



Paid In Blood

The stairs creaked under him as he followed the figure ahead

By Anthony Clemens

JOHN CRANDALL breathed a sigh of relief when a zigzag shaft of lightning illuminated the rain-swept night and showed him the Griggs house at the top of the hill. His headlights were out—there was a “short” somewhere. And no wonder, after driving thirty miles from the nearest village through that deluge. He had not known there was such sparsely populated country in upstate New York.

As the car skidded to the door, the motor sputtered, coughed, and died. He cursed. He had known the gas was low, but he hadn’t passed a single service station since leaving the village.

He turned up his collar, felt of the automatic in his topcoat pocket, then opened the door of

the car and made a dash for it through the downpour.

They must have heard him coming, for the door of the house was swung open to allow him to slide in, bringing along a gust of the storm. The one who admitted him was a leathery old man in the seventies. His hair was plentiful, but pure white. Slate-gray eyes looked keenly out of a weathered countenance, the skin of which was seared into deep-set wrinkles.

As the door closed, Crandall’s gaze swept down the long hall, and despite the bright lights, a peculiar, disturbing feeling swept over him.

“I’m Crandall,” he announced, “from Mr. Avery’s office.”

“Aye,” the old man boomed, “ye’ll be the

investigator. Mr. Avery is waitin' fer ye—they're all waitin' fer ye—" he lowered his voice, "—and fer death!"

Crandall looked up at the old man, and he felt a queer constriction about his heart "Why—have there been any more—deaths?"

"No. Not since Mr. Avery phoned ye." The old man pointed a bony forefinger at him. "But mark ye, lad, there'll be more tonight. Right after Avery talked to ye on the phone, it went dead. The wires must be cut som'eres. We can't get the police, we can't get the doctor, an' ol' Phineas Griggs has took hisself another stroke. He's paralyzed—can't talk or move. Ye'll get no sleep tonight, lad."

He turned to lead the way down the hall.

"I thought at first," said Crandall, "that you were Mr. Griggs."

The gaunt old fellow laughed shortly. "No. An' I wouldn't be ol' Phineas fer all the pearls of Ceylon. No, sir, I wouldn't be in his boots tonight! I'm Quincy—Joshua Quincy. Used to be his mate on the *Nancy Griggs* thirty-odd years ago. An' now when I look him up, thinkin' maybe the two of us could be together a little in our last years, I find him paralyzed, and I find this terrible plague on his household. It's a retribution, I tell you, a retribution!"

They had reached the end of the corridor, and now turned into an old-fashioned sitting room. Crandall saw a strange group—three men and two women. One of the men was Frank Avery, his employer. Avery was old Griggs's lawyer. Crandall had done some work for him in the past.

Avery arose and greeted him. The elderly attorney seemed distraught, nervous, in the grip of a gloomy mood. "Glad you made it, John," he said. "It's a load off my shoulders. We can't get to the police—there are two cars in the garage and they've both been tampered with." His shoulders sagged wearily. "It would have been too much for me to cope with alone."

Crandall looked around the room. "All right,

suppose you introduce me, and then tell me what it's all about. You didn't tell me much on the phone, but I gathered someone's been killed."

One of the two women raised her voice in a wildly hysterical laugh. "Killed!" she mouthed between spasms. "Killed!" The second word was uttered in a shriek. Then suddenly she buried her head in her hands while terrible sobs racked her plump body. A man with a patch over one eye, who stood beside her chair, shook her roughly. "Stop it, Sis!" he growled.

Avery whispered to Crandall, "That's Georgia Skane, Phineas Griggs's daughter. It's her husband who's dead upstairs."

"Who's the gentle guy with the eye-shade?" Crandall asked.

"That's Anselm Griggs, her brother. He was a captain during the World War. Since then he's been—adventuring. Come now. You must meet old Phineas."

HE led him across the room to the wheel chair where Phineas Griggs sat. The old man was motionless, except for his eyes, which seemed to strain against the prison of their helpless body. He was flabby, double-chinned. The skin of his hands, which rested along the chair arms, was white and soft.

