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# The House of the Living Dead

By HAROLD WARD

*An amazing goose-flesh story of disinterred corpses that breathed, lived and loved again—a tale of stark horror*

## 1. John Harper

**L**IVING corpses! Men and women, filched from the grave, festering in their moldering cerements, talking, laughing, dancing, breathing, holding hellish jubilee! All this have I seen—and more. Yet who will believe me—I who am an inmate of the House of the Living Dead? Even as I pen this screed I look down and see the rotting cloth dropping from my mildewed framework with every move and feel the maggots bore their tortuous way through my decaying carcass. Ugh! Even I, living dead man that I am, inured to the horror of it all, shudder as I write.

"I am helpless. Would that I had the power to free myself from the foul grasp of Lessman, the master of us all! Across the room lies the body of Carter Cope. Soon, but not until Lessman commands, I will return to occupy it. My body belongs to him—to Doctor Lessman. But my soul is my own, even though Lessman holds it in his clutches. For the soul does not die. Ah, a wonderful man is Darius Lessman—able as he is to throw off his temporal body and assume that of another. He is a superman—or a devil. I——"

Asa Rider, private investigator, laid the manuscript on the table before him with a snort of disgust.

"What twaddle is this?" he demanded angrily. "My time is too valuable, Mr.

Harper, to devote to such drivel. It is nothing but the maniacal gibberings of a diseased brain. I——"

His visitor stopped him with a little gesture.

"But is it?" he questioned gravely. "Do I look like the sort of man to be stampeded? As I told you at the commencement of our interview, I am an attorney of twenty-five years' standing. I know Carter Cope. Only a few months ago he was in my office. He came in response to my request. I, as attorney for Priestly Ogden, retained him to institute a search for that unfortunate young man. I can honestly say that he is no more insane than you are. He disappeared that night. His car was found, a battered pile of junk, in an abandoned stone quarry many miles north of here. His body has never been found.

"I never believed that he was dead. Then, yesterday, this weird manuscript reached me by mail. It was in a sealed envelope placed within another envelope, both addressed to me. With it was a brief note from a man who signs himself Fred Rolfe stating that he had picked it up alongside the road close to Oakwood cemetery. The handwriting, both in the body of the manuscript and on the envelope, is that of Carter Cope.

"Briefly, sir, I believe that Carter Cope is the victim of some terrible misfortune. Possibly, as you have suggested, it may



*"We picked up the body of Priestly Ogden and put it in the coffin."*

be mental. But, at any rate, he still lives. I want you to seek him out and save him from this—this thing, whatever it is. I sent Carter Cope into it, just as I am seeking to send you. I feel a moral responsibility and John Harper is not the man to shirk his responsibilities. My private fortune—and I am not a poor man by any means—is at your command. Incidentally, in seeking him, you may run across a clue to the whereabouts of Priestly Ogden. I ask you this favor, Mr. Rider: Read the manuscript to the end. Diagnose it with an open mind. Having finished it, if you do not care to accept the commission, I will seek some other detective. Otherwise——"

"Why did you come to me?" Rider interrupted bluntly. "I am a stranger to you. My reputation is not so great that

you would seek me out without some good reason."

John Harper shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps you are not unknown to me," he responded quickly. "And I know you to be a single man, your closest relative a distant cousin. I am sending you into danger. And, frankly, you will not be greatly missed should you meet the same fate that seems to have overtaken Carter Cope and Priestly Ogden. I say with equal frankness that I doubt whether you will come out of the affair alive. I have a feeling—call it a hunch, if you choose—to that effect. The man who accepts my commission can not be a coward."

"Your talk of danger intrigues me," Rider said hotly. "Leave the manuscript here. Let me read it through. I will give you my answer in the morning."

John Harper rose to his feet.

"I will be at the Lincoln Tavern until noon tomorrow," he responded, extending his hand. "I will expect an acceptance by that time or the return of the manuscript. Meanwhile"—his hand moved toward his pocket—"what about a retaining fee? It is customary, I believe."

Rider shook his head.

"Should I accept your commission, I will render my bill when I have finished my work," he answered. "And I warn you in advance, Mr. Harper, that it will not be a small one."

"Bring me the solution of the puzzle and there will be no quibbling over your fee," Harper asserted. "I want to know the truth regardless of the cost."

He moved toward the door. Even before it closed behind him, Rider knew that he would accept the lawyer's tender. He filled and lighted his brier and gathered the sheaf of papers together. They were in pencil, somewhat in the form of a diary, although undated. With them was a clipping from some newspaper, it, like the manuscript, being without date.

They are given here verbatim:

## 2. *The Strange Story of Carter Cope*

I AM writing this in the House of the Living Dead. I know it by no other name. Perhaps, some time, some one will find this manuscript and explain my strange fate to the world. Now—

But I digress. Let me start at the beginning, hard though it is to tell the story.

There was something sinister and foreboding about the rambling old place that caused me to shudder in spite of myself. On either side was a clump of evergreens through which each breath of vagrant wind soughed and moaned like a lost soul

in purgatory. A scant hundred yards away to the right was a tiny, vine-covered ruin of a church, its spire rotting and drooping, its windows broken. Surrounding it was a tangle of underbrush and weeds through which I caught a glimpse of sunken graves and fallen tombstones.

The house was a huge pile of brick and stone and wood. It sprawled against the side of the little hill like some squat, ungainly monster in the midst of a fetid jungle. The weed-grown burying-ground extended through the evergreens almost to the flagstone path which wound, twisting and snake-like, through the mass of creepers and lilac bushes and stunted arbovitæ trees with which the front yard was filled. There was something eerie and unreal about the place—something that gave me a feeling that if I investigated closer I would find a layer of fungus over everything.

Surrounding the unsightly ensemble was a high, iron fence, the pickets sharpened at the top.

I swung open the creaking gate and entered, only to leap back with an exclamation of fright as the head and shoulders of a man suddenly appeared out of a little clump of bushes. He was a huge lump of a fellow, loutish and uncouth, his beard black and tangled, the hair—which hung low over his retreating forehead—long and matted and filled with sand burs. For an instant he gazed at me, an idiotic grin on his dough-like face, while I stared blankly back. Then I recovered myself and plunged into speech.

"I am looking for Doctor Darius Lessman," I informed him civilly. "Does he live here?"

The man made neither sound nor comment. Not a gleam of comprehension flitted over his ox-like face. I repeated the question again. For what seemed ages he stood there gazing dumbly at me. Then, with a queer, gurgling, throaty

sound, he turned and disappeared back into the tangle of underbrush.

I was tempted to turn and retreat to my car, which stood beside the road a dozen rods away. Again the boding of disaster swept over me. In spite of the fact that the day had been hot and sultry, I felt the chills chase themselves up and down my spinal column. Would to God I had yielded to that feeling and left the accursed place then and there. Instead, cursing myself for a fool, I squared my shoulders and continued my way up the stone-paved path.

