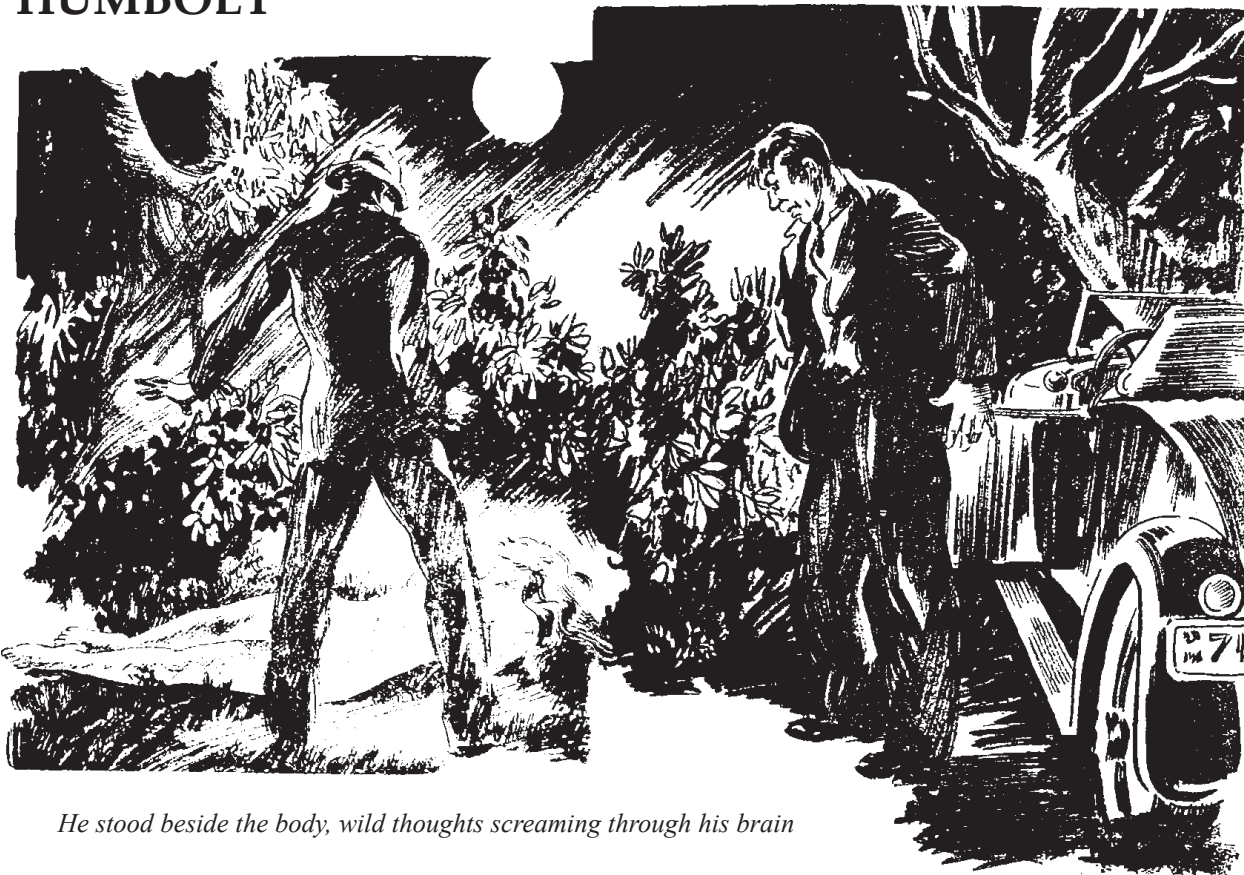


By
ARTHUR
HUMBOLT

Blonde Madness



He stood beside the body, wild thoughts screaming through his brain

“Blonde Beauty Murdered,” blared the headlines. Innocent young girls had been slain—mutilated! Was it the work of some maniac killer — some fiend in human form?

IT was twenty minutes to nine P. M. and Hal Parker had his battered coupe up to its wheezy limit as he batted along the ten mile strip of concrete between Sharpsburg and Marvin. He was already ten minutes late for his regular Wednesday night date with the most glorious blonde in the world, Anita Moss, and dates with Anita were warm, blissful events to remember for days. Marvin was still well over ten minutes away.

A grin twisted Hal's wide, hard-lipped mouth as he pictured the stubborn set of Anita's sweetly curved body, her full, hot lips, and he trod heavier on the gas pedal. He'd been late last week, and the week before that. Anita's be plenty sore; but, heck, a cub reporter on a sheet like the Sharpsburg Star had to stay on the job, or else.

The tanned skin of his square-jawed face wrinkled about the corners of his wide-set brown eyes as he squinted through the headlights streaking over the pavement

What was that up ahead? Looked like—yeah. A down-and-out bum stumbling out of a side road on the right. Probably stewed to the gills and might wander in front of a speeding car.