Crandall shuddered inwardly at the thought that this hulk of a man had once been the master of a ship that ventured into the distant ports of the world. He nodded at Avery's introduction, and threw a glance at the door where Joshua Quincy stood. Mentally he compared the invalid to the man who had once been his mate. They were both about the same age—probably well into the seventies—but what a difference!

He shook hands with Captain Anselm Griggs, and bowed to Mrs. Georgia Skane, the woman who had just sobbed hysterically. There was left one more woman. She was a girl in her twenties, black-haired, small, and very pretty. There was a marked resemblance to Anselm

Griggs, and Crandall learned that she was his daughter, Mary.

She arose to shake hands with him. "We are all sure you will do something about this, Mr. Crandall," she told him. "Mr. Avery has nothing but praise for you."

Crandall smiled grimly. "I'll do my best, miss," he said, "as soon as I find out what it's all about."

Avery sighed. "I suppose it's time to—take you upstairs. Come along." At the door he said to the others, "I will ask you all to remain in this room till we return. It may be safer—in case there is further danger." He crooked a finger at old Joshua. "You, Quincy, see that everything is locked up downstairs here."

Quincy nodded "I've made the rounds once tonight, but I'll do it again to make sure."

Following the old lawyer up the creaking staircase, Crandall felt that there was something sinister enveloping this lonely house and its occupants. He sensed that Avery had a nameless dread of going up to view the dead body.

Avery was saying, "I've seen death in many forms in my long life, John. But this that I'm going to show you now—" There were beads of sweat on his forehead. "—I'm almost afraid to look at it again." He stopped and put his hand on Crandall's sleeve. "John, Richard Skane's body is upstairs in his bathtub—and there's no blood left in the body!"

Crandall's eyes opened wide, then he quickly veiled them. "Did he bleed to death?"

"There's no blood in the bathtub!"

Crandall took his employer's elbow and urged him up. "Let's look. He probably bled to death and the blood drained out of the tub."

Avery shook his head. "There's more to it than that, John. Wait till you see."

Crandall asked, "How many people live in this house?"

"All of them that you saw downstairs—except Captain Anselm. He—wanders."

"He's vaguely familiar to me, somehow—

that Anselm. Did he serve in Palestine during the war?"

Avery threw him a startled glance. "That's right. I forgot you were a major in the Intelligence there. Yes, he did. That's probably where you knew him."

Crandall snapped his fingers. "Of course I remember him. It's that patch over his eye that threw me off. I never knew his name, but I recall seeing an officer standing before a line of soldiers. And a brigadier was tearing epaulets from his shoulders!"

Avery nodded grimly. "It was hushed up back here. Let's not talk about it. It can have no bearing on this business."

Crandall said, "Maybe not!"

THEY had reached the upper hall. Avery opened a door and they went through a bedroom into the adjoining bathroom. Avery bent down and pulled away the sheet from the thing that lay in the tub, and Crandall, for all his self-possession, felt the hair on his scalp tingle with a dreadful chilliness.

The body was merely a bag of bones. Not a drop of blood was left in it. The eyes were closed, the cheeks hung flabby and white.

"That," said Avery in a whisper, "is all that is left of Richard Skane—Phineas Griggs's son-in-law!"

Crandall bent over the tub. The entire surface of the body was covered by minute little punctures. A rope hung loosely about the wrists, and there was a knotted handkerchief around the neck.

Crandall said, "He was tied and gagged and put in here."

Avery bent beside him and asked, "What do you make of those punctures? They look like pin pricks. Can you imagine what agony he must have endured? Look, his skin is covered with them!" Involuntarily he glanced behind him. "The fiend that did it must be in the house yet!"

Crandall kicked something with his toe. It was the bathtub stopper. It lay on the floor with about six feet of string attached to it. "Whoever did it took the time to pull out the stopper and let the blood drain off. But I can't see why more of it didn't stick to the tub. There are only a few drops here and there."