The door before which I found myself was of nail-studded oak, blackened with age and flanked on either side by narrow panes of dark-colored glass. There was no sign of bell or knocker. Doubling my fist, I pounded a lusty tattoo.

There was no answer. I rapped again, cursing under my breath. I had a feeling that there was somebody on the other side of the panels, although I heard nothing. I raised my knuckles to rap again, when the door opened a tiny crack and an eye peered out at me. I opened my mouth to speak, when the eye was suddenly withdrawn. A chain rattled. Then the door was slowly opened and I found myself staring into the face of a young woman attired in the conventional garb of a nurse.

"Pardon the delay in answering your summons," she said in a rich, throaty contralto. "In a place like this we, naturally, are forced to be careful."

She waited for me to answer. She was tall—taller than the average—and dark with the clear, white skin of the Eurasian. Her hair was drawn back under her pert little cap; it was as black as the darkness of a moonless night, while the eyes which gazed inquiringly into mine were as deep and unfathomable as limpid pools.

"Doctor Lessman," I managed to articulate.

"What is your business with him?" she demanded pleasantly, although firmly. "Doctor Lessman is, as you are no doubt aware, a very busy man. I am his secretary."

I nodded and presented my credentials.

"Carter Cope," she said, gazing down at the card in the leather-covered case I held in front of her eyes. "You are a detective?"

"In search of a young man named Priestly Ogden," I hastened to explain. "I have been retained by his relatives—or rather, by his lawyer for them."

"And where does Doctor Lessman fit into the picture?" she inquired.

"I hardly know myself," I smiled back at her. "The fact is that in searching through the young man's effects I chanced upon a scrap of paper on which the doctor's name was written. Investigation showed that he is licensed to operate a sanitarium for the treatment of mental disorders. Resolved to run down every possible clue, I came here in the hope that some quirk in the young man's brain prompted him to place himself under the doctor's care in the belief that he was temporarily deranged."

She nodded her comprehension.

"I can recall no patient by that name," she said thoughtfully. "However, it would be best for you to talk to the doctor. Step into the office, please, and I will call him."

**T**HE room in which I found myself was out of keeping with the gloomy exterior of the house. It was gorgeously furnished, its columns of lapis-lazuli, the great fireplace across the end of onyx and marble. The walls were panelled and covered with silken curtains; the rugs were Persian and almost priceless. Here and there hung rare paintings; scattered about were exquisite marbles in keeping with the remainder of the great room.

I dropped into a large Louis XV chair and looked about me.

"Doctor Lessman is busy just now," the girl informed me as she glided into the room. "I have informed him of your presence, however, and he will be with you inside of a few minutes."

She left the room again, closing the door behind her. I heard the click of a bolt and knew that I had been locked inside. My dealings with hospitals for the insane had been negligible, however, and I solaced myself with the thought that this, perhaps, was the customary procedure in places such as this.

For a moment I busied myself in making a mental survey of the room and its treasures. Then the thought suddenly flashed through my mind that, even though the sun was shining brightly outside, the place was artificially lighted. I glanced toward the windows. What I discovered there gave me a start.

The rich tapestry curtains covered thick steel shutters, tightly padlocked.

"YOU wished to see me, sir?"

I woke from my reverie. The man who stood before me was tall and thin almost to the point of emaciation. He was clad in a surgeon's white smock, his coal-black hair brushed straight back. His nose was thin and hooked slightly, his dark beard trimmed to a needle-point. It was his eyes, however, which attracted me most. They were black and beady, deeply sunken in their sockets and thatched by heavy brows, giving his countenance an appearance at once saturnine and satanic.

I leaped to my feet with an apology.

"You are Doctor Lessman?"

He nodded. Then:

"My secretary tells me that you are seeking a young man—Ogden, I believe she said the name was?"

While he was speaking he motioned

me back to my chair, at the same time seating himself on the opposite side of the table. From one of the drawers he drew forth a sack of smoking-tobacco and a book of papers and, taking a leaf therefrom, deftly rolled himself a cigarette.

"Smoke?" he inquired, pushing a humidior of cigars across to me.

I nodded and accepted one of the weeds. He waited until I had lighted it, then plunged into a mass of questions which almost left me breathless with the answering. The man was a brilliant talker, examining me so deftly that inside of five minutes he had milked me dry in spite of myself, learning almost as much of my past life as I knew myself.

"A bachelor, eh?" he said reflectively. "Quite the thing, I would imagine, for one whose occupation is as dangerous as yours. Criminology has always been a hobby of mine; I regret that I have not had the time to study it more. Take the present instance—psychologically, I mean. I would like to know what reasoning led you to believe that your man, Ogden, was here?"

We are all more or less susceptible to flattery. I am no different from the average man. I told him of my search for the missing young man and the finding of the slip of paper among his effects with Lessman's name written on it.

"It was my belief," I said, taking the bit of paper from my pocket and passing it across the table to the physician, "that the young man might be suffering from a belief that he was off mentally and that he had, therefore, placed himself under your care."

Lessman slowly shook his head as he examined the paper I had handed him.

"Not my writing," he said. Then: "In other words, Mr. Cope, your visit here is merely one of the thousand little details connected with your profession?"

I nodded.

"By running down each tiny clue we eventually hit upon something which leads us to the solution of the puzzle we are working on," I answered somewhat grandiloquently.

"Your man Watson?" he inquired with a twinkle in his deep-set eyes. "I presume you have one—some admirer who takes notes of your triumphs and mistakes in the hope of some day handing your exploits down to posterity?"

I shook my head.

"I work entirely alone," I replied. "My trip here will, like thousands of my other mistakes, never be chronicled for the simple reason that no one will ever know of it. No one knows that I am here and I am not fool enough to tell of my blunder. It is only my successes that I report."

I realized too late that my answer was what he had been seeking for. His face changed. The look of dignity was wiped out in an instant and in its place came a peculiar, evil stare.

I started to leap to my feet. Something held me in my chair as in a vise. What was it? I do not know. Nor do I understand it to this day. I struggled against it with all the power at my command, but in vain. I tried to talk. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. My head was as clear as a bell. I could think and reason, but I could not co-ordinate my muscles. I was paralyzed.

**L**ESSMAN bent over me for an instant. Then he stepped across the floor and opened the door.

"Meta!" he called sharply.

The girl entered. She gave a single look at me, then dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"Another?" she wailed. "Oh, God! No more—no more! This—this horrible—this awful thing has gone far enough!"

Lessman stretched his hand toward her.

She rose, half crouching, and approached my side. Then she sprang back again, a look of revulsion spreading over her beautiful face.

"Some other time. Some other time," she wailed. "I can not go through with it today."

