



# The ANGRY DEAD

A Complete Novelette of Weird Slaughter

By CHANDLER H. WHIPPLE

Author of "Son of Darkness" "Curse of the Harcourts," etc.

*In his upraised hand  
he held a razor-  
sharp cleaver*

## CHAPTER I *The Room of the Bier*

MARCIA didn't tell me much over the telephone—only that her father was dead, had died suddenly, and that she wanted me to drive her out to their home in Jersey at once. I was astounded. Graham Waite dead! Why, not three weeks before I had seen and talked with him; he was then in the best of health, for all his seventy years, sound in mind and body.

He had told me then—it was the night Marcia and I had received his blessing on our engagement—that he was just beginning to live. Coming from a man who had knocked about a good deal in his time, from Singapore to Suez and back again, and had managed to accumulate a modest fortune through prospecting and trading in those remote places, that sounded rather odd—but I knew he meant it. He had bought a comfortable country place in the rolling New Jersey hills; and there he meant to settle down with his wife to a

graceful, quiet life. Now he was dead.

The whole thing, mingled though it was with anxiety and sympathy for Marcia, seemed to form in my mind a faintly sinister pattern. I couldn't tell why; yet I felt it. Even when, a little later, I was holding Marcia very close, as she wept and I tried vainly to comfort her, I still felt it.

The sun was setting over the hills to the westward, and we were less than an hour's drive from the Waite home, when at last Marcia spoke. The words came very clearly.

"You see, Jerry," she said, "father killed himself."

My hands gripped the wheel of the roadster tightly.

"What!" I burst out. "Killed—but Marcia, he couldn't have! He was happy—He had everything to live for."

"Yes," she said. "I thought so, too. But he shot himself."

"It isn't possible!" I protested. "Unless—unless— Could anything have happened—in the

past week?"

"We don't know." Her voice was very low now. "I guess we never will. You see, he was alone. Jim had been away for the past two weeks on a fishing trip. And mother had gone to visit friends in Connecticut. Dad had urged her to go. It—it was almost as if the whole thing had been planned—"

"The servants?" I said. "Did they notice any change in him?"

"They—mother said that they—"

Abruptly, Marcia screamed. I didn't find out what the servants had said.

At the same time she screamed, I saw what she had seen—a big blue car swinging around the curve at a vicious speed and coming straight for us!

The sun-glare blinded me. I tried to swerve our roadster off the paving. Then something struck me in the face with stunning force, and I was breathing in choked gasps. We had gotten off the road and had come to a stop in the shallow ditch. The other car had raced on.

"Are you hurt, Jerry?" came Marcia's frightened voice.

"Not at all," I said. I turned, saw that she was unharmed.

"The—the other car," she said. "It looked like father's—the big sedan. And I'm sure it was Franklin, the butler, driving. I wonder if—"

She broke off short, gasped.

"Darling!" she cried. "You are hurt. You're bleeding—"

I felt my face. She was right. When the car stopped, my head had gone forward into the sunshade, and I had some rather nasty cuts about the nose and mouth.

I wasn't thinking of them, though, as I started the car. I was thinking of the strange feeling I'd had as the other car came upon us.

You see, I'd been positive that we couldn't avoid a crash; yet we had done it. And it seemed as if suddenly we had been picked up from the road and set in the ditch. Somehow, in that sharp moment, I had seemed to see Death smiling indulgently at us as *he* set us to one side of the onrushing car—as if, with grisly humor, he had saved us for something else he had in mind. . . .

**W**E were the last to arrive at the Waite home. We had stopped at a doctor's office on the way and he bandaged my nose and upper lip thoroughly—so thoroughly that for hours afterward

I could smell only the odor of antiseptic. I cursed those bandages at the time. I couldn't know that they alone, for a while, saved me from what followed.

Howard, Marcia's oldest brother, met us at the door—he and Winfield had driven out from New York, too—and the others were just behind him.

"Mother!" Marcia said, and then she was in Mrs. Waite's arms. Marcia's own mother had died at her birth—but the understanding between these two was perfect. In fact, though Graham Waite's second wife was truly mother only to eighteen-year-old Jim, all the Waite children loved her as much as they could have loved their own mother.