The old lawyer stroked his thinning hair with a scrawny hand. "Perhaps he was killed elsewhere, and carried here. And those pin pricks—"

Crandall laughed harshly. "Draw yourself a picture of anyone carrying that bag of bones! No, Mr. Avery, he was killed and tortured right in this tub. And those punctures covering his skin aren't pin pricks. Notice that they come in sets of three, like the three points of a triangle."

Avery shivered. "You're right, John. I hadn't noticed that." Impulsively, fearfully, he clutched the detective's sleeve. "John, there's something terrible—something horrible—hiding in this house!" He fumbled in his pocket and produced a crumpled letter which he handed to Crandall. It consisted of four lines of block capitals crudely printed in pencil:

PHINEAS GRIGGS:

Remember the Brotherhood of Hirudo? No one will live to enjoy the wealth you took from Ceylon! They will die—the way I did. And you last.

There was no signature. Crandall looked from the note to the body of Richard Griggs. "If it weren't for that," he pointed to the tub, "you could call it the letter of a crank—harmless. Especially that crack—'They will die the way I did.' When did this thing arrive?"

Avery placed a shaking forefinger on the letter. His voice was low. "That wasn't written by any crank. It must carry a dreadful meaning for old Phineas Griggs. It came two weeks ago, and when he read it, he just collapsed. He's been paralyzed ever since. Mary—that's his granddaughter, the girl you met downstairs—took it. She didn't show it to the others. What

with taking care of the old man and running the household she had plenty on her mind. But when this happened, she thought of the letter first thing, and gave it to me."

"How do you come to be here?"

"I came out this morning with Phineas' will. He insisted that I bring it down from the safe in our office—wanted me to read it to the family so they'd know where everybody stood. That was two weeks ago, before he got the stroke, and this is the first chance I've had to come."

They were startled by the creaking of the boards in the corridor outside. Avery jumped. Crandall snapped around, his hand going involuntarily to his coat pocket where he had placed the automatic on removing the raincoat. He relaxed when he saw that it was old Joshua Quincy.

THE old sailor was tall. He filled the doorway. He kept his eyes studiously from the horror in the bathtub. "They couldn't wait fer ye," he said. "Georgia Skane was set fer gettin' another fit o' hysterics. So Anselm took her to a bedroom on the ground floor. They've all gone to their rooms, and I wheeled Phineas to his'n." His eyes glowed somberly. "They're just waitin'—to see who it'll git next!"

Avery said, "I hope they all locked their doors?"

Quincy laughed unpleasantly. "Much good it'll do 'em if that thing means to get 'em. An' besides, this old house is full o' hidden doors. It's ninety years old. There ain't a room you cain't git into from two-three ways!"

Crandall had been silent. Now he asked Quincy, "Have you any idea what killed Richard Griggs?"

Quincy shook his head. For the first time he glanced at the body. "It ain't human, me lad, I'll tell you that. It ain't human!"

Crandall grunted derisively. "Don't start to tell me there's a ghost in the house!"

Quincy flushed. He said earnestly, "There's

more in this world than you c'n feel an' smell, me lad. You're a youngster. If you'd been around the world in ships more times'n you could count, like me—if you'd seen the things I'd seen—” He turned suddenly to Avery. “Did ye tell him about the ha'nt we saw?”

“Ha'nt?” Crandall repeated it incredulously.

“Ghost, if ye like that better. Mr. Avery an' Miss Mary saw it too.”

Crandall looked at Avery for confirmation.

Avery nodded. “We saw it, John. Right after we found Richard's body here. Mary and I came out of this room and there was a shadowy figure that seemed to be dragging one foot—lame-like, you know. Mary cried out, and the figure turned around. It was in the act of slipping into the last room at the end of the hall. We got a glimpse of its face.” Avery shuddered. “God, I never want to see it again! It was gaunt, hollow-cheeked, and the lips seemed to snarl. Then, even as we watched, petrified, it disappeared into the room.”

Avery went on, indicating the tall sailor, “Quincy came out of the room right behind us. He caught a glimpse of the figure and dashed after it. Anselm came up, and we searched every room—found absolutely nothing. Anselm laughed at us and said we were overwrought, that it was a figment of our imagination. Perhaps he's right.” The lawyer looked sheepish. “I'm getting old, and Mary is a high-strung girl, after all. We might have imagined it.”