Unconsciously, Hal's foot eased up on the gas as he neared the swaying figure, then his muscular body stiffened abruptly, his feet tramped the brake. and clutch.

That bum wasn't drunk! He was half-running, half-staggering looking back over his shoulder as if afraid. He was running from something!

Even as Hal looked, the bum struck the edge of the pavement tripped and went sprawling. He pawed frantically to his feet and staggered toward the car. Hal could see that he was a typical Weary-Willie, clad in cast-off clothing.

Brakes squealed as the reporter jammed to a stop beside the man. He kicked open the right hand door of the car.

“What’s the matter with——” he started, then stopped, his hands clammy, gripping the wheel, the cold chill of horror racing up his spine.

THE man framed in the open doorway was a blood-smearred human scare-crow. Blood-shot eyes stared wildly from a bony, un-shaven face. There was a streak of dried blood slashed across the narrow forehead. Stringy hair jutted from numerous holes in a battered hat. His skinny, rag-clad body jerked spasmodically and ropy saliva drooled from his blubbering lips. His left hand was covered with a sickening mess of blood that reached to the bony wrist.

“God, Mister!” he croaked, pawing at the open door to keep his grotesque body erect. “She ain’t got no arms! I tell you, she ain’t got no arms!”

Hal felt the hair on his neck stir. He’d seen that face before—staring from a warning poster at the Sharpsburg Police Headquarters. The words of the warning bit like fire into his brain. The bum was a mad fiend wanted for the brutal assault of at least three young women!

And the reporter was without a weapon. He wetted his dry lips.

“Who hasn’t any arms?” he asked, keeping his voice steady with an effort. “Where?”

The bum looked fearfully over his shoulder at the dark side road and pushed closer to the reporter. Hal caught the rank odor of unwashed clothing and flesh, pushed back under the wheel and lighted a cigarette blowing the smoke out through his nostrils.

“D—down, that there side road, Mister,” whimpered the bum. “I was comin’ out to the highway to t’umb a ride, an’ it was dark an’ I couldn’t see nothin’. I tripped over somethin’, an’ I struck a match to see what it was, an’ it was a dame, Mister! A little blonde dame! She aint got no clothes on, an’ she ain’t got no arms!”

“Yeah?” the reporter queried through the smoke cloud about his head. Humor the man, kid him along and try to get him back to Sharpsburg. “Climb on the running-board, buddy,” he invited. “We’ll run up that side road, take a look at your armless nightmare, then roll on to Sharpsburg.” The bum started to protest. “Get on!” urged Hal. “I’m in a hurry!”

TWO hundred feet down the dark side road and Hal felt cold sweat bead out over his body. The bright shaft of his headlights had picked up the white figure of a naked woman lying in the dust of the road some distance ahead. He jammed in the clutch and

coasted up within twenty feet, then stopped. The bum dropped off the running-board and stood motionless, whimpering. The reporter got out and stalked forward, momentarily forgetting about the bum.

He stopped within five feet of the figure, the pulse starting to pound in his ears. He gulped twice, then went on, walking stiffly, mechanically, the numbing ice of horror crawling in his veins.

It was a girl of about twenty, stark naked. She lay on her back, her milky, tapering legs pointing straight toward the wide ditch at the side of the road. Her soft abdomen dipped slightly between well-formed hips, and her garnet-tipped breasts, slack in death, sagged to either side of her chest.

Her strangely bloodless lips were parted, half-baring tiny white teeth, as though she were about to scream. Long, shimmering hair coiled like fine spun gold in the inch-deep dust of the road, and her eyes, framed by long-lashed lids and fine pencilled brows, stared wildly from a white face from which ghastly terror could not erase the wistful beauty.

Hal didn’t know her.

He stood beside the body, wild thoughts screaming in his brain, and every muscle taut to the point of quivering. The close-hovering darkness seemed to gibber mad threats as he looked at the girl’s shoulders.

Raw, clotted wounds contrasted horribly with the white skin of her throat and shoulders. The crimson fluid had soaked into the dust on each side of her body and showed as dark, sullen blotches against her soft flesh. There was, however, not as much blood as one would expect. The reporter ground his teeth. Both of the girl’s arms were gone, slashed off at the shoulders!

Muscles cold and shaking, Hal knelt felt the girl’s body. Her flesh was cold, stiff. She had been dead at least three hours, probably longer. That would place her death at about five or six in the afternoon. She——

A muscle twitched at the corner of Hal’s mouth. His eyes narrowed. Hell! The girl hadn’t been lying here in the road all that time. Someone would have seen her hours ago. She’d been killed and butchered somewhere else, then brought here!

HOT fury burned in his eyes as he got stiffly to his feet and dashed the chill sweat from his broad forehead. Hard muscles about his lips were jerking and his chest felt hollow. That bum. . . . God! If he’d done this. . . .