The men questioned me about the accident. As always, when seeing them together, I could not help thinking how distinctly different each was from the other. Howard, hard-muscled and tall—you could tell him for a man who built roads and spanned rivers. Winfield, Howard's opposite—the sensitive, artistic type. You'd know before you'd been told that he was a painter. And blond, blue-eyed Jim, eager, intelligent, though too young yet for one to know just what he would make of himself. And last of all, their cousin, Sidney Horton. Sidney lived nearby, and—his parents being dead—was at the Waites' so often that I counted him one of them. Dark and slender, yet tall and strongly built, he was like none of them, yet there seemed to be a great deal of Waite blood in his veins. It was said that a strain of Polynesian was in him, too. His father had knocked about the earth a good deal with Graham Waite, and later had married Graham Waite's sister. Ordinarily quiet and reserved, Sidney showed genuine alarm now as I finished telling of the accident.

"Then it was Franklin," he said.

"Marcia was sure of it," I told him. "But where was he heading, going like that?"

Young Jim answered.

"We—we don't know," he said. "We think last night must have unnerved him. Just after mother and I got here, we heard a crash in the hall. We rushed in and it was Franklin; he was white as a ghost and he had dropped the tea things.

"He blurted out that he'd just seen—seen father in the dining room. Then suddenly, he flew into a rage. He cursed the place, said he'd be damned if he'd work here another minute. He stamped out and took the big car and drove away.

"We—there was no chance of stopping him.

And mother and I were sure he'd come back."

I couldn't help saying:

"If he keeps on driving that way, he won't ever come back—alive."

I don't think there is any custom among civilized people more redolent of barbarism than that of viewing the corpse.

The others went in with us to the flower-banked library where the coffin lay. I don't know what I expected to see, but tiny shivers of fear crawled up and down my spine, and because of that, I kept a tight hold on Marcia's arm. Otherwise, I think she'd have fallen when she saw her father's body. As it was, she gasped—and I started, took half a step back.

I could hardly believe that it was the body of Graham Waite which lay there. Only the white hair and beard seemed natural. The bullet hole in the side of his head was carefully hidden; but that did not help much. The face was contorted. The smiling, generous mouth that I had known was twisted with hate.

I had a feeling that behind the closed lids even the eyes must be shining with that awful fury. I don't know how much the undertaker had changed the look in that face; but those things must have been beyond his power to change.

I knew then that when Graham Waite had shot himself, he had been insane—stark, raving mad.

**W**AS there a strain of insanity in the Waite family? I didn't say anything; I couldn't, for I was certain that others in that room knew what I was thinking. Marcia must have guessed my thoughts; she tore away from me, ran again to Mrs. Waite. The brothers, even Jim, stood stiffly silent.

I found myself beside Sidney Horton. At that moment, friendly as the Waites had been to me, I felt like an intruder in this room of death. For an instant Sidney seemed to feel that way, too.

"It may seem a sacrilegious thing to say," he said, "but I can't help thinking—looking at the old chap's face, you find it not hard to credit those old beliefs—"

"Beliefs?" I said.

"In Polynesia," he said, "they have a strange feeling toward the newly dead. They fear them. No matter how kindly the dead one, how much he loved his family, they believe that for a time after death his ghost is a hateful, hideous thing—that he comes battering at the doors, striving to get in to

attack and destroy. In Polynesia, after a death, the women bar the doors and sit the night through in terror."

I looked at the corpse again, and shuddered. I felt suddenly cold.

"An odd belief," I said.

"A stupid belief." He smiled. "But looking at the old chap reminded me of it. You don't wonder that Franklin got to seeing things."

He spoke lightly, evidently striving to break the tight feeling in both of us. With me, though, it didn't succeed. I couldn't forget what he had said and what Franklin thought he had seen; it seemed to tie up with the growing certainty in my mind that here in this room something ominous and fearful hovered—something apart from the aura of death occasioned by the body of Graham Waite.

I looked about me now, trying to place the vague thing that troubled my brain. The room seemed choked with flowers, almost tropical in abundance. Where they were grouped thickest, the Waites stood, talking quietly.

On the instant, the sound of a blow cut sharply through the thick quiet of that funereal room. Winfield—the quiet, self-effacing Winfield—had struck Howard across the mouth!

"I'm damned if I'm taking orders from you!" he snarled. "I say the flowers are going! They're barbarous—heathen!"

He started toward a cluster of flowers as if he meant to fling them out the window. Howard followed after, seized him roughly by the arm.

"You and your bloody artistic sense," he sneered. "You seem to forget that they have a meaning. Leave them there, confound you!"