A dog-whip was lying on one of the chairs. Lessman seized it and brought it down across her beautiful shoulders. With the first blow her attitude changed. For an instant she cowered in the corner. Then, as he struck her again, he hissed a word of command. She tore her gown open in the front and allowed its folds to drop around her, baring her beautiful body to the lash. Across the white flesh the cruel whip raised a dozen red welts. She took a step closer to her tormenter. Again and again he struck her with all the force at his command.

The expression on her face was not one of pain, but of sensual enjoyment. She uttered no sound as she stood there, her lips parted slightly in a smile that showed her gleaming teeth, a look of almost dog-like devotion in her wonderful eyes. With a snarl, the doctor finally hurled the whip upon the floor. She leaped forward and dropped to her knees at his feet, her arms raised in an attitude of supplication.

"You are my master!" she exclaimed proudly. "My body is yours to command. My soul belongs to God, but you are its keeper."

He smiled triumphantly. Slowly he turned on the balls of his feet and pointed to me. Her eyes brightened. For an instant she crouched like a panther about to spring. Then she turned to him again.

"Something tells me that somewhere another holds my heart like a burning pearl between his hands, Master," she wailed.

"This is he," Lessman asserted.

Her face changed. She moved toward

me slowly, her rounded arms extended. I prayed. God, how I prayed! The world danced before my eyes. Something was happening. My very soul was being torn from its moorings. She pressed her lips to mine. I attempted to push her from me—to shriek for help. I was unable to move, to utter a sound.

Before me the burning eyes of Lessman seared into my brain. Something seemed to tell me that I was not myself—that I was some one else—some one who had known and loved this girl in the dim past. . . . Then consciousness left me.

### 3. *The Awakening*

I RETURNED to consciousness with a start. I was lying on a cot in a bleak, unfurnished room. The sun was shining through the uncurtained window. The beetle-browed man I had seen in the garden at the time of my entrance was sitting on a broken chair close to the foot of the bed regarding me with an idiotic grin.

For an instant I lay there trying to collect my thoughts. Then recollection swept over me. The remembrance of that meeting in the doctor's office—everything—came to me with a rush. I swung my feet to the floor and rose unsteadily. The man with the beetle brow gave a peculiar, guttural cry and took to his heels, slamming the door behind him.

Unconsciously I swept my hand across my chin. My face was covered with a day's growth of stubble. Yet I had visited the barber just before driving to Lessman's. I glanced down at my wrist watch. It had stopped. The thought flashed across my mind that I had slept the clock around. I felt groggy and tired. My brain declined to function. For an instant the room swam before my eyes. Was I dreaming? No.

I wondered if I was a prisoner. Summoning all of my will-power I staggered to the door through which the shaggy-

haired man had retreated. It was unlocked. I stepped out into the hallway.

Unlike the lavishly furnished room where I had met Doctor Lessman, the hall was unfurnished and bare. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling; the corners were festooned with them. The floor was covered with dust. The paper was mildewed and torn. On either side the doors were open. I noted that none of the apartments were furnished. All bore the same evidence of desertion that the hall showed.

I was on the second floor. That much was apparent. I dragged my weary body around the corner and came upon a stairway leading downward. I descended, finally emerging upon the lower level almost in front of Lessman's office. The door was open. I entered.

The saturnine physician was seated beside the table smoking, a book between his fingers. He turned slowly at my approach, his eyes gazing into vacancy. Then recognition swept over him and he gave me a slight nod.

"You are—yes, you are Cope," he said slowly. "Sit down. What do you want?"

"My freedom," I answered bitterly.

He raised his arched eyebrows questioningly.

"My dear man, you are free to go whenever you choose," he answered almost irritably. "You came here as a voluntary patient and asked for treatment. I——"

"Patient? Treatment?" I ejaculated. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," he responded. "Your bill is paid a month in advance. Naturally, I will not refund your money, although I do not care to hold you against your will."

Again the room swam before my eyes. Was I insane? Was the whole horrible affair only the hallucination of a disordered mind? Had I dreamed of the beat-



ing he had inflicted upon the girl, Meta? Was the episode following my entrance only a part of my delirium? I turned to him appealingly.

My face must have reflected the condition of my mind. He pointed to the door. I strode forward and, turning the knob, looked out. Something—some strange power—held me back. I tried to break it. Impossible. Like a whipped puppy, I turned back into the room once more. My mind was as clear as a crystal. I swear it. I realized that I was free to go—that it was my duty to leave the hellish place as soon as possible—that I should bring the proper officers back with me and search it from cellar to garret. Yet I could not move. I could no more cross that threshold than I could fly.

The sweat burst out on my brow in great beads. I turned to a chair and dropped into it wearily. Lessman gazed at me mockingly, a cynical smile hovering over his diabolic face. Opening a drawer, he brought forth a printed blank and passed it over to me.

"You must understand, Mr. Cope, that even though your commitment is voluntary, I must have something to show in case of inquiry," he said quietly. "Kindly sign your name on the dotted line at the bottom of the page."

I picked up the pen he offered me. Something seemed to grip my fingers. I struggled against signing, but in vain. In spite of myself I affixed my signature to the document.

SEVERAL days have passed since I wrote the above. I am like an animal now. My hair is matted and unkempt, my beard tangled and uncombed. I spend most of my waking hours in a sort of trance in my bleak, unfurnished room which, it appears, I share with the beetle-browed man. He sleeps on the floor, curled up

like a dog. Sometimes I wonder if he is Priestly Ogden. I have asked him several times, but he does not answer me. He seems to be without the power of understanding. He is an automaton. He brings the food to our room and we wolf it down like ravenous beasts without regard for the common decencies. I am almost as wild and unkempt as he is. . . .

I have tried several times to leave this accursed place. I am allowed the run of the yard and there does not appear to be any guard over me. But whenever I approach the gate something seems to drag me back. I am bound here by invisible chains.

I see little of Lessman and less of Meta. I do not seem to be a prisoner, yet, as I said before, I have not the will-power to leave. . . . The other day I found this tablet of paper in one of the rooms. Luckily my pencil was still in my pocket. Lessman, passing by, noticed me writing and gazed over my shoulder. He chuckled, half to himself, but said nothing. Since he made no objection, I will continue.

OF LATE I have been subject to dreams—weird, horrible nightmares. They frighten me. Let me explain. Yesterday there was a funeral in the little cemetery I have already described just at the edge of this uncanny place. I watched them from the window as they tenderly lowered the coffin into its final resting-place.

Final resting-place! God, what a mockery! I wonder if it really was. I dreamed about it last night. Ugh! How realistic that dream was! I was in the burying-ground with the beetle-browed man. We were armed with spades. Lessman stood close by and directed operations while Meta held the lantern by which we worked. We opened the grave and removed the body from the casket—a young and good-looking man—then we refilled

the grave and carried the cold form to the house. It all seemed horribly real.