“But I didn't!” Quincy boomed. “I only saw a shadow slippin' in thet there room, but it was suthin', all right!”

“Any idea,” Crandall asked, “what it was?”

Quincy's eyes were reminiscent. They seemed to be gazing back over the years. “Aye, young feller, that I have.” He lowered his voice as if fearful that the paralytic downstairs' might hear him. “It was thirty—no thirty-one years ago when I sailed as mate with Cap'n Griggs. We had a seaman by the name of Fries—Ed

Fries. He talked back to the cap'n, an' Griggs hit him with a belayin' pin— hit him in the head. He didn't die. Fries didn't, but we had no such things as a ship's doctor in those days, an' he lay in his bunk, ravin' delirious for weeks. When he got up and around again, he dragged his right foot— never had the use of it no more.”

“What of it?” Crandall asked impatiently.

Joshua went on as if he hadn't heard. “When we got to port, a doctor examined Ed Fries. He said that Ed would never walk right again, that Griggs had struck some nerve or suthin' in his brain—a nerve that controlled his leg muscles. Well, you should of seen the look in Ed's face when the doctor told him that. If ever you've seen pure, undiluted hate, that was it. He just stands there an' says, ‘I'll make him pay, I will, if it takes a lifetime!’ We left him there for treatment, an' I never saw him again. But he was the kind of a man that remembers. An' from what Mr. Avery an' Miss Mary tells of this shadow's face, I'd say it was Fries come at last fur his pay!”

Crandall began to say, “Well—”

But he never finished his sentence. For from below came a woman's fearful shriek!

It filled the house and echoed back from the old walls in a dreadful peal of horror.

Avery's face became pallid. Quincy seemed rooted to the spot where he stood.

CRANDALL acted swiftly. He leaped through the doorway, brushing the sailor aside. He skidded down the flight of stairs to the main hall. When he reached it, his gun was out. The shriek was repeated again and again. It came from one of the rooms in the rear. Another door opened, and Anselm Griggs came out with a gun in his hand, seeking the source of the screams. “It's Mary—my daughter!” he shouted to Crandall.

There, was a momentary silence, then another shriek. Griggs crossed the hall to the

door from behind which the sounds came. He jerked it viciously and it opened. Crandall shouldered in beside him.

Mary Griggs came stumbling out of the bathroom door at the opposite side of the room. Her face was drained of color, her eyes were glazed. She would have fallen had not Anselm caught her. She didn't faint. She just clung to him. "Daddy!" she sobbed in a whisper. "Aunt Georgia—in her bathtub! Like Uncle Richard! No blood in her!" She shuddered. "I came in to see if she was all right—and found her there!"

Crandall sprang across and into the bathroom. He stopped short beside the tub, his eyes bleak. Georgia Skane—what remained of her—lay there. Her skin was covered by minute punctures like those on her husband's body upstairs. It sagged from the bloodless flesh. There was rope around her wrists and a gag in her mouth. Both sagged now, the skin having receded from the rope. Richard's eyes had been closed; hers were open, and mirrored indescribable agony.

Crandall turned away bleakly. His knuckles were white around the stock of his automatic. Avery and Quincy came in. They looked at the body. Avery staggered a little. Quincy supported him.

Crandall looked around the bedroom. He picked up from the floor a pink nightdress. It was torn in several places—apparently ripped from Georgia Skane's body before she had been placed in the tub.

He went over to the bed on which Anselm had laid his daughter. "Do you feel strong enough to tell us what happened, Miss Griggs?" he asked gently.

Mary Griggs nodded weakly.

Old Joshua Quincy broke in before she could begin. "Phineas!" he exclaimed. "Anybody see if he's all right?"

"Where is he?" Crandall asked.

"I wheeled him to his room."

"All right. You better go and bring him back

to the living room. We'll keep everybody together from now on."

