out of hell.

Its gaunt head was dully luminous in the light, glimmering spectrally, its taloned fingers flexing, its right hand gleaming like metal reflecting witch's fire, its glowing eyes alive with maniacal glare. It was staring at the Princess, its dark mouth working

By a supreme effort, Turner forced his rigid muscles into action. He came up heavily from the chair, clawing for his gun.

The shroud fluttered, the tail of it jerking, with the tearing impact of Turner's bullet. Then the spectre was gone.

Turner heaved his huge bulk across the long room, weaving and stumbling past furniture, his gun held before him.

He jerked to an amazed stop in the library. It was empty. Only a vague, tantalizing aroma of death and vileness hung heavily.

Hal came stumbling up beside him. "I saw it," he gasped, "it was—"

The Princess started to approach. Turner waved her back.

"Where along these walls did your wife disappear?" Turner snapped. He was breathing hard, knowing a repugnant dread. He would have gone on oath that this thing he'd seen was the same as the corpse in the casket—but alive now and breathing vileness, a revolting monster spawned in filth.

"Across the library, near the entrance to the servants' pantry," Hal snapped, "It couldn't have come through the door for we keep it locked and—"

He broke off, mouth sagging. The locked door was ajar.

Turner ran for the opening. The apparition seemingly had approached from that direction.

"Stay with your sister," he ordered Hal, then

was through the pantry and leaping down a long flight of steps into the darkness of the cellar.

Musty dankness smote him. He sprawled over a box, his gun sliding into the dark,

He struck a match, held it above his head. Slowly he recovered his gun, and stared with narrowed eyes at the electric meter. The disk, registering the power used, was spinning rapidly, far more swiftly than the entire mansion would use if each light were on, which was not the case.

"Ghosts," Turner muttered, "don't need light—maybe." Somewhere electricity was being consumed in quarters other than the mansion. That was certain.

He recalled that Frederick had been the architect of this sprawling house. It was very possible that hidden entrances and unknown rooms existed. They had to exist! It was the only explanation.

The thud of a falling body, a swiftly choked-off cry echoed thinly from upstairs.

Turner cursed, struggled on legs made of lead up the long stairway.

He skidded to a halt in the library—empty and lighted—and looked into the reception room—also empty. A log from the fireplace was burning a hole in the carpet in the middle of the room. The divan was upset. He called out, "Princess." Then, "Hal."

His voice reverberated emptily, mockingly. He stamped the fire.

MIND swirling, his nostrils quivering again to the heavy smell of death and vileness, he cursed himself for a fool for leaving the crippled Hal and the Princess alone.

He went to the hallway, ran up the semicircular stairs. Searched each room.

Women's garments were strewn heedlessly on the floor in two of the rooms. He found the shattered frame and photograph of Hal in one room; and one of the swarthy, oily-haired Prince standing upright on a dressing table in the other. Two jewel boxes—empty—were in each disordered room.

It was a puzzler. A walking corpse certainly would have no interest in jewels. That seemed fantastic. But the fact remained that it—or someone—had taken loose trinkets on previous

visits—and now had completed in full the rich plunder.

Sweat of desperation beaded his forehead. His clients were helpless now, puppets to the whims of a revolting monster with lascivious eyes and drooling mouth. One who struck recklessly and with lightning swiftness, either in desperation or contempt.

He returned downstairs, examined the thick walls and knew a baffled helplessness.

Only one lead was at hand—that of the spinning electric meter. That this mansion had hidden rooms above ground was impossible. It came to him, shockingly, that the mausoleum was above ground—and there a corpse had changed caskets for some inconceivable reason. He recalled the casket that had moved from its niche in the darkness—and the Princess' statement that her uncle's corpse had reached for her as it crawled from her father's resting place.

He cursed his growing terror, obtained a flash, and plunged into the dripping gloom of the path leading to the sepulchre. The bare foliage moved overhead in a macabre dance in the wind. The ornate door was swaying in grisly invitation, releasing the fetid smell of the unknown.

