

# A LIFE FOR SALE

BY SYDNEY HORLER

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## CHAPTER X THE HOUSE AT HIGHGATE

Standing desolate and forbidding, amidst grounds that were weed-ridden and unsightly to the eye, this house did not invite inspection. Indeed, it has such a repellent effect that the average passer-by almost averted his gaze, hastening on as though the grim story of the past was actually taking physical shape again.

The Mount had the reputation of being haunted, and in the neighborhood this rumor was believed. Fifteen years before a particularly atrocious murder—a crime which sent a wave of horror throughout the whole civilized world—had been committed within its walls, and from that time the house had had no occupant.

Recently, however, a new legend had become circulated. This was to the effect that a repulsive-looking creature, a dwarf in stature, had been seen prowling through the deserted grounds like some animal in its native jungle. Word had been sent to the police, for the owners of the adjacent properties had already been forced to suffer considerably, and it was felt that any fresh horror associated with The Mount could not be endured. Apparently this strange story had been merely a figment of the imagination, for the local police inspector had dismissed it with contempt.

"You people 'ave got The Mount on the brain," he told an eminently respectable houseowner named Perry. "You go to the Pictures and see all sorts of 'orrors, and then you sit up all night 'olding 'ands and imagining things about The Mount. As 'though I 'adn't got something more to do than to listen to such rubbish!"

It would have been interesting to have watched Police Inspector Twemlow's rubicund countenance had that worthy representative of law and order been in a certain room of The Mount at 11 o'clock on the same evening as he had pronounced the above dictum.

Even a police inspector can be wrong on occasion, it seems. On this particular evening the house which had such an evil reputation was occupied. In the huge underground kitchen several men and one woman were holding a meeting.

The chairman of this assemblage proved to be a giant in stature, in whose otherwise raven-black hair were three curious white streaks. With his perfectly fitting, immaculately cut clothes, he was a singular person to be present in that mouldering underground room, the desolation of which was almost overwhelming. Yet an even more singular occupant was the strikingly attractive girl who sat by his side. This girl, who wore a coat of sumptuous sables, looked like an orchid blooming in a dirty back yard.

The other occupants of the room were six men, most of them nondescript in appearance, yet all of whom had a furtive look, as though afraid of being trapped in that noisome den. The Colossus held up his finger in warning as mutterings spilled nervously from the lips of these Creatures of his.

"You fools, to question the plans of The King!" he boomed; and the already electric atmosphere seemed to

vibrate at the words.

A man with a rat's face made a snarling sound, showing his teeth.

"I'm sick of all this play-acting," he replied. "Who is this man, and why do you call him The King?"

The Colossus loomed gigantesquely.

"Because he is the king of all crooks," he replied—"the greatest criminal in the world. If you are not satisfied, Ferrinski, you know what to do. But if you leave us, I warn you your throat will probably be cut within twenty-four hours. I have already told you that I do not know who The King really is myself, but I am proud to serve under him. What is good enough for me and for Xavia here should be good enough for such as you."

Murmurs of assent came from the other five, but Ferrinski snarled again.

"Why all the mystery, then?" he sneered. "Why is the fellow afraid to show himself?"

There was the creak of an opening door, and the critic, turning, drew himself up rigidly, whilst a low, rising sob of terror suddenly welled from his twitching lips.

A man had entered. He was tall, and walked with a resolute air. His carriage was one of iron determination. Beyond that there could only be speculation, for the whole of the face was hidden by a black mask.

The Colossus immediately rose.

"The King!" he said; and there was homage in his voice.

He vacated his seat at the head of the long table, and the masked man, with a brief inclination of his head, took his place.

"Peter Ferrinski, what is your grievance?" he asked. The rasp in his voice, the cold, steely edge to the words, made the former critic shiver.

"I was only saying, King, that I should like to see you," he replied shakily.

The masked man regarded him intently.

"You see me now," he said. The words were sufficient. There was such authority in the speaker's tone that Ferrinski, who had risen when giving his explanation, collapsed into his seat.

"We will get to business," announced The King. "Juhl!"—turning to the Colossus—"I will listen to your reports."

As though he were a secretary attending a board meeting of his directors, the Colossus read from a book that had the appearance of a ledger. This information, which probably would have puzzled Police Inspector Twemlow very considerably, dealt with large sums of money that seemed to have been paid by various men and women whose photographs and names appeared very prominently in the public Press.

When the reader had come to an end, the masked man rapped on the table with his knuckles.

"Attention, please!" he ordered. "Our affairs are proceeding satisfactorily. But we must increase our business. The next person to whom we will devote our attention is Sir Simon Baste." At the mention of the well-known financier, who was popularly supposed to be a multi-millionaire, sharp, staccato cries came from those who listened.

"I have certain information," proceeded The King, "and now we will go into de-

tails." He spoke rapidly for several minutes, and then, turning to the man whom he had addressed as Juhl, concluded: "As usual, I now leave the matter in your hands. Do not fail."