This morning when I woke up I was tired and every muscle in my body ached as if from some unaccustomed exercise. I scarcely stirred from my bed all day. I am beginning to wonder. . . .

No, I am not insane. Yet Lessman says that I came here and asked him to treat me. I must have been suffering from amnesia, for I have no recollection of anything save what I have written here. I know that I am as sane as I ever was except for the hallucinations and the inability to obey my own will. But if I continue to dream as I have been dreaming I shall be a raving maniac before long. . . .

**I** HAD another dream last night. God, it was diabolical! I will try and describe it. Lessman seemed to be calling me. I leaped from my couch and hurried through the darkened corridors to a huge room at the rear of the house. The door was open and the place was brilliantly lighted. Lessman, clad in surgeon's smock, was waiting for me. Meta in her trim nurse's garb stood a little way back. She smiled as I entered and gave me a friendly nod.

The room was fitted up like the interior of a hospital. In the center was an operating-table. There were vials and retorts and shelves filled with bottles and boxes and several cases of bright instruments. To one side was a door. Lessman commanded me to open it. His will was mine. A draft of cold air greeted me as I stepped inside. It was like an ice-house, only the air was dead and moldy. Once I was inside a morgue. It was the same—there was a feeling of deadness even in the atmosphere.

He turned on an electric light. It was a morgue. On marble slabs lay several bodies in their grave clothes. Nearest

the door was the young man I had dreamed of stealing from the grave the night before. At Lessman's command I picked the cold form up in my arms and carried it to the outer room and laid it on a leather-covered couch.

As I straightened up I caught a glimpse of Lessman's eyes. They gazed through me like twin X-Rays. I heard his voice calling to me as from a great distance, telling me to separate myself from my body. Then came a feeling of dissolution. Time after time I seemed to be falling through space—falling—falling—falling. I would catch myself with a jerk, standing in another part of the room, but my body was in front of Lessman. I was puzzled. Always, as I have said, just as my soul seemed to be leaving my body, something would snap and I would find myself gazing into Lessman's eyes.

"I can't do it tonight," I heard him mutter to Meta. "It is not the subject's fault, however, but my own. For some reason I am unable to concentrate. It will have to be you again."

My last recollection was of hearing Meta sobbing.

I awoke again with the same feeling of lassitude and inertia.

**G**REAT God above! It was not a dream. Everything is clear to me now. I have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that I am not insane. In prowling through the house today I chanced to find the door of the operating-room, or laboratory, open. I entered. The place was unoccupied. The interior was just as it had appeared to me in my vision, dream, or whatever it was. Across the room was the door opening into the little morgue. I knew that inside lay the bodies of the dead. I moved toward it and had my hand on the knob when I heard the voices of Lessman and Meta

in the office. I darted out and was half-way up the stairs when they appeared.

What is this charnel-house? What is the ghastly plot in which I appear to be one of the central figures?

#### 4. *A Night of Horror*

**M**Y MIND is in a haze as I write these lines. Something has happened to me—something so weird, so unbelievable that I can scarce believe it myself. I am not myself! I am some one else! I am the dead man who was buried in the little cemetery adjoining this foul place and whose cold, cold clay Jake—Lessman and Meta call the beetle-browed man Jake—and I disinterred. And yet I am—I must be—Carter Cope. I think as Carter Cope. My actions are those of Carter Cope. . . . God! It is awful! There is no one to whom I can talk. I must write or my already tottering mind will break entirely.

I say that I am Carter Cope and yet that I am some one else. The body of Carter Cope lies in the little morgue in the rear of Doctor Lessman's laboratory. I have seen it with my own eyes. Yet I am Carter Cope. I am here. But is this I? Where will I commence on this chapter?

Last night I heard the voice of Lessman calling me again. Yet there was no voice save in my own mind. It must have been the thought waves from his marvelous brain beating against my subconsciousness. I rose from my lowly cot and obeyed his command. He and Meta—curse their foul souls!—were in the laboratory. She was clad in some sort of thin, transparent material through which every curve of her beautiful, sensuous body showed. As I entered she gazed at me with a look of indescribable longing. Her blood-red lips were half parted over her pearly teeth; her wonderful eyes were filled with languorous passion. She took a step toward me, her soft, white hands

extended beguilingly, her rounded breasts rising and falling with each breath. Lessman turned and waved her back to the couch on which she had been half reclining. Lessman owns me. . . . He owns me body and soul. I am his to command. I know this now. I desired this woman, yet I made no movement toward her because he willed otherwise. At his command I turned away from this rare creature of flesh and blood to the door of the little morgue and staggered forth with the stiff, frozen body of the young man whom I have already mentioned. I placed it on the operating-table, then looked at my master—at Lessman—inquiringly.

"My experiments with you have not been altogether successful," he told me in his calm, low voice. "Somewhere, deep in your sub-conscious mind, your will is battling against that which I am striving to do. In order to make my experiment a success you must be complaisant.

"I am, my friend, attempting to change the law laid down by the Creator of all things. I am attempting the transference of the soul. Think of it! For those who know my secret there will be no such thing as death—only a moving on from one shape to another. When man's body wears out he need only discard it and assume another and so continue on and on to the end of time.

"Science, my friend, has shown us that life—the soul—the essence of being—weighs only the infinitesimal part of an ounce. Yet without it we cease to be. The young man whose carnal shell lies before you weighs practically as much as he ever did. The same framework of bones supports his flesh. Yet he is nothing—a mere clod. Why? Because the thing we call life is missing. It is that spark which, with your help, I propose to give him for the time being.

"Time after time I have succeeded with the assistance of Meta, but never with another. Look at her, my friend. Is she not beautiful? She is yours if you but give me your aid. Allow your sub-conscious mind to lie dormant for an instant until I catch your soul. Will you do it? The prize is well worth winning."

Fool! Fool that I was! Did I not know that his long harangue was merely to compose my soul so that it would be more pliable in his hands? Did I not know that Meta was but the bait to draw me into the trap? I caught a little glimpse of her. She smiled at me. Something within me snapped. . . .

I was a vapor—a thin, transparent, fog-like vapor. My body—the body of Carter Cope—lay sprawled on the floor in the middle of the room while I—that is, my aura—floated, wraith-like, above it. Lessman bent forward, his eyes glittering like twin fires of hell, his arms outstretched toward me.

I could think. My brain was clear. I realized everything that was going on, yet I was powerless to resist my master's call. His voice was calling to me, ordering me to enter the body of the dead man on the operating-table. I made no struggle now. I was too far gone to fight his commands.

Blackness . . . Egyptian darkness . . . the darkness of the infernal regions. And cold—the chill iciness of death . . . the arctic cold of dead, frozen flesh. . . .

I felt a thrill of life pound through my veins. Then came a sensation of delightful warmth. I pulled myself erect.

As true as there is a God in Heaven, I was the dead man. Yet I was not dead. I was alive.