"I don't care what they mean!" shrilled Winfield. "Their odor is foul—I can't stand them!"

He brought back his free arm; Howard stepped back to avoid the blow, his own fists coming up. At that moment Mrs. Waite came between them.

Oddly, she wasn't shocked; she seemed, instead, furious! All her poise was gone.

"I want to hear no more of this!" she snapped. "The flowers shall stay."

Then I glimpsed Marcia's face. She saw that I was looking at her and did not speak—but her lips were parted and her face was flushed with anger. Had it not been for me, she would have entered the quarrel, too.

Over the dead body of their father, I thought, the well-bred Waites are quarreling like fishwives!

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CHAPTER II  
*The Suicide Room*

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**S**HOCKED as I was, I yet had the feeling that it was not the Waites who were quarreling, that it was something arising from the corpse in that room. I wanted to get them out of there.

Sidney seemed to be thinking the same thoughts. He stepped quietly over to the little group, took Mrs. Waite's arm.

"It is a shattering experience, Aunt Anne," he said. "Don't you think it would be best if we retired to the living room?"

Mrs. Waite started at the sound of his quiet voice. She drew her hand across her eyes.

"Yes," she said dazedly. "Yes, you are quite right, Sidney."

She led the way from the library into the living room. The rest, even Winfield and Howard, followed.

We sat down there. That room, too, was heavily banked with flowers. I realized now that many of them had come from the Waites' own garden—out there, I supposed, by the faithful Franklin before his strange defection. Oddly, they oppressed me. It wasn't the odor, for I could still smell nothing but antiseptic; but nevertheless they gave me the feeling of wanting to escape—to run screaming from the room, into the fresh country air outside.

I think I might have done just that, if Wong, the Chinese cook, had not brought the brandy at that moment.

The Waites seemed to have forgotten their strange actions, the harsh words they had spoken. Marcia came over and sat beside me, slipped her hand through my arm. But I could feel her body trembling a little.

Then, as we were talking quietly, Winfield rose from his chair. He set his brandy down sharply.

"If you'll pardon me," he said, "I shall go to my room."

He walked out, and I couldn't help staring at him. What had I seen in his eyes? Was it anger—or madness?

"Now what the devil is he up to?" Howard demanded irritably.

I held my breath. Was it going to break out again, this sinister battle? I thought Marcia trembled more visibly. Grimly, I held to her hand. I couldn't let her speak—she *couldn't* do as the

others had done.

Jim got to his feet. I was afraid for the moment that he meant to follow Winfield, but instead he went to the casement windows and flung them open.

"Stuffy as the dickens," he said.

That commonplace act broke the tension. I felt Marcia quieting. The others sat back, relaxed.

I couldn't relax, though. I kept thinking of what I had seen in Winfield's eyes, and I wondered what he was up to.

Then I heard something upstairs. It sounded like a crash or like something falling. Though the noise puzzled me, I breathed easier, just knowing he was really upstairs.

The sound I heard next, there was no mistaking. Everyone in the room heard it, and we started to our feet. Muffled by the intervening walls, it yet came sharply. It sounded from Winfield's room.

It was the death cry of a man in mortal agony.

We men ran out of the room and up the stairs almost together. No one spoke, but horror showed on every face. I entered Winfield's room first—and at what I saw I stopped short.

Winfield lay on the floor in a pool of blood. His throat had been slashed from ear to ear, and the knife which had done it was still clutched in his hand.

That wasn't all, though. His face was contorted, twisted with madness. And in the room there were signs of a struggle. A chair had been smashed to splinters and a vase of flowers overturned; and more significant than that, two of Winfield's paintings on the wall—two that he had especially liked and refused to sell—had been slashed to ribbons. Plainly, they had been slashed by the same knife which Winfield clutched in his hand.

It was quite evident that Winfield Waite had killed himself, and that he also had done these other things; yet it nevertheless seemed as if he had been struggling against something in this room—something invisible, perhaps, but nonetheless hideous and horrible. And whatever this thing was, I felt then that it was that which had caused the strange actions of the Waites. Perhaps it had caused Graham Waite's death, too. I remembered Sidney's strange tale of the fierce ghosts of the newly dead, and wondered. Was this the way they struck? Was an epidemic of madness to sweep through this family because of Graham Waite's death?

Marcia—Good Lord, would it strike her, too?

Down there in the library she had—  
I shuddered.