His torch swung along the white walls—and the corpse seemed to be standing, looking at him.

He remembered then that he had left the coffin on end. In the glare the sunken eyes of the yellowish face against the new satin resembled a modern mummy poised as if awaiting centuries-old revenge.

Turner steeled himself, raised his automatic and shattered the glass. The door of death leaped at him. Reluctantly he pushed forth a nervous hand, his shaking fingers pressed against the crossed hands of the corpse.

His hand came away tingling and powdered with dried flesh.

He swung his torch to the massive marble pieces that formed the walls and the back of the niche. They were set evenly, like house bricks, smooth, without apparent opening.

The braces holding the rollers were screwed into the marble, two oblong arms that extended to the bottom of the casket.

Ordinary enough steel, they were, except the left one, where a thin shaft of metal lay flush

along its top.

Turner braced his arm and shoved against the shaft. Nothing happened. A sidewise movement got no result. He yanked upward on it then—and the stone forming the crypt's rear turned slowly on its axis.

Turner drew a deep, shuddering breath. He understood now why the coffin had moved on its rollers during the brief spell of darkness when he had been in the mausoleum the first time.

The movement of the stone would force the casket to roll outward a few inches. Which could only mean that some monster had come out of the depths and made the stone move, had been preparing to attack Turner from the rear as he had examined the corpseless casket. He repressed a shudder; then moved his torch into the opening. He gasped.

Wide stone steps, spaced evenly, neatly, precisely, went steeply downward into the bowels of the earth.

Turner's eyes were narrow and apprehensive, his jaw a hard line of jutting muscle.

He pulled the casket far out on its rollers, braced it against the floor, crawled through the niche and swung his feet to the steps.

Flash in his left hand, gun in his right, he went downward, cautiously and swiftly, his every emotion screaming outrage and retreat.

THE passageway was wide enough for two men, but the ceiling of bare earth was low, causing Turner to move in a crouch, head bent forward. It was dug on an angle, left, going straight and levelly as an arrow in the direction of the mansion. The very levelness of it, since the mansion sat high upon a hill, told him that the quarters of the monstrous walking corpse were far beneath the cellar of the mansion

He plunged on, going deeper, and the walls and ceiling dripped water and became cold and foul.

He was totally unprepared for the turn and the upward shoot of the passageway. He had to struggle, his feet sliding in the mud; and the four walls narrowed gradually. Turner went to his knees and crawled, his flash getting dimmer and mud-smearred. Twice he thought he detected warm gusts of air.

A dull thud, a muttered curse sounded vaguely somewhere ahead. Turner tensed, jerked up his flash. It cracked against the low sidewall, went out.

The agonized scream—of a man—petulant, hopeless protest—of a woman—a fiendish, guttural rumble, sent Turner blundering blindly forward into the subterranean labyrinth.

His blood was ice; his nerves shrieked in warning. It would be the natural and logical thing to do to flee and summon help. But he had to go on—had to—if ever again he was to meet his own eyes in a mirror—meet them levelly and unashamedly.

He kept pushing his hands down, propelling his body forward. The down-draught warned him that the tunnel's end was near, beyond a slight turn. Light showed ahead.

Cautiously, he went forward. Then stark and abysmal terror of the supernatural rocked his senses. The panorama below was unforgettable.

There was an electric glow, like a flooding footlight, facing Turner, slanting at a dais in the dome-like cavern. In the faint illumination in back of the light were the bound bodies of Hal, the Prince and the woman, Elaine.

On the dais—as a throne—were two still bodies. One—a woman of alabaster whiteness, rouged gruesomely, agleam with countless jewels. Two—propped near the foot of her ornate chair—like a mute court jester—was the waxy, mud-smearred corpse of one of the brothers, shroudless. The two figures seemed to watch with rapt attention the revolting tableau being elated at the foot of the dais.