My own discarded body, the body of Carter Cope, lay like a cast-off garment before me. I almost smiled as I noted a tiny rent in the leg of the trousers where I had torn it on a bramble the day be-

fore. The clothes I now wore were new—the grave clothes of the boy who had just been buried.

Lessman turned to Meta. His voice trembled with excitement as he addressed her.

"Success! Success at last!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "This, then, is the beginning of the end of my long years of labor."

He leaned forward and whispered something in her ear. She drew back with a little gesture of disgust. He jerked the whip from beneath his smock and struck her across the shoulders. With the first blow she dropped on her knees before him, her arms extended, her face upturned. In her eyes was a look of esthetic bliss.

The wraith-like garment dropped from her rounded shoulders, across which the cruel whip raised a criss-cross of welts. The red blood trickled from them in tiny streams over the smooth, white flesh.

"More! More!" she begged in a soft, low voice. "I am Laela, priestess of Isis. Was I wrong when I loved, even though I had taken the vow of celibacy? Tell me, oh High Priest, ere you scourge me again."

He hurled her from him as if she was unclean. She rose slowly to her feet and drew her garment over her bleeding shoulders. She took a step toward him, her arms outstretched.

"Scourge me, my master," she wailed. "But take me not away from my beloved."

He struck her again. She turned to me. Something—I know not what it was—passed over me. She was calling me. Yet she made no sound. I advanced toward her. She met me. For an instant we stood there facing each other. I looked into her wonderful eyes. Then our lips met in one long, long kiss.

A feeling of bliss swept over me. Words can not describe it. I glanced

over Meta's shoulder. Lessman's eyes were upon me. They bored through me. My temporal body seemed to disappear, leaving my soul alone to meet that of Meta. . . .

Again a feeling of nothingness swept over me. Then came a strange buoyancy. . . .

*I was Meta Vanetta!*

Before me stood the dead man—not dead, but pulsating with life. His arms were about me. He clasped me to him, drawing me so close that my face was pressed against his shoulder.

I was two beings—myself and Meta.

How can I explain it? I was Meta Vanetta. But was Meta Carter Cope? Impossible! I was still Carter Cope. Yet the body of Carter Cope lay on the floor where I had left it when I entered the shell of the man who stood before me. Upon his hands was blood—blood from the reeking gashes made by the whip on the shoulders of Meta.

Lessman's eyes! Again that feeling of oblivion—or nothingness—swept over me. I was drifting . . . drifting through space . . . drifting. . . .

I awoke. I was leaning against the wall swaying dizzily. Meta stood on the other side of the room. She was leaning forward, her eyes gazing hungrily at me, her white arms extended toward me beseechingly.

"Beloved!" I heard her call.

Then nothingness again.

Great God! I can not understand it.

When I awoke I was lying on my bed of straw. Jake, the beetle-browed man, sat up when he heard me stir and gazed at me, frightened. Then he ran from the room. His eyes were wide with terror.

There is no mirror by which I can confirm my thoughts. *But I know that I am not Carter Cope! I am the dead man we took from the grave!* Jake knows it. That is why he runs away from me.

W. T.—3

My hands are covered with blood—Meta's blood!

### 5. *Dance of the Dead*

**T**wo days have passed since I made my last entry in this account of my life here in this diabolical House of the Living Dead. The House of the Living Dead! What a title that would be for a story! But the author would be locked up for the remainder of his life in some asylum. No one would believe that it was anything but the wanderings of a diseased mind.

Lessman is treating me better now since his experiment with me proved a success. I have been taken away from the room which I shared jointly with Jake and I am now lodged in an apartment on the first floor. Here there are all of the conveniences of modern life save one—a razor. There is a bathtub. I can keep myself clean. And, too, I have been given fresh linen. Lessman insists, however, that I allow my beard to grow and that my hair remain uncut. He probably figures that a tangled mass of whiskers and long, dark hair will prove an effectual disguise should any one who knows me see me from the road. And he is right. There is a mirror in the room I now occupy. I looked into it yesterday and almost failed to recognize myself in the tall, gaunt, bewhiskered man who gazed out at me.

I see a great deal of Meta now. Lessman is a devil incarnate. I believe that he has sold himself to the ruler of Hell. He knows that I love Meta and that I can not oppose his will as long as he allows us to mingle together. And I—I, poor fool—I know that Meta is but his tool. She knows it, too. She loves me, but yet she obeys his every command. Daily, hourly, I feel my will-power growing weaker and weaker. The brain of Doctor

Darius Lessman is my brain. I can not think for myself when he wills otherwise. That is why this screed is so rambling and incoherent. It is only when he wills it that I have the inclination to bestir myself. Time passes and I do not know it. I do not even know what day of the month this is. I do not care.

I wonder why Lessman allows me to continue my writing? Some one is liable to find this scrawl. He does not seem to worry about it, however. Meta believes that he knows that this outpouring of my soul is the link which binds me to sanity—the safety valve which keeps me from growing totally demented. Perhaps she is right. Lessman is a wonderful man. I am growing to like him more and more, devil though he is.

I have had several long talks with Meta. She is one woman in a million. She is more—much more—subservient to Lessman's will than I am. For some reason when we are together he withdraws his power over us and allows us to think for ourselves. . . . But does he? Or do we just think that such is the case? Her mind is a blank on many things which have happened. She has no recollection of her constant assertions when under the influence of Lessman's whip that she is the reincarnation of some one—some long-dead priestess of some strange Egyptian cult. Yet she says that she always comes out of such spells feeling buoyant and light-hearted. She says that she suffers no pain when the cruel lash cuts into her flesh, but, on the contrary, each blow fills her with a strange, uncontrollable love for her tormenter. Not a sexual passion, but, rather, the love of a neophyte for the Creator of all things. As a matter of experiment, she has asked me to beat her; on several occasions I have tried to inflict bodily pain upon her, but the effect is different from when Lessman strikes her. Even a faint blow from my

hand hurts her and causes her to shrink away from me.

She has no recollection of any other life than that with Lessman. She has been with him so long that she is almost a part of him. She does not know how old she is, nor has she any memory of a childhood. She reads and writes with ease and is an accomplished musician. Yet she says that she never attended school and does not know where she gained her accomplishments.

She believes that Lessman is two beings—that he has divided his soul and that half of it occupies her body. She believes that she is very old. Sometimes, she says, she has hazy recollections of a distant country—of another life in the midst of lotus flowers and robed priests and priestesses. She has never been in Egypt, yet she is certain that it is of Egypt that she dreams. She believes that she is occupying the temporal body of some one else, but that her soul is as old as time itself.

Who is Darius Lessman? Meta does not know. Within his skull is concentrated the wisdom of the ages. His most cherished possessions, she says, are two mummy-cases; in one of them is the mummified body of a priestess of Isis and in the other that of a priest of that strange Egyptian cult of a bygone day. He keeps them under lock and key in a vault. Meta believes that he is the reincarnation of that priest and that she is the priestess. Who knows?