AFTER Mrs. Waite learned what had happened, we had to take her upstairs and to bed. She was more than hysterical; it was plain that if she weren't quieted, she'd go the way Winfield had gone.

When we were back in the living room again, Howard asked:

"Did anyone phone for the doctor?"

Jim looked up from the couch, his face frightened.

"I tried to," he said. "The—the phone wouldn't work. It was dead."

"That's odd," Howard said. "It was working this afternoon. We can't help Win now, but someone should go for the doctor—"

"I'll go," Jim offered quickly.

Howard shook his head, glanced at the rest of us. There was an old look in his eyes.

"On second thought," he said, "I think we ought all to remain here. We'll send Wong; he can drive my car."

We all agreed with him, without voicing the reason. If someone should attempt to do what Win had done, if someone else should go mad with a weapon in his hand, we ought all to be there. Yet I didn't like the way Howard had spoken. There was an ominous tone to his words, almost as if he were planning something. I looked at him again, but he had turned away.

I steered Marcia through the doorway that led to the veranda. I wanted to get her out of that damned house.

She stood there on the lawn, tense, without speaking, till we saw the car go down the driveway, with the Chinese at the wheel. Then she turned her white face to mine. I found myself looking at her intently—then cursed myself for doing it. What was I looking for in *her* eyes? There was nothing wrong with Marcia—there *couldn't* be.

She gripped my arm tightly.

"Jerry!" she said, "What is it, in there? What is it—more than we have seen?"

Reassuring words came to my lips—but they were never uttered. I was facing the house, Marcia's back was turned toward it. Something—I don't know what—caused my glance to stray toward the darkened window of the library.

I started, choked back a cry.

There in the library window, faintly luminous in the darkness, was the face of Graham Waite! The white hair and close-clipped Van Dyke—the face contorted as I had seen it in death—and the mouth now twisted horribly in a smile. Smiling at us—

One instant, I could have sworn I saw it, as clearly as that. The next, it wasn't there. I was trembling.

Just the same, impulsively, I took Marcia in my arms.

"Whatever it is in there," I said wildly, "I'm not going to let you stay and face it any longer. You've got to come away with me—now."

Before she could answer, a scream came to our ears. It was a woman's scream, high-pitched and terrified, and it sounded from upstairs in the house.

On the instant, every light in the house went out.

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### CHAPTER III

#### *Corridor of Darkness*

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WE gained the hallway as I brought a flashlight from my pocket. We raced up the stairs as the screams, hysterical now, sounded again and again.

I didn't stop at what my light showed me; I cried out, though, as I ran faster, trying to make it in time.

There in the hallway, locked in mortal combat, snarling and fighting like beasts of prey, were Howard Waite and young Jim! They both had weapons in their hands—Jim a short iron poker, Howard a club which he must have brought back from the garage with him. These two, who had been as close as two brothers could be, were trying to kill each other!

Sidney Horton, a lighted flash in his hand, running toward them from the other end of the hall, was nearer them than I. But the only one near enough to come between them was Mrs. Waite. They were almost in front of the door to her room, and she stood looking on, alternately screaming and uttering a mad babble of words, utterly unable to move,

"Graham!" she cried. "I saw him just before—"

While I was still a good twenty feet away, I saw Howard stagger back, snarling, plainly badly hurt.

"Damn you!" young Jim shouted. "Come at me, will you!" And he raised the poker for a killing blow.

Sidney sprang at Jim to seize the weapon.

He was just too late. The poker came down. I heard the sickening crunch of metal on bone. Howard sank to the floor and did not move.

Sidney got hold of Jim then, but it didn't seem necessary. Even as his brother fell, the boy staggered back, horror replacing the madness in his eyes. The poker fell from his lax fingers.

"What have I done?" he gasped.

Mrs. Waite was on the floor beside Howard. Now she sprang up, turned a wild, agitated face toward Jim.

"You've killed him!" she cried.

Abruptly Jim was struggling in Sidney's arms, as if seized by a fresh attack.

"I didn't!" he shrieked. "He jumped me. He tried to kill me!" And then, "I don't give a damn if I did kill him! I hated him—I've always hated him!"

His eyes glared wildly. I thought for a minute that he was going to break loose from Sidney and pick up the poker and come for the rest of us.

Sidney held him though, and while Marcia strove futilely to calm her mother, I examined Howard. The dead face was that of a madman.

They were both mad—as Winfield had been. Only, unlike the more sensitive Winfield, who had killed himself, they had set out to kill others.