Quincy turned to obey. Crandall said to Avery, "Go with him, Mr. Avery."

The lawyer threw Crandall a quizzical look. "You suspect—?"

The detective shrugged. "I don't know whom to suspect first. You'd better go along just to be safe."

Avery hurried after Quincy. Anselm and the detective supported Mary Griggs between them, across the hall into the living room. In a few moments Joshua Quincy wheeled the old invalid into the room. Avery came behind them.

Crandall looked at Phineas Griggs. The man sat there flabbily helpless while Joshua placed him in a corner of the room. But his eyes! His eyes seemed intent on the detective, straining, trying to give him some message!

CRANDALL wasted no time on preliminaries. "My friends," he said, "either one of you is a murderous fiend, or else there is someone hidden in this house!"

Anselm Griggs looked up at him, his eyes flashing. Joshua Quincy stood listlessly, his hand on Phineas' shoulder. Mary Griggs shrank into her chair. Avery cleared his throat and polished his glasses.

Crandall went on, "It's too bad Mr. Phineas Griggs can't talk at this time. I think he could name the killer!" He saw a gleam in Phineas' eyes, and knew that he was right. "Since Mr. Griggs cannot talk, I am going to ask Mr. Avery to read us the will that he brought out here today at his client's request. It may throw some light on this mystery. We will at least learn who gains by wiping out this family!"

Avery dug a long envelope out of his pocket. "I have the will here," he said. "But I don't know that I have the authority to read it to you."

"I'm sure," Crandall insisted, "that Mr. Griggs would want you to read it. Besides, you

told me yourself that it was the purpose of your visit here!"

"All right," the lawyer agreed reluctantly. He ripped open the envelope and extracted a single sheet of legal cap. Glancing apologetically at Phineas Griggs, he adjusted his glasses and said, "I'll skip the preliminaries and read the list of bequests."

"Go ahead," Crandall agreed.

Avery read in a dry, nervous voice from the last will and testament of the man who sat in the wheel chair, still alive, yet incapable of moving a muscle.

"I bequeath the sum of fifty thousand dollars to my old mate, Joshua Quincy, who sailed with me for two decades. If his whereabouts are unknown at the time of my death, I direct my executors to spare no efforts to locate him.

"I bequeath to one Edward Fries, a sailor, the sum of twenty thousand dollars as partial amends for a terrible wrong I did him. My executors are directed to make every effort to find him, too.

"I bequeath to my son, Anselm, and to my daughter, Georgia, the residue of my estate.

"In the event that any of the above legatees predecease me, their surviving children shall share and share alike.

"If the said legatees shall predecease me and leave no surviving children, then the money shall be paid to my attorney, Frank Avery, to establish a charitable institution for medical research."

Avery stopped reading amid a pregnant silence.

The voice of Anselm Griggs cut bitterly into the quietness. He mimicked Crandall's last words. "We have, at least, learned who gains by wiping out this family!" He was staring intently at the lawyer.

Avery's face blanched. He stammered, "What do you mean?"

Anselm strode up to him till he towered over

the little attorney. His jaw jutted vindictively. "If we should all die," he said slowly, "you would have the exclusive handling of the entire estate—for charitable purposes! I bet charity would begin at home!"

JOSHUA QUINCY mouthed a thunderous oath. In two strides he was beside Avery, who shrank from him. "So you're the one that's been killin' us off!" the sailor shouted. "One by one, gettin' us all, so you can have that money!" He turned a livid face to Crandall. "An' you, too, ye smirkin' Sherlock! Ye're in this with him!" His great hands opened and he came at Crandall.

Anselm's daughter, Mary, sat still, eyes wide on the detective to see what he would do. Old Phineas, too, watched him out of anxious eyes in a motionless body.

Suddenly an automatic appeared in Crandall's hand. Its barrel glinted dangerously. He drawled, "Take it easy, Matey."

Quincy stopped, a foot from the detective. "Go on," he uttered hoarsely, "kill us all an' be through with it. Then share the money with that shyster!"