**M**ETA and I have twice attempted to escape from this weird and unholy place. On both occasions we have gotten as far as the gate, yet we could not pass through it. Lessman's spell is too strong for us to break.

Lessman rarely shows himself by day. He is a denizen of the darkness. I picture him in my mind's eye as consorting

with the bats and owls and other inhabitants of the night. It is only at night that we see him, save on rare occasions. Meta says that he can work his hellish incantations better after sundown. . . .

This afternoon we searched the house for him. He was neither within nor on the grounds. We even peered into the little morgue. The palatial office was unoccupied. The door to the little vault was open and I looked within. The two sarcophagi leaned against the wall. I turned away and, an instant later, Lessman stepped through the door. Yet I am willing to swear that, save for the two mummy-cases, the vault was bare. I was too much astounded for words. Nor did he make any explanation.

Later I discussed the matter with Meta. She believes that Lessman has the power to project himself into the body of the mummy and that he takes such rest as he may need in that manner. If so, where does he leave his mortal body? Yet she can not be wrong. We have searched the house and have found no bedchamber for him. Meta says that she has no recollection of ever seeing him asleep. Where does he disappear to during the day unless it is within the mummy-case? . . .

**M**ORE horror! A dance of the dead! Lessman is succeeding far beyond his wildest dreams. He says that I was the turning-point in his experiments.

Last night he ordered Jake and me to bring from the morgue the three bodies that it contained. There was the young man whose shape I had assumed before and a young and beautiful girl. There was also a young, fair-haired man with throat cut from ear to ear. Into these shells he transferred the souls of Meta, Jake and myself. Then to the music of a radio—to the music of a dance orchestra playing in the dining-room of one of New York's finest hotels—we, the dead,

held hellish jubilee. For hours we danced and cavorted while our own bodies lay sprawled, like discarded garments, on the floor before us. God! It is horrible to think of it now in the clear, bright light of noonday. Last night it was different.

Meta assumed the body of the girl, I that of the young man we had stolen from the cemetery, while Jake took on the temporal form of the man with the slashed throat.

It is of Jake and the other that I would write. That Jake is Priestly Ogden is now a certainty. He told me so himself while the orchestra rested between dances in that far-away station in New York. Yet his story is so strange, so unbelievable, that I scarce know how to tell it.

Lessman killed him. The slash across his throat was made by a razor which tore through windpipe and jugular. Think of it! A man with his throat cut from ear to ear dancing, cavorting, gamboling to the strains of a modern orchestra playing "Betty Coed." An orchestra whose music was brought to us through the air on the invisible waves of sound.

Lessman enticed him to this place. The girl was here—the girl whose form Meta had assumed. In driving past the house Ogden noticed her in the yard and, stopping, engaged her in conversation. He had fallen in love at sight. Lessman, appearing from nowhere, had invited him to return. That is how he came by the slip of paper bearing Lessman's name. He had returned the next day. Later when he was under Lessman's spell he had found that he was in love with a dead woman—a girl who had been filched from the grave six months before and whose shell sheltered the soul of Meta.

Within the morgue lay the body of Jake. Night after night Lessman worked with Ogden in an effort to force his soul into the cold clay but without success. In a fit of anger he had killed his victim.

Then, as Ogden's soul was leaving its shell, Lessman had captured it and confined it inside the body of Jake, the half-wit. All this he told me, and more, as we stood there waiting for the orchestra to strike up another tune. Yes, it is horrible—too horrible to mention—now that I am temporarily out from under the spell of the master mind. But last night it was different.

**L**ESSMAN was pleased with the success of last night's experiment. He has a treat in store for us tonight, he says. He told us that last night after we had shed the bodies of the dead and had assumed our own shapes—told us after we had carried the cold, stark bodies back into the gloomy morgue.

**A**CREW of workmen erected a tombstone over the grave of the young man whose body we stole from the cemetery. His name is John Reid. He is twenty-six years of age. It is graven on the marble slab.

If they only knew the truth! . . .

### 6. *The Stolen Soul*

**I**MUST write. If I do not I shall go mad. Already I feel my reason tottering. Last night I helped Lessman steal a soul. In the eyes of God and man I am as much a criminal as he is. Yet am I? What I did was at his dictation. I have no will of my own. It would make a pretty case for the courts—something for the learned judges and lawyers to spout and rave about until doomsday.

How can I describe what we did? I know so little of psychology, of philosophy, of theology. It is hard for me to write intelligently. Suffice to say that it is Lessman's theory—this much do I understand—that the doctrine of reincarnation is correct. Souls, he says, never die,

but go on and on, changing the old bodies for new as speedily as the ancient shell is worn out. He believes that there are just as many people in the world now as there were in the beginning—no more and no less. He says that there is no such thing as nothingness. Matter dies, decays and returns to the earth from which it came. The globe on which we live weighs just as much as it did when it was created. A single ounce more would throw it out of balance; a single ounce less would do the same thing. Just as water evaporates, congeals and returns to the earth in the form of hail and snow and rain, so, he believes, do souls leave one shell and return to occupy another while the body returns to dust.

He would change the process laid down by the Creator. It is his idea that the soul can go on and on in a different way—by changing its abiding-place before that strange thing called death occurs. He can extract the soul and mold it to his own needs, but in his opinion it must always have a dwelling-place. Until such a dwelling-place is found the soul is doomed to wander through space, a wraith, or, as we term it, a gho

**L**AST night we took a holiday—the holiday of the dead. From some unknown source Lessman obtained an automobile. Into it he loaded all of us. But was it we who occupied the seats? I do not know. My own soul occupied the shell of John Reid. Jake was in his own form, but I know, now, that he is Priestly Ogden. Meta's ego was transferred into the body of Ogden's sweetheart. The dead girl's name was Nona Metzgar, she has told us. Why did he not allow us to use our own earthly shapes? I mustered up courage enough to ask him. He said that it was to insure our safety in case we were seen. In other words, Jake and Nona and young Reid were all known to



be dead. Who, then, would believe the story of any one who claimed to have seen this array of occupants of the grave in the act of performing their ghoulish work?

He laid before us new clothing in which we arrayed our bodies. He himself assumed the shell of Priestly Ogden and took the wheel. The horrible gash in his throat showed just above the collar of his shirt. Ugh! I shudder even now as I think about it. Imagine a man with throat cut from ear to ear driving a car filled with living dead men and women!

At the edge of a town a dozen or more miles away was a burying-ground. Here we stopped. Lessman, who had evidently posted himself in advance, led the way through the darkness straight to the newly-made grave. Jake and I followed with the shovels while Meta brought up in the rear with a lantern. The rain was falling in a steady drizzle; had we not been numbered among the dead ourselves the work of disinterring the coffin would have been a dismal one.