The rest of them, I was thinking, when their turn came, would they creep upon us through the darkened halls with some ugly weapon in their hands?

I caught myself staring intently at Marcia—

The three of us finally got Jim and his mother to their rooms, Howard's body into his.

There were only Sidney and I left, now, to watch over Marcia. Sidney's story of the angry dead kept ringing through my mind.

**W**E forced a sleeping potion through Mrs. Waite's lips, then Sidney and I tied her to the bed. We hated to do it, but she had to be kept in her room. After she had dozed off, we went out, locking the door of the room.

After we got Jim to sleep, we tied him down, too, and locked his room. We left a candle burning in both rooms, for we hadn't been able to find what was wrong with the lights.

After that, the three of us went downstairs to the living room, and found enough lamps to make it fairly bright. Sidney walked the floor nervously,

and Marcia sat, stiff and tense. Sidney kept looking at his watch, and at last I realized what was on his mind. Wong had not returned.

Finally he turned to me.

"It's been an hour and a half," he said, "since that damned Chinese went for the doctor. It couldn't have taken him more than half an hour."

"He probably got scared and kept on going," I suggested.

"I shouldn't wonder. Jerry, we've got to get a doctor. We really should get the police; but in any case, we need a physician to examine Aunt Anne and Jim—before it's too late. One of us has to go."

I looked at Marcia; if I went, I knew she'd insist on staying here with her mother. Still, it was up to me to go. I told Sidney I would.

He was on the point of agreeing with me, it appeared—then suddenly he shook his head. He drew me out into the hall, away from Marcia.

"Jerry," he said, "now that I think of it, I believe I'll go. Remember, I'm half Waite. Whatever it is that's loose in this house, I think you're immune. You can stay here, try to help Marcia. Don't think I'm yellow, Jerry, but—look at my eyes, will you? Do you see anything odd about them?"

"I don't think it's hit you, Sidney," I said.

He laughed shortly.

"The look in your face belies your words, Jerry," he said. "I thought I was immune, too—but for the past half hour I've been feeling—just a little strange. The truth is, I don't dare stay here—with Marcia."

"You're right," I told him.

"Then I'll be going," he said. "And I'm not just bringing a doctor—I'm bringing the police, too."

When he had gone, I told Marcia that she had better go to her room and take a sleeping potion as the others had.

"I know," she said bitterly. "You want to lock me in. No. I'll stay up and watch over Jim and mother."

I protested that she couldn't help Jim and her mother now by staying up. I promised her that I'd be in the room next to hers, and that I would be awake and dressed.

She broke down then. She rushed into my arms and wept for a long time.

I carried her in my arms, finally, up the stairs and into her room. And after a little while, she slept. I blew out the candle I had lit, and crept softly into the adjoining room.

I didn't undress; I didn't even lie down. For a while I walked the floor, trying to think through to some answer to the mad thoughts whirling in my brain. But I stopped short as a fearful new thought struck me. Supposing I wasn't immune to this fearful madness?

I was sure by now that it wasn't caused by any hereditary taint upon the Waites; it was something that had to do with this house and the first death in it. And it had gotten Franklin; why wouldn't it take me when the right time came? And if it did, was there any reason for thinking it would make me any less a mad killer than it had the Waites?

I sat down in a chair, shuddering, held my face in my hands while sweat beaded my brow.

I finally calmed myself. I seemed to be getting drowsy.

I must have dozed off. Then sound dinned in my ears. It came from the next room. It was Marcia!

"Father!" she cried shrilly, and then: "Jerry!"

**I**BURST in the door and rushed into the hall, calling back to Marcia. I sensed some movement in the hall. I ran into Marcia's room, flashing on my light as I did so.

She was standing beside the bed, pale as death, her eyes wide with terror.

"Marcia!" I said. "What was it?"

She came toward me.

"Jerry—it was father! I saw him! I woke up and he was standing over the bed. But he wasn't like he used to be. He—he looked hideous."

I tried to calm her.

"It couldn't have been," I said. "You had a nightmare, Marcia."

She gripped my arm tightly; then she spoke low and tensely.

"Jerry," she said, "look into my eyes. I'm not mad. I saw father."

There was no madness in her eyes, only terror. In spite of myself I began to believe that what I had seen in the library window had been no illusion.

There was no use of keeping anything from Marcia now. I told her all I had seen.

"I think we'd better go downstairs—look in the coffin," I added.