The corpse with the luminous death's head stood with one foot raised against the dais, the nude body of the Princess draped across its raised knee.

The small hands of the Princess were flaying futilely. And in her eyes there was that which Turner never had expected to see—an engulfing terror—and fear of this lascivious thing from the beyond, the corpse of Frederick Philips, nine years dead.

Hal Philips and the Prince, eyes agonized, were struggling unavailingly with their bonds. The soft Elaine, hair disheveled, scant clothing in tatters, was screaming like a lost soul gone

berserk.

The right hand of the corpse flickered as it moved over the body of the Princess, and its head gleamed as it bent to choke off her horrified cry, pressing its hot mouth to hers. Its clawed fingers ran across her white skin, leaving reddening welts, as it held her bare loveliness in an obscene caress.

Desperately, feverishly, Turner sought the way down into the cavern. There was a sheer drop of about six feet; and he realized that the tunnel served the double purpose of secret passageway as well as air vent. He didn't immediately locate the even, precise holes that made a natural ladder up the wall.

When he did, despair gripped him. He would have to struggle through the narrow opening, find the foothold and descend with his back to the monster. His movements were certain to be seen. The low floodlight bathed this wall, made it a brilliant backdrop to the throne.

He wanted to take the monster alive, tear away this macabre mask of mystery, have the inexplicable explained.

He became conscious that Frederick Philips was mouthing words with bestial delight, his voice unsteady with ecstasy—gloating and chuckling to the two still figures on the dais.

“—you're wearing your jewels now, wearing them for the last time—jewels that represent my fortune, jewels that made of me even a thief! Wear them, enjoy them for the last time. You'd accept them, my humble offerings—but never would you accept me, never—for eighteen long years—could I find favor in your eyes. Then you cheated me by dying. I knew I'd been a fool trying to win you. You remained in love with my brother.” His hot eyes swept hatefully to the still figure at the woman's feet.

“**B**UT I will not be made a fool,” his voice rose to throbbing shrillness. “You'll sit and you'll watch—helplessly—while I know triumph and satisfaction—at last. Love can turn to hate, adoration to revenge. She'll wear my jewels—but she'll earn them!”

Frederick Philips was mad—stark, raving mad. That went unquestioned. But that a madman could conceive this diabolic plan seemed improbable. Appeasement of sordid passion—and

revenge—weren't sufficient motives for this elaborate backdrop of supernatural horror.

Somewhere there was a directing guiding genius, compelling Frederick Philips to puppet-like brilliance.

Turner raised his mud-smeared automatic. Frederick Philips seemed unconscious of movement other than that of the Princess. His hands moved curvingly, gluttonously over her body even as his eyes glowed and he hammered out words at the two insensate things on the throne. He seemed to be trying to inflict unendurable mental agony.

“—and I kidnapped you. Dumbly, humbly, hopefully I worshipped you. Then you died, and all I wanted then was to torture you—destroy everything that represented you. Even in the other world—you'd know—and you'd suffer. But—” his left hand brushed the Princess' breast—”this one...she is too lovely to destroy. She is so much like you when you were alive, vibrantly young. The others will be disposed of as planned.”

A sudden squirm and a twist and the Princess avoided his grasp. She leaped upon the dais.

Frederick Philips roared, bounded around the dais, seized her arm and sent her sprawling backward in front of the figures of her mother and father. She fell heavily, lay there twisted, unmoving.

Turner's automatic roared. He saw the shrouded figure turn half-about, sag to a knee, his loathsome face sagging incredulously.

Turner never heard the second shot from behind the bound figure of Hal Philips.

He'd leaned from the tunnel to sight at Frederick Philips. A mighty weight seemed to strike along the left side of his head. He toppled forward and down.

A hazy consciousness clung. The fall seemed limitless. He felt his left arm snap like a matchstick. Elaine's screaming seemed a distant, roaring storm; the swift patter of heavy shoes across the cavern's floor were toy soldiers marching.