We had gotten little more than started when a sound in the bushes brought us to a sudden halt. An instant later half a dozen men dashed out of the undergrowth. At Lessman's command we took to our heels. They shouted an order at us. Then, when we did not stop, they fired a volley. The range was close and they could not miss. A dozen bullets went through our dead flesh. But of what avail is it to shoot leaden bullets into the carcass of a man who is already dead? We laughed at the thought of it. The hellishness of our mirth caused them to stop. One of them was nearly atop of us. At the sound of our laughter he turned the beam of his flashlight upon us. It struck Lessman fairly in the face. They got one look at the grisly gash in his throat. They dropped their arms and

took to their heels while we returned to our car and made our escape.

We drove through the rain another dozen miles or more, finally coming to another large cemetery. This time, however, Lessman did not stop at the edge of the grounds, but drove straight through the gate and up one of the graveled roads which curved through the trees and neatly trimmed foliage. Five minutes later we were in front of a large mausoleum. For an instant he probed at the lock; then the barred doors opened and we entered.

There were a dozen coffins in the niches. He turned to the nearest of them and commanded Jake to pry it open with his spade. The half-wit obeyed. An instant later we were gazing down at the still, cold face of a man of middle age.

Dawn was not far away, so we were forced to work fast. It took Lessman but an instant to project his soul—or ego, if you wish—from the form of the murdered Priestly Ogden to that of the man in the coffin. An instant later the latter climbed from his narrow cot, the life-blood flowing through his veins.

At Lessman's command we picked up the body of Priestly Ogden and placed it in the coffin. Then we stole forth into the clean outside air again.

Once more we were fated to be interrupted. We were about to enter the car when the watchman came hurrying around the corner of the huge vault. He caught a glimpse of the car and, at the same time, the open doors of the mausoleum, and shouted a command to us to halt.

We paid no attention to his order. He turned the beam of his lantern on us just as the man in the other cemetery had done.

As the light struck Lessman squarely in the face the startled watchman uttered a cry of horror. What must have been his astonishment at seeing a man whom he

had assisted in placing in the tomb only a few days before sitting at the wheel of a car in front of his last resting-place! Lessman laughed—a hellish, diabolical chuckle. The man turned and fled. We heard him scrambling through the bushes and undergrowth, howling in terror. Lessman switched on the ignition and, an hour later, we were back inside our own bodies again.

**I**N THE beginning of this chapter I stated that I had helped Lessman steal a soul. Let me explain.

Dawn was just breaking when we arrived at the place we called home—the House of the Living Dead. Lessman sent Jake somewhere with the car and, a moment later, assumed his own shape.

It was shortly before eight o'clock when a man appeared at the door—a tall, heavy-set individual, well dressed and prosperous-looking. Lessman had evidently been expecting the visitor; he hastily told me what to do, and now I, in the role of butler, answered the knock and ushered the man into the office.

I did not see what passed between the doctor and his visitor. I only know that, fifteen minutes after he had entered the house, Lessman summoned me again to assist him, this time in carrying the stranger into the laboratory. The poor devil was not dead. His brain was apparently normal, but every faculty was paralyzed just as mine had been that first time I met Lessman. There was a look of appeal in his eyes as I entered the room. Evidently he thought that he might expect some help from me. But so strong is the power of Darius Lessman over me that I paid no heed to him.

Once in the laboratory Lessman worked fast. For an instant only he confronted the other. Slowly the spirit left the body and, hovering for an instant in midair,

entered the shell of the middle-aged man we had stolen from the mausoleum.

Lessman turned to me, a look of triumph on his saturnine countenance.

"You can see, now, why I wanted the body," he said with the air of a professor demonstrating to his class. "The soul, my friend, must have a resting-place or else be doomed to wander forever over the face of the earth. Now, I want to borrow the body of this man for a day or two. Why? Because I must make a trip to the city. I need money with which to carry on my work here—money and other things. This man is wealthy. Perhaps, while I am occupying his shell, I will do things without the law. He has influence. Later, when I am through with it, I will transfer his soul back to its rightful resting-place, and allow him to answer for the things that I have done—for the liberties I have taken. But, first, I will make his mind a blank insofar as the happenings here are concerned. Now do you understand?"

I shook my head dumbly, still not understanding.

As one sheds an old coat, so did Lessman shed his own form and enter the shell of the stranger. He stood erect and drew a great breath into his lungs.

"Eureka! The world is mine!" he exclaimed.

**L**ESSMAN has just spoken to me as I wrote the above.

"Write '*Finis*' to your screed," he commanded. "Do you think that I have thus allowed you to put your thoughts on paper without having a definite purpose in mind? I am in a hurry. So hasten your work."

This, then, is my last line. I hastily subscribe myself,

CARTER COPE.

7. *Rider Meets Lessman*

RIDER'S face wore a strange, far-away look as he laid the weird manuscript on the desk. Again he slowly filled and lighted his pipe, so absorbed in his thoughts that the match flame singed his fingers before he noticed what he was doing. He dropped the burning taper with an oath and picked up the newspaper clipping which had accompanied Carter Cope's communication.

MYSTERIOUS HAPPENINGS  
IN OAKWOOD CEMETERY!

Body of Prominent Man Stolen From Tomb—Body of Suicide Is Substituted—Caretaker Tells of Seeing Dead Man in Car

The body of Amos Hoskins, prominent philanthropist, was stolen from the mausoleum at Oakwood cemetery Monday night and in its place was substituted the body of a young man named Priestly Ogden, who has been missing from home for the past several months and who now, judging from the condition of the body, has been found to have committed suicide.

Jabez Heckwood, the cemetery caretaker, who lives in a small house just inside the grounds, was aroused from his slumber about 3 o'clock in the morning by the sound of a car driven into the grounds. Hastily dressing, he armed himself with a revolver and flashlight and hurried to the mausoleum in front of which, he noted, the car had stopped.

He was just in time to see four persons—three men and one woman—hurrying from the mausoleum to the car. He shouted at them to halt, at the same time pointing his flashlight in their direction.

The leader of the party of four, according to Caretaker Heckwood, was Amos Hoskins.

In view of the fact that Mr. Heckwood had, only two days earlier, assisted in placing the body of Mr. Hoskins—who died Thursday at his home, 1739 South Masfield St.—in the tomb, it is needless to state that he was badly frightened. Dropping flashlight and gun, he hurried to his home, where he telephoned to cemetery officials and members of the Hoskins family.

Upon arrival at the cemetery, the party found that the lock of the mausoleum had been picked and the body of Mr. Hoskins removed. In the casket lay the body of a young man whose throat was cut from ear to ear. From official descriptions, the police identified him as Priestly Ogden, 4519 Lenroot Ave., who disappeared from home several months ago. Identification was later completed by distant relatives.

Ogden was, without doubt, a suicide.