We went downstairs swiftly, keeping the flashlight trained ahead of us. We had left the lamps in the living room burning, but they didn't light up the library. It was all I could do to muster courage to step into that darkened room of death.

I finally did it. We stepped up to the coffin. The body of Graham Waite was still there.

I started, though, and looked closer. Weren't the arms just a little moved from their former position?

While I was wondering about that, though, I suddenly went cold all over. From behind us toward the doorway, a soft step had sounded!

We whirled about. Coming toward us, very quietly, was Jim Waite—Jim, whom we had left bound and locked in his room! In his upraised hand, he held a meat cleaver, razor-sharp.

He rushed toward us when he realized he had been seen. But as he leaped, he cried out, high and shrilly, words that at that time seemed strange even for a madman:

"Damn these stinking flowers!"

Marcia had leaped to the far side of the room. As I looked wildly around for a weapon to defend myself, I glimpsed her face. The sight all but froze me—

*It had gotten her, too.*

With a choked sob, I flung the lighted flashlight full into Jim Waite's face.

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#### CHAPTER IV

##### *Death Waits Next Door*

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**P**ARTLY because he was mad, I suppose, the light in Jim's face did the trick. He struck out at me with the cleaver, once, just as the flashlight hit him. He missed—and on the instant he whirled about. With a low cry, he rushed from the room.

We followed after him swiftly, side by side. I didn't dare turn to look at Marcia.

The front door opened and shut before we got there. When we came out onto the veranda, we could neither see nor hear Jim. It was quite dark, though, and the trees and scrubs were black clusters of even darker shadow.

"It's really no use, Jerry," Marcia said. "We'll never find him—not in the night."

The quietness of her tones, the sanity of them, startled me—sent a flood of hope coursing through me. For the first time since we had left the library, I dared to look her in the face again. All the hate and the madness I had glimpsed was gone!

"No," I said, "we'd never find him now. We'll go back into the house, make sure that your mother hasn't awakened."

But before we went upstairs, we walked out to

the garage, making our way very cautiously. There I reached in the pocket of my car and took out the gun I always carried there.

We went up then and looked in Mrs. Waite's room. She didn't seem to have stirred. We crept quietly out, and locked the door again.

Then we went across the hall to Jim's room. He hadn't wriggled loose and the ropes had not been cut. He had been untied, the door unlocked, from the outside.

"It's no use, Jerry," she said a little wildly. "I *did* see father! He set Jim loose. No one else could have done it."

"Whoever let Jim loose," I said, "was a human being. A ghost couldn't do it, even if there were such a thing. No. It was Jim. He came into your room, made up like your father. You've got to believe that, Marcia. You've got to keep on believing it, no matter what happens."

I took the automatic from my pocket, and handed it to her.

"There's one danger that you know is human. That's Jim, Marcia. You must take this gun, and if Jim comes back into the house, you've got to defend yourself. Don't try just to cripple him."

She took the gun, with a shudder.

"And another thing," I said. "I want you to change rooms with me this time. There's a door between that we'd better leave unlocked. The door to the hall, you must lock from the inside."

"I sha'n't sleep," she said.

"Perhaps not. But it's safer in there than anywhere else."

All my thoughts were a jumble. Once I even thought of insisting on making a break for the car with Marcia, leaving this accursed house behind; but the odd thing was that immediately I tossed all plans of getting away aside. For the moment I wasn't afraid; I actually *wanted* to stay and see the thing through.

**W**E went into the room where I had stayed before, and Marcia locked the door leading into the hall. Promising that I'd keep watch, I got her to lie down on the bed and covered her up. Then I lighted a candle and went on into the other room, closing the door behind me but not locking it.

Once in there, I locked the door which led to the hall. I sat down beside the bed, leaving the candle burning. There was no sound in all the house.

Stuffy in the room, I thought. My head ached a bit. I got up and opened the window a little wider. That didn't help much, and I loosened the bandages around my nose, took a deep breath. I felt better then; but when I went back and sat down, my head began aching again.

There was a huge vase of flowers beside the bed near where I sat. It reminded me of the library, and the coffin. I'd a good notion to fling it out of the window. Then I remembered—Winfield had wanted to do the same thing. I shuddered.

I looked at my watch, and started. It had been over an hour since Sidney left! My thoughts blurred. I seemed to hear Marcia stirring in the next room. It made me wonder.