After a brief, but animated, discussion, The King stood up again.

"You will now leave one by one," he said, "and await your orders. Ferrinski, if you are still dissatisfied, I am willing to accept your resignation."

There was a cold, deadly menace in the words, and the little rat of a man put up a shaking hand.

"Please—please, King, I don't want to resign," he said quaveringly.

"Very well, then; but I shall be watching you, friend Ferrinski, and if I see anything suspicious I shall know how to act."

Ferrinski was the first one to leave the room.

This remarkable trio—The King, the Colossus called Juhl, and the girl Xavia—were now left alone. The three chiefs of a small, but remarkable, criminal organization their future discussions dealt with matters too important and too secret to be heard by those who had left.

The King, who retained his mask, turned to Juhl.

"This man, Zoab—I am not too sure about him," he said. "I have taken him on your valuation, remember. I should like to see him."

"Certainly."

The Colossus rose and left the room. When he returned he was accompanied by a dwarf, whose stunted frame was surmounted by a face so repellent that the girl, in spite of herself, put slender fingers before her eyes. The masked man looked at the monstrosity with eyes that gleamed through the slits in his mask. He evidently found the strange creature he had summoned to his presence very interesting.

Juhl was the first to speak. "Professor Zoab," he said, "this is The King. He wishes—"

"I want to ask you certain questions, Professor," cut in the masked man. "First, as to your qualifications."

The dwarf twisted his thick lips into a smile which showed a mouthful of broken teeth.

"My qualifications!" he repeated in a harsh, discordant tone. "You ask Schmidt of Munich; Courvillier of Lyons; Pisani of Rome; the Jew, Chumitz of Vienna; the American, Gorer; the Edinburgh Scotsman, Robertson—all these, skilled men in bacteriology, could tell you of my qualifications. What I have said to Juhl I can do." The stunted man raised his abnormally long arms, at the ends of which, strikingly incongruous, were two beautifully moulded hands. An expression of almost maniacal triumph glowed in his face. "I tell you," he shrieked, "quite shortly now I can be master of the world! This Thing which I can unloose will ruin any country within a month!"

The King motioned him to silence.

"That would be madness," he commented. "Unless we had the power to stop it. We might be destroyed ourselves. You must prepare an antidote, Professor."

Zoab nodded sullenly.

"As you will," he replied; "I am a man of science, and to me everything is possible."

The masked man made a sign, and Juhl rose, touching the dwarf on the shoulder. He conducted the shuffling Zoab out of the room and quickly returned.

Directly he sat down The King spoke in an impressive voice.

"That man," he said, looking towards the door, "has tremendous possibilities, but he must not be allowed out

of your sight, Juhl. I leave him in your charge. I think, in view of his having been noticed here, you had better find another place for him. See to it at once. And now, please, I want the man's full history."

"Zoab is of mixed blood," commenced the Colossus, "partly Spanish and partly native Mexican, I think. He is now forty-five years of age. From a boy he had a passion for medical research work, and from sweeping out a doctor's office he rose, by extraordinary industry and by living on practically nothing a day, to a minor post in Toledo University. By this time he had shown a positive genius for bacteriology. But in spite of his brilliant attainments his repulsive appearance made him strongly disliked. Time after time the University authorities were urged to get rid of him, but they refused, because they knew that they possessed possibly the greatest authority in his line in the world. The agitation against the man increased in volume, however, and then came a terrible scandal. Zoab will not speak about it, but I understand that one night a party of students, assisted by one or two dons, waylaid poor Zoab, took him to a deserted house outside the city, and there horsewhipped him until he was nearly dead. "Zoab returned to his duties . . . and one by one his assailants died. They all died mysteriously, and the cause of their end could not be ascertained by even the cleverest doctors. Naturally enough, suspicion fell on Zoab, although there was no definite proof, and the University authorities, yielding at last to the clamour of public opinion, dismissed the Professor from his post.

"He became an outcast, absolutely penniless, and but for me I believe he would have died. Thinking that a man of his ability would prove very useful at some later date, I have kept him going. Already—a slow sinister smile passed over Juhl's face—"he has done me a service. No, not in this country; in France. Apart from me, Zoab hates the whole human race; that is why he is perfectly willing to wipe out creation with this new and terrible disease on which he is working. A useful man, I submit, Chief?"

The words were put in the form of a question.

The reply came immediately.

"If he is taken care of; not otherwise. I charge you with this duty; be careful that you obey me."

The Colossus gripped the arms of the Windsor chair in which he was seated. Then he slowly rose. His face became convulsed.

"I have never allowed any man to treat me with contempt," he said, and at the back of the words were a hidden menace. "You speak to me as though I were a dog. Until now I have obeyed all your orders unquestioningly—"

"You will continue to do so." The voice of the masked man had the chill of death in it.