The police are investigating. The family of Mr. Hoskins has offered a reward of \$5,000 for information leading to the recovery of the body and conviction of the ghouls.

For an instant Rider sat in silence. Then he reached for the telephone, lifted the receiver and gave a number.

"Lincoln Tavern?" he inquired. Then: "I would like to speak to Mr. John Harper."

An instant later the connection was made. As the voice of Harper came booming over the wire, Rider spoke again.

"Rider speaking," he said tersely. "I am accepting your commission. I visit Lessman tomorrow morning."

He replaced the receiver on the hook, his face again wearing the strange, far-away expression.

DAWN was still two hours away when Rider, his car parked a quarter of a mile away, broke through the tangle of underbrush which surrounded the House of the Living Dead and, dodging furtively from shadow to shadow, finally reached his objective.

There was a light in one of the rooms in the rear of the house. He crept closer to the windows and attempted to listen. Only silence greeted his ears. The shades were tightly drawn, leaving not a crack through which he could peer.

Why had he told John Harper a falsehood? Why had he told the attorney that he would visit Lessman in the morning, only to hasten his trip by a dozen hours? He scarcely knew, himself. Asa Rider was a man who believed in hunches. Something—some vague, indescribable sixth sense—had warned him of danger. He had made hasty inquiries.

John Harper had disappeared from his home twenty-four hours before. He had left no word where he was going, nor had cautious inquiries at the lawyer's office elicited any information.

Were John Harper and Doctor Darius Lessman one and the same? Was John Harper the man who had appeared at Lessman's house of horror in the early

hours of the morning? Was it his soul which now reposed in the dead body of Amos Hoskins while Lessman masqueraded in his stolen body? Had Lessman given him the weird, unbelievable manuscript written by Carter Cope in an effort to trap him? Rider believed that he had. But why? The pseudo-lawyer had answered the question himself when he had told Rider that he had selected him for the dangerous task of seeking Carter Cope because there was none to mourn him should he, like Cope, disappear from the haunts of men.

In the rear of the house was a tiny lean-to. Above it a window. Cope had stated that the upper floor was untenanted save for the man, Jake, and he was, in all probability, with the others in the lighted room.

Removing his shoes, Rider climbed the latticework to the roof of the little out-building. The window was unlocked. He raised it slightly and allowed the beam of his flashlight to play over the bare, untenanted room. An instant later he was inside.

He could hear the subdued sound of conversation now. He reached for his revolver. Then he recalled the statement made by Carter Cope. Lead bullets had no effect on men and women who were already dead. With a shrug of his shoulders, he replaced the weapon in his pocket and, cautiously opening the door, entered the long, unlighted hall.

The door of the room in the rear of the house was open. He dodged down the stairs, halting for an instant in front of the office Carter Cope had described. The door was ajar, the room in darkness. He dodged inside and turned the beam of his flashlight here and there over the palatial interior. A second door to the left attracted his attention. It, too, was unlocked. He pulled it open and allowed

the ray from his lamp to dissipate the darkness.

The little room was vacant save for two Egyptian mummy-cases leaning against the wall.

He heard the sound of a footstep behind him. He turned but too late. A dozen electric lights flashed into life as some one pressed the switch.

John Harper stood before him.

FOR an instant the attorney said nothing. Then he took a step forward, a smile of recognition upon his face.

"Ah, I see that you outguessed me," he chuckled. "You are right, Mr. Rider, I am Lessman—Lessman in the shell of John Harper. Luckily something—some sixth sense—called me into this room; else you might have escaped."

He motioned to a chair, seating himself on the opposite side of the table. For an instant Rider hesitated. Then he, too, seated himself.

Lessman rolled a cigarette.

"As you deduced, Rider—you see I am able to read your mind to a certain extent—I needed another man to experiment with. I wanted a clean-cut, healthy specimen—a man whose habits were such that he appeared and disappeared frequently and whose relatives would make no great fuss if he never returned."

He chuckled.

"John Harper wrote several checks today. In fact, practically all of his available cash is now in my hands. I have money enough now to complete my experiments. Tomorrow Harper will return to his usual haunts. The past forty-eight hours will be a blank to him. He will put it down to temporary amnesia, pocket his loss and say nothing. Meanwhile——"

He leaned forward. A feeling of inertia swept over the detective. He struggled against it in vain. He was paralyzed.

His muscles refused to co-ordinate. The eyes of the man on the opposite side of the table were boring holes through him, it seemed. His brain was clear, missing not a single detail. He summoned all of his will-power in an effort to resist the other. . . .

In spite of the fact that he knew bullets would have no effect on the man who sat before him, Rider had, as the strange feeling of nothingness swept over him, involuntarily reached for the revolver which reposed in its leather holster beneath his left arm. Now, as his hand dropped, nerveless, his fingers accidentally touched the tiny crucifix which hung, suspended from a thin golden chain, about his neck.

For an instant the hypnotic influence of the master mind ceased. Rider felt the lifeblood surge through his veins once more. He leaped to his feet, his gnawing fingers tearing at the buttons of his shirt as he jerked the little cross from its resting-place above his heart and held it aloft.

Lessman screamed. He leaped to his feet. The match which he had just lighted and was about to apply to the end of his cigarette dropped from his nerveless fingers.

"The Cross! The Cross!" he screamed hoarsely, staggering backward.

There was a flash. The lighted match, falling into the wastepaper basket, had ignited it. Now, while the two men stood facing each other, the flames crept to the window hangings. An instant later the room was an inferno.

Rider, fighting his way through the smoke and fire, the tiny cross still held aloft, fell in a little heap in the middle of the yard. For five minutes he lay there

sucking the fresh night air into his tortured lungs.

From inside the house he heard screams. Then silence.

The door opened. Lessman, staggering under the weight of two mummy-cases, dashed through the flame-encircled doorway.

He hurled the cases from him. Then he fell. He dragged himself to his feet and, turning, re-entered the burning building.

Through the smoke which poured out of the roaring inferno drifted two white, mist-like forms. For a moment they were wafted here and there by the suction of the flames. Then, fog-like, they settled over the two mummy-cases. Lower and lower they hovered until they covered the cases like dew. Then, even as Rider, his teeth chattering as if from the ague, watched, the vapor disappeared within the cases.

"Lessman and Meta," he muttered in an awed whisper. "Carter Cope was right. Within the mummified forms of that long-dead priest and priestess the souls of those two fiends make their home."

Rider darted forward to drag the cases farther away from the burning building, but he was too late, for the roof crumbled, and the blazing wall fell out onto the mummy-cases, enveloping them in a sheet of flame.

**W**ITH the coming of morning near-by residents, hurrying from the four quarters of the landscape, raked through the smoldering ruins. The remains of six bodies were found, burned beyond recognition.

Of the House of the Living Dead not even the two mummy-cases remained.