Crandall barked, "You, Captain Anselm Griggs! Why did you have to start this crazy sailor off? There's enough hate in this house as it is! Have you forgotten the intruder that Mr. Avery and Miss Griggs and you, Quincy, saw?"

Quincy muttered, "Ye're right! An' he mentions Fries in the will!" His eyes regarded old Griggs with reflective somberness.

The paralyzed captain was straining with pathetic futility against the bonds of his helpless body. His eyes were straining from their sockets in excitement.

Mary Griggs came up behind Crandall and whispered, "We didn't tell him about that shadow we saw. Poor granddad!"

She went over and put her arm around the old man's shoulders and then stroked his hair.

Crandall still had his gun out, though

Quincy had relaxed. The detective said, "There's only one thing to do. We must have the police here—and a doctor to determine the cause of these deaths. One of us must walk to the village. Who'll it be?"

Quincy raised his eyes penitently to Crandall. "I'll go," he said. "I'm used to weather."

Mary Griggs said, "You don't have to go to the village, Josh. If you go down the other side of the hill from the road there's a farmhouse about two miles away. They have a phone."

Quincy went to the door. Before going out he turned and spoke to old Phineas Griggs. "Don't worry none, Phineas. I'll be back in no time—an' we'll end this business!"

When he had gone, Crandall said to the others, "Now I want to be alone in here with Mr. Phineas Griggs for a while. Suppose Miss Mary goes in the kitchen and makes some coffee—it'll come in handy, I know. And you two gentlemen go with her, Mr. Anselm Griggs and Mr. Avery."

Anselm said, "And leave you alone with Dad? No!"

Crandall pocketed his gun and strode over to him. His eyes blazed. "Look here, Captain Griggs. Perhaps you recall my name—Major John Crandall. I was attached to Intelligence in Palestine. My name was pretty well known then."

Griggs looked at the floor. "I recall the name. I didn't connect you—"

"Naturally," said the detective, "after the lapse of years. Now perhaps you will have the kindness—"

Mary broke in. "Father, please. I am sure Mr. Crandall can be trusted—fully." She flushed prettily and avoided the detective's eyes.

Anselm said, "You're right, Mary. I'm a fool." Then to Crandall, "I'm sorry. Major. Of course we'll go." He stepped up closer. His one eye glowed. "I know you recall that—incident

in Palestine. Thanks for not bringing it up before Mary."

Crandall nodded in understanding. As they started to leave, he asked, "Are you armed, Captain? Don't forget that there may be a dangerous fiend somewhere in the house. This Ed Fries—"

Anselm nodded. He produced a businesslike automatic. "I would like to see that devil."

Crandall said, "Be on your guard. Stick together. We know where everybody is in this house now. If you see a strange shadow, shoot first and ask questions afterward!"

Mary shuddered and put her hands before her face. "When I think of Aunt Georgia—her dead body!"

Anselm put his arm around her shoulder and led her out.

At the doorway, Avery turned and said to the motionless Captain Griggs, "Have no fear, Captain. Mr. Crandall can be fully trusted."

CRANDALL sighed when the three left, and crossed the room to old Phineas. "Now, Mr. Griggs, let's get to work."

Griggs's eyes rested on him brightly as he came over to the wheel chair. "If you can't talk, you can do something else—the others didn't think of it. You can move your eyes."

The old man's eyes were burning intensely, trying, it seemed, to convey an urgent message. They glared at him, then moved quickly to focus on a spot on the wall opposite. Back and forth they moved. Crandall followed their direction, and walked over to the row of bookcases along the wall.

He turned to Griggs. "Are you trying to tell me that the answer to our mystery is in this bookcase?"

Griggs's eyes sparkled. Crandall scanned the books closely. Suddenly his hand shot out and seized one of them. It was a leather-bound diary. He saw that Griggs was straining in his chair. Those eyes, with distended pupils, were

literally shouting at him. "So this is the clue," he said.