"I have said," repeated Juhl, "that until now I have obeyed all your orders unquestioningly." He looked at the tall man who, now that he stood, was within a couple of inches of his own height. "I have done all this—without knowing who you really are. Now—"

"Well?" The tone of the other had become even more icy.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

El Paso, Tex. — Walter Gregory was hauled into police court and pleaded guilty to stealing 15 cents' worth of merchandise from a department store. He was fined \$20. Walter took out a roll of \$980 in cash, pulled off a 20, and calmly paid the fine.

**ON FUR FLIGHT**  
Los Angeles—A million dollar's worth of furs is the prize which William R. Graham, noted pilot, plans to get with a plane he is having fitted here. Graham hopes to salvage the fur cargo of a Hudson Bay ship caught last year in the ice of the Arctic ocean off Point Barrow. The plane will be equipped for Arctic weather.

**SCHOOL HAS POET**  
Huyton, England—The first school in England to install a private landing field for airplanes is Huyton high school. Boys of the

school have laid out the field and have set the letters "H. H." 30 feet tall on the field. The school has a plane which is used for instructions in flying and geography.

**TO TEACH AGRICULTURE IN DALLAS SCHOOLS**  
Dallas, S. D.—(Special)—A course in agriculture has been added to the Dallas high school and Garry B. Hanson of Brookings, has been engaged to teach that branch.

Montana's fire loss in 1931 was slightly more than 2 million dollars, or \$750,000 more than in 1929.



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TIP TOP MEAT PIE

Put 2 qts. hot veal and carrot stew in greased baking dish. Crumble 2 1/2 cups Flake Crackers and mix with 2 tbsps. minced onion, salt, pepper, and 1 can condensed tomato soup. Spread over stew, dot with 2 tbsps. butter, and bake in hot oven (425° F.) until browned lightly. Six portions.

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**REPAIR CRISIS COMING SOON**

**Avoidable Home Neglect Costs Millions; Save by Painting Now.**

Home owners and others throughout the United States face an avoidable burden of \$200,000,000 for repairs and replacements next spring, that can be prevented by adopting proper precautions this fall. A crisis that has been approaching for several years will be reached this winter, and "a vigorous offensive program" to lessen its seriousness will be inaugurated at once, according to an announcement by the Acme White Lead and Color Works, Detroit White Lead Works, W. W. Lawrence & Co., Lincoln Paint & Color Co., the Lowe Brothers Co., John Lucas & Co., Inc., the Martin-Senour Co., Peninsular Paint & Varnish Co., the Sherwin-Williams Co. Newspaper advertising in every part of the United States will be used to tell property owners of the danger from further delay in making needed repairs and replacements.

"Millions of dollars can be saved by giving buildings proper care this fall. They have been exposed to the elements three, four and five years, through neglect and postponement of needed work. Property and equipment cannot go longer lacking proper protection, without further serious injury.

"When a woman's home is saved from foreclosure by a coat of new paint which led to a renewal of the loan on the house, as has just been reported from a small Middle Western town, it is easy to see that other benefits than just those of property protection can be derived, too, from adopting the correct safeguard methods.

"Prices of good paints are the lowest in fifteen years. Enough good, dependable paint to protect all the badly weathered surfaces on the average home can be bought with a

few dollars. The general buying public has already begun responding to advance promotion through our distributing and retail channels. Encouraging orders from large key industries and railways are simply the forerunner of a pick-up through all the various industries. We are entering a paint market of huge proportions. We are moving with greater confidence than in many months."—Adv.

**Apartments on Stilts**

Nine-story apartment homes on stilts are proposed for New York city. The structures would have no first story. Almost all the space usually devoted to a ground floor to be reserved as a sheltered playground for children. According to the architects, apartments on the street level will never be missed.

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Touchy . . . irritable! Everything upsets her. She needs Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound to soothe her nerves and build up her health by its tonic action.

**Dangerous Feathers**

Scratched by his pet chicken, Dick came running excitedly into the house.

"Oh, mother," he cried. "Look! Old Biddy stuck me with her pin feathers."

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Removes Dandruff—Stops Hair Falling—Imparts Color and Beauty to Gray and Faded Hair—Keeps Hair Soft and Silky—50 cents at drug stores. Hiscox Chemical Works, Patchogue, N.Y.

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## 500-Year-Old Oak

May Not Survive Winter

Natick, Mass.—(UP)—The John Eliot oak, whose age horticulturists estimate as high as 500 years, will not survive the rigors of another winter, Natick natives fear.

It was under this tree, during the middle of the 17th century, that John Eliot ministered to the Indians, whom he believed to be descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel.

And it was this same tree, last century, that inspired Longfellow

to pen the poem beginning, "Thou ancient oak! whose myriad leaves are loud with sounds of unintelligible speech. . ."

Killed by leaking gas fumes that enveloped its gnarled roots five years ago, the old oak has continued to stand, though only four stubby limbs spread out from its almost barkless trunk today, and those who have watched it down through the years fear another winter will see the remains of the landmark forever removed.