The snarl of his coupe motor spun him about. The light car was already in motion. The mad bum was running away! He sprang toward the car. The motor burst

into a throbbing roar and leaped at him like a thing alive. He sprang to one side to keep from being run down as the coupe whipped about in the road and headed for the highway, flinging up a choking cloud of dust behind it.

Hal tore out after it, shouting profane commands for the bum to stop. He might as well have been talking to a comet.

The coupe raced for the highway, its red tail-light winking derisively through the dust.

Hal heard the swelling roar of a car speeding on the highway from the direction of Sharpsburg, saw its headlights painting the crossing ahead with livid light. The two cars would meet! He screamed a warning as he ran.

The coupe lurched up on the highway. The bum saw the other car, jerked the wheel to avoid it. The coupe swayed wildly on the pavement. The headlights of the other car zipped past the crossing. Hal stopped, staring, expecting to hear a rending crash. The car swept on, missing the coupe by a miracle. It swayed drunkenly for a moment, then straightened out.

Hal tore after it, then stopped, cursing as the battered car gained speed and raced toward Marvin, throttle wide open. In a few moments even the red eye of the taillight was out of sight.

Well, that was that, The bum had gotten away. He'd have to get to a telephone, call the STAR office, then report everything to the Sharpsburg Police, and Anita—good Lord! He'd almost forgotten her!

The nearest telephone, he remembered now, was a mile and a half away. Big place set well back from the road in a regular forest. Fellow named Andre Renan and one man servant, a queer duck lived there. Renan had plenty of money and did nothing but paint pictures of undressed women and girls. Had a half-dozen girls from Sharpsburg and Marvin posing for him all the time. Hal had seen some of the pictures—they weren't bad, that is, if a guy liked to look at blonde dames dressed in a postage stamp of velvet. Dames sure fell for that staff. Anything for Art's sake.

THE Renan place was an old remodeled farmhouse built nearly a quarter of a mile back from the highway. Huge trees crowded close about the white walls except on the north side of the house. Renan's glass-walled studio was on that side. Hal had been out several weeks ago to get some dope on an article for the STAR.

And, as he walked along the broad driveway leading to the house, the reporter felt that the rustling

trees were whispering secrets in the night. Hell, he grunted, if those trees could talk of the things they'd seen and heard around the Renan place, there'd be an army of dames hunting axes to chop them down.

Stalking hard-heeled up on the Renan porch, he jammed a hard finger on the bell button.

Renan's man-servant answered the ring.

"Good evening, sir," he greeted in his queerly clipped voice, his dark eyes peering brightly from their deep nests of hair-lined flesh beneath heavy black brows.

Hal stepped into the long, wide hall that he knew extended the full length of the house, spotted the telephone on a small table pushed up against the oddly papered walls. Nobody but an artist would have the stuff in his house, much less like the nutty red figures. They made Hal think of dancing red corpses. A pair of heavy drapes the color of stale, dried blood cut across the hall just behind the telephone table.

The reporter's nose wrinkled. The joint smelled like dames.

"There's been — an accident out on the road," he explained. "Just ran in to use your telephone. Call the office." He strode toward the instrument.

Sharp footsteps pattered in the back hall and a slightly built, dapper little man came through the heavy drapes. It was Andre Renan. The little Frenchman recognized Hal and came forward, holding out his sensitive, long-fingered hands.

"My good friend, *l'homme des lettres!*" he greeted effusively a smile baring gleaming teeth beneath his tiny black mustache "Moggs!" he spun to the man-servant, his slim, lithe body moving with striking grace, "bring cau-de-vie—whiskey! M. Parker must be upset." Moggs stolidly left the hallway. Renan turned back to the reporter. "You mentioned an accident *en route?*" His black brows shot upward questioningly. "You're not injured?"

"No. Thanks." Hal shoved hard fingers through his thick brown hair, felt the cold dampness of sweat on his wrist, and a mirthless smile touched his lips. "No," he repeated grimly, "I'm not injured. Just dropped in to use your telephone. A guy swiped my car."

MOGGS came back with a tray bearing Four Roses Mand brandy. Hal took a slug of brandy and felt better. Renan, he thought, might be a pansy, but he sure knew his drinks!

The City Editor answered when Hal got the STAR office.

"This is Hal," started the reporter. "I—"



As Hal watched, Moggs whispered something to the artist.

“Where in Tophet have you been!” Bellowed the C. E. “Hidden out in a hollow log? Been trying to get you in Marvin, your boarding-house, everywhere but the Morgue! A girl without legs was found in——”

“**WHAT!**” Hal’s voice was almost a scream. His eyes threatened to start from his head.

“A girl!” blared the C. E. “you know what a girl is, don’t you? Ought to, staying up all night and——”

“You say she—she—didn’t have any legs?” broke in Hal, the words choking in his throat.

“Not a one. Legs chopped off at the hips. A kid found her a back alley over near Huntington Park