There was a line scrawled across the cover; "Diary of Captain Phineas Griggs." There was a leather band stretching from edge to edge of each cover, and a small padlock dangled from one end. "With your permission, sir," Crandall said. He smashed the lock with the butt of his gun. The book fell open at a page in the center. He read at random, and in a moment forgot the helpless invalid whose avid eyes were following his every motion. The large, vigorous handwriting was easy to read.

"Sept. 28, 1902

Off the Island of Ceylon

"Well, I've left him there. God, what else could I do? He was wounded, and I had a fortune in pearls. I don't call it stealing. They had no right to them either, for that matter. It's him, I'm worried about. I saw them capture him. And I left him in their hands—alive!

"It can't be helped. We've weighed anchor. I couldn't go back now, if I wanted to. But I keep seeing pictures of what they're doing to him!"

Crandall turned the page. There was no writing, but a clipping torn from a book had been pasted in. It was short.

"In Ceylon, in some of the forests and alone the river banks, it is impossible to take a step without being attacked by them. Not only do they creep along the ground seeking what they may devour—they are on every bush and tree, from which they drop on the head and neck of the passer-by; nay, they even spring to meet their victim."

Underneath the clipping was written in pencil:

"And when they finish with you, your body is a bloodless bag of bones. They suck you dry! And I left him to that fate! The Brotherhood of Hirudo will have his blood sucked out of him, while I enjoy the pearls. Hirudo—what a name for a leech!"

Crandall slammed the book shut. Of course—leeches! That explained the peculiar

triangular marks on the bodies. He should have thought of that before. In Palestine many soldiers had been killed by the leeches. Ceylon was not the only spot in the world where they festered.

The voracious parasites had three triangular teeth in their mouths. They made an incision in the skin, then fastened on with their suckers and clung till their crops were full of a victim's blood. Then they dropped off, bloated. Fifty leeches no longer than a man's index finger could drain a body of blood in fifteen minutes!

But who? Who was the fiend that had envisaged such a horrible death for a family? Feverishly he opened the book, forgetful of Griggs's unwavering eyes focused on him, forgetful of the storm that battered against the house.

And suddenly the lights flickered and went out. The room was plunged into absolute, palpitating darkness. He got out his flashlight, and the beam penciled the features of old Phineas. They were contorted with terror! The shock had released his paralyzed muscles. Crandall saw his jaw working. He was trying to talk, to cry out, but no words came. Saliva drooled from the corners of his mouth.

And then Crandall's skin tingled as a shiver of cold ran up his spine. For from the direction of the kitchen came the voice of Mary Griggs, raised in a fearsome scream! Only once, that scream, and then silence, followed by the thud of a falling body.

Crandall's gun was out. He left the old man in the wheel chair and dashed into the corridor. He flashed his light down the hall and caught the shadow of a huge figure coming out of the kitchen. He was about to let his automatic belch, but he caught his finger in time and lowered the gun. For the figure was carrying on its shoulder the inert body of Mary Griggs. The beam of light had framed her face momentarily.

CRANDALL launched himself forward. The figure with the girl's body leaped up the stairs to the upper floor. Crandall sprinted after it. As he swung around the bannister, his flashlight swept the kitchen through the open door, showing him two bodies lying on the floor. One was the white-haired Avery, and it stirred under the light. The other he didn't have time to recognize.

The stairs creaked under him as he followed the figure ahead. At the top of the stairs, the figure dropped the girl from his shoulder. At the same time he dropped a box he had been holding in his left hand. Crandall heard the rending of cardboard as the box broke. At the same moment he threw himself to one side as a gun belched in the hand of the man above him. A slug passed too close for comfort. His instinctive move had saved him.

Crandall threw up his gun and fired. The figure staggered backward, stumbled, and collapsed. Crandall knew he had hit him in the shoulder. He threw his light on the man and saw the pain-contorted face of Joshua Quincy!

He pocketed the gun that Quincy had dropped, and played the light on Quincy's face.

The old sailor stared up at him and winced. "All right," he gasped. "You got me. But I'd have killed every damn' one of 'em with a little more time!"

"But why, man? Why the leeches?" Crandall demanded.