“Destroy them, fool! Destroy them!”

It was an odd voice, an enraged voice, yet dominant, authoritative, compelling.

“Not her—not her—never!” Frederick Philips' answer was pain-drenched, stubborn and

ominous.

A muttered curse, Frederick's scream of rage, a shot, the quick clash and thud of heavy bodies meeting.

Turner drove his brain into clarity. His arm was a hot iron, his head a throbbing maelstrom of sharp, aching confusion.

He remembered then, appalled. His swimming eyes focused on the dais.

Frederick Philips, a shoulder of his loathsome shroud drenched crimson from Turner's shot, was locked in mortal combat with a tall man dressed in conservative tweeds.

A savage blow that ripped the luminous mask along his jaw sent Frederick Philips stumbling up on the dais.

The man in tweeds went after him with awkward ruthlessness, hands outstretched. There was about him a savage desperation.

“Fool! You double-crossed me! I knew of your faked death, brought you back here, added fire to your frustrated hate of the woman you loved. I was a fool to trust you! A choice figure, a beautiful face—and you forget your intention to murder. The setting was perfect, too. The village had heard whispers of the corpse that prowled this estate. A wholesale wave of murder here would be laid to the corpse's—”

Frederick's hand—with a madman's power—jarred against the figure of the seated woman. It rose from the chair, almost toppled on the man in tweeds.

TURNER saw then that it was a statue, a remarkable likeness of a woman who resembled the Princess. With the movement of the statue the corpse at its feet swayed and toppled. Only an unseen catch on the throne chair kept the statue from crashing from the dais.

Turner got to his knees; his right hand fumbled blindly for the automatic.

He saw it there—far away in mid-floor—where it had skidded. And near it was a revolver, obviously knocked from the unknown's hand by Philips' unexpected attack.

A feeling of absolute futility, of utter hopelessness assailed him. He saw the fingers wrap themselves around Frederick Philips' throat, bring the wounded man to his knees, mouth open,

tongue protruding.

Turner started to crawl unsteadily for the guns. A dozen times the pain of his arm and head seemed too great to bear. But he had to reach the guns. One of these crazed beasts locked in deadly combat was certain to assert superiority within a few seconds. No matter which one—an orgy of murder was certain to follow.

From the corner of his eye he saw Frederick Philips jerk upward with his head, butting the man's chin, knocking him backward. Then he was weaving on his feet, and the glinting metal of his right hand thudded sharply against the man's chin.

The man went back; lay still.

Frederick Philips cursed, then howled. "You swine. I see through your slick game now. Leading me on, arranging this for me—thinking I would kill all four. Then you would kill me and make a hero of yourself, blame everything on me. Then my brother's money would go to charity. And you, his smooth lawyer—George Arud—who arranged the will somehow would benefit. Perhaps through some non-existent charities, dummy agencies formed by you!"

Turner understood it all then. It seemed logical enough.

But it was unimportant.

The guns—they were important.

He dimly heard Frederick Philips screech, saw the swaying madman reach out a hand to steady himself, then leap forward.

Certainly Frederick Philips never knew that that steady hand had braced itself against the statue, and started it moving even as he jumped before it. Certainly he didn't hear the heavy thud of it smashing his bones and pulping his flesh.

Weak with shuddering revulsion, Turner got his hand on the familiar butt of the automatic. His mind cleared somewhat.

It seemed certain that Frederick Philips had faked his own death. He had found someone in Paris who resembled him, had left this unfortunate individual in Paris when he had kidnapped the Princess' mother. Then the man had been murdered. Attorney Arud some way had found out about it. Upon Maurice Philips' death he had made valuable use of this knowledge,

On legs made of dragging rubber he made his way across the cavern to the form of George Arud. Handcuffs clicked. Then Turner made for the rear of the bizarre room, certain he would find an entrance that led up through the walls and into the reality and security of the library. He was right. He made five trips to the library.