Come to think of it, it hadn't been such a good plan at that—giving Marcia the gun and leaving the door between us unlocked. Already the madness had started to strike her, more than once.

I almost wanted to lock the door between us. She could sneak in and finish me with one shot. Then she'd go in and kill her mother, and then probably herself.

I'd better keep an eye on that door, just in case it should start moving.

Maybe I ought to arm myself. A knife was lying on the bookcase. I went over and picked it up. I started. Why, it looked like the knife Winfield had killed himself with! How could it have gotten in here? It wasn't bloody anymore; somebody must have wiped it off and brought it in here.

Had Marcia done that? Had she figured on using it? On me, perhaps?

Shakily, with the knife still in my hand, I went over and sat down by the bed. I began watching the door closely, expecting it to move any moment.

It was stuffy. Not so much airlessness, as that there was a strange odor. The antiseptic on my bandages had begun to wear off, and now that I had loosened them I caught the odor.

It was a noxious, thick sort of smell. Did those flowers smell that way? No, they couldn't; they were dahlias; I knew how dahlias smelled. This was thicker, more exotic.

I bent over, breathed in the odor of the flowers deeply. It did seem as if the smell came from them—yet I still knew it couldn't.

I seemed to be thinking weird thoughts. I thought about the guillotine, how it must work; I thought about Winfield lying in a pool of blood. I had a kind of dream of dark-skinned men, a great



horde of them, fighting each other with knives. I seemed to be one of them. I felt a great joy as I thrust a heavy knife into a man's vitals.

"Damn him—I finished him then," I said.

I had spoken aloud. It brought me out of the dream. I looked down. The knife was still clutched in my hand.

Why, damn it, I thought, she had the knife in here so she could come in and kill me with it! Changing rooms has spoiled Marcia's plan, but now she has the gun. Why, the she-devil!

I blew out the candle; then I crept over to the door, listened. The moving had stopped. She had probably come to the other side of the door, and was waiting to strike.

There's only one way to beat her, I thought. I've got to strike first. I'll move the door open, slowly, inch by inch.

I wish I could forget the things I thought and did then; but I can't. I'll remember them until I die.

**I** FINALLY opened the door. I had expected a shot to greet me, and I had the knife gripped tightly in my hand, ready—but no shot came. She had blown out the lamp and was waiting for me.

I kept close to the floor and crept forward, trying to accustom my eyes to the darkness. By the time I was halfway across the room, I could see fairly well. There was no one lurking in the shadows.

Was it possible that she was in bed and asleep? My heart beat wildly. I raised up a little to see.

She was! I was sure of it. I could see where the covers were bunched together.

That made it perfect. She probably didn't even have the gun under her pillow. I moved forward to the bed. I looked around the room again, to make certain she wasn't hiding.

Then, suddenly, I leaped up. With a low cry, I plunged the knife into that rise in the covers. There was no sound, but again and again I plunged it in, gloatingly.

I sank back at last on the floor by the bed. I was exhausted, gasping for breath. Then, abruptly, my hair rose on end. I had heard a sound behind me! The door to the hall was opening—almost noiselessly.

I whirled about, the knife gripped in my hand, ready for the intruder. And then I screamed.

In the doorway stood the corpse of Graham Waite!

I say corpse, because even if I had not known Graham Waite was dead, I'd have been certain this was no living man. The face was almost as white as the hair and beard. The mouth was hideously, hatefully twisted.

I didn't even dare to look at the eyes.

When I screamed, he stopped. I thought for a breathless minute that he was going to wheel about and run. Then he smiled horribly and started toward me.

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## CHAPTER V

### *House of Madness*

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**A** RED rage boiled up in my brain. Ghost or corpse, I didn't care. I wanted to sink my knife into it. With a bellow, I leaped to my feet, flung myself toward it with my knife thrust forward.

The knife struck something fleshy, went in. I heard a cry, and came up against a solid body. I drew my knife back again.

His arm caught my wrist. Then I saw that his other hand held a gun. I caught the gun hand. We held each other for a moment, struggling. All at once his gun hand wrenched loose. I twisted, and at the same time, I heard the *click* of the trigger. The gun roared.

I felt a burn along my side. The bullet hadn't entered me. I reached out with my foot, caught him off balance. He staggered back. I drove the knife in.

He gasped once—then he fell backward, clutching at empty air. His grip on me was loosened—yet I went over with him. I stumbled forward, on top of him. He didn't struggle.

As we hit the floor, I heard the pound of running feet. Lights flashed in my eyes. People were bending over us. It was Marcia, and Jim—but they had masks on—handkerchiefs tied over their faces like white masks. The whole horror of it struck me at once, like a consuming fire.

"Send them away," I mumbled. "Take me down to hell, and send them away!"

I clutched at the man under me—or the corpse. I felt the beard pull loose. Then everything went black.

I couldn't have been out for more than a half minute. I shuddered. I looked down and gasped. I had clawed away the face of the corpse. Beneath it were the features of Sidney Horton!

Marcia and Jim were helping me to my feet.

Horton, beneath me, was babbling wildly. The others were talking too, and I began to understand.

I hadn't killed Marcia. She hadn't been in her bed when I drove the knife in. She had seen Jim lying out on the lawn, and had crept out there, hoping she could bring him back to sanity. He already was sane when she got there, because the fresh air had cleared the madness from his brain.

He had begun to guess why it was he had gone mad—and so when they came back, they had worn masks, treated with antiseptic. The same kind of thing that had saved me till just a little while ago.

Some of the other answers to that night's horrors I learned from Sidney Horton's babblings before he died, some not till much later. One thing I hadn't known was that Sidney wasn't a Waite, but was a natural son of the elder Horton, by a Polynesian mother. Graham Waite's sister had raised him as if he were her own son; but at the same time, the Waites knew his true ancestry, and he knew it, and it had rankled in him. He grew to hate them all. He wanted to destroy them.

On top of that, he needed money. In some way or other he had learned of a diamond mine in South Africa that his father had once owned a half interest in, but had later sold out entire to Graham Waite. At one time it had been valueless; Graham Waite had still thought it was when he died; but Horton had learned that it was going to turn out to be tremendously valuable, and he wanted it. If he could kill off all the Waites, it would come back to him.

He found a willing ally in Wong. Wong had been, apparently, a faithful servant of the Waites for years; but at some time or other, Graham Waite had unwittingly offended him. In Oriental fashion, Wong was biding his time for revenge.

HE knew of a strange poison, a perfume that would drive men mad, drive them into a killing rage. It would act a little differently upon one man than another, but always, if he got enough of it, if the doses were repeated, the victim would go mad and try to kill himself or others.

Wong had managed to sprinkle it in the flowers—flowers that, for the most part, had been grown in the Waites' own garden. The odor had driven Graham Waite to an insane suicide; it had put the butler, Franklin, into a mad fury. Then, when the family were all gathered, the two had

attempted to drive the rest of them to madness and to death.

Horton wore respirators in his nose to save himself, and when he realized that the bandages on me served a like purpose, he decided to save me. Alive, I would be his most certain proof of innocence. He had made himself up to look like Graham Waite partly because he thought it would aggravate the madness with some, but more so that he could safely go from room to room, adding more of the oil to the flowers.

He had come into Marcia's room, guessing that we had changed rooms, to do that at the time I met him, and he decided then that he had to kill me, too. Of course he never went for the police.

He said that Wong had gotten his pay and cleared out, and we'd never catch him. He was right about that. But we did learn something more about the poison later, when the police chemist managed to make a crude analysis of what little was left. He was unable to discover its exact constituents; but he later showed me a book by H. Ashton-Wolfe, "Warped in the Making," I think it was called, in which the author, describing his experiences as assistant to Dr. Bertillon in Paris, cites an instance of the use of a similar drug. The case of Hanoi Shan, in which this poison was used, is to be found in the records of the Paris *Suret * for 1909. Shan, otherwise known as the Spider, was a madman killer who had terrorized Paris. At the time of his arrest, the *Suret * analyzed the poison and announced their belief that it was an extract of the venom of a deadly insect, native to Borneo, probably of the spider family. Its effect was upon the brain cells, arousing in the mind exactly the same sort of bloody madness that had overtaken the Waites. I checked on this later myself, and found that, strange and hideous as it was, it was true!

That, as I say, came out later.

Now, after Sidney Horton had breathed his last, we went down the hall and lifted Mrs. Waite gently from her bed. We carried her downstairs, and out of that poison-infested house of death.

Dawn light was just showing in the east. Marcia and I walked down the lawn a little way.

I put my arms around her. A little of the dawn light caught her hair. As if by silent agreement, for a little time we forgot everything else but just us, there in the morning light. I leaned down and kissed her tenderly, protectingly.