Quincy screwed his face into a grimace. "Old Phineas. I was his mate. We stole pearls from the Brotherhood—of Hirudo. I was wounded. He—left me in the lurch. Got away with the pearls. I was caught—and they gave me the leech torture." His thin lips set in a grin. "But I didn't die! I got away. I vowed Phineas' family would never enjoy the wealth we had stolen together. It took me thirty years, but I caught up with him!"

Quincy's eyes began to close. He was not hit mortally, but the loss of blood was

weakening him.

Crandall shook him roughly, and the pain jerked his eyes open.

"What about that ghost?" Crandall demanded. "What about this Ed Fries that Mary and Avery saw?"

Joshua Quincy's lips opened and slowly spread into a sickly smile. "It was Fries, all right. I brought him here. I found him in Java and brought him here." He coughed, and his face showed a twinge of pain, but he went on. "I promised I'd let him get his revenge!" He laughed weakly. "I figgered I'd kill off the family an' then put the blame on him."

"Where is he now?" Crandall demanded.

Joshua grinned mirthlessly. "I had him hiding in the cellar. When I went out, I was supposed to go to the village. But instead, I stole back in the cellar. I stabbed him. I figgered I could say later that I'd met up with him and killed him in self-defense. Then I pulled the fuses an' come up to the kitchen." His head dropped back weakly.

Crandall's mouth was set in a grim line as he turned to the girl. She had fainted. He picked her up and carried her down the stairs. He took her into the kitchen. His flashlight showed him Avery with a bloody head, supporting Anselm Griggs. Avery set Anselm in a chair and took the girl from him.

Crandall searched around in the closets and found a box of candles. He lit a couple and placed them on the table. By their light, he poured water over the girl's face. Anselm watched dazedly while she regained consciousness.

She opened her eyes.

Crandall said to Avery, "Take my flashlight. Go in and tell Phineas Griggs that everything is all right. We've got the murderer!"

Anselm shouted, "You did? Who was it? We didn't hear a thing after the lights went out. Then someone struck me on the head. He must have knocked out Avery too, and dragged Mary

out!”

“It’s Quincy,” said Crandall. “He never went to that farmhouse. He stole back and pulled out the fuses, then came up to the kitchen. He was sure set on wiping out your family!”

Avery went out with the flashlight. The girl was still dazed. Her eyes were losing their glassy expression, though.

“Where’s Quincy?” Anselm asked.

“Upstairs—wounded in the shoulder?”

“Won’t he get away?”

Crandall allowed himself a grin. “When you get hit by a slug from this little plaything,” he tapped his pocket, “you don’t want to go any place. You just lie down and kind of pass out for awhile.”

Avery shuffled back. His eyes were dull. “Old Phineas,” he said slowly, “is no more. The shock.”

Mary began to sob. Crandall patted her shoulder and looked across at Anselm, “Sorry, old man,” he said.

Mary Griggs said, “My leg. I must have hurt it.” She reached down, and quickly drew her hand back with a startled cry. Crandall looked, and swore. He bent to her leg and yanked off the slimy thing that clung there. It came away with a “phut” of yielding suction, leaving three red

spots like the points of a triangle that showed through the sheer stocking.

He threw the thing to the other end of the room. Anselm had half risen from his chair. “A leech!” he cried. “That’s how they died—Richard and Georgia!”

Crandall jumped up. He said, “Damn!” He had just remembered the box that Joshua Quincy had dropped when he let the girl fall. He remembered hearing the box break.

He snatched the flash light from Avery and raced up the stairs. He stopped at the top. After a moment, he turned away. He brushed viciously at a repulsive thing that leaped from the bannister and clung to his hand. It fell away leaving the three red pin points.

When he came down, they looked at him questioningly. He told them.

“Quincy. He must have fainted from the wound. He had a box of leeches with him. I guess he was going to use them on this little girl. His system was to let them sate themselves on the blood of his victim. When they were full, they fall away. Then he’d let the water run and the little things would be washed down the drain. There’d be no trace of them.

“Well, his box of leeches broke, up there. They went to work on him— and a death that he escaped thirty years ago caught up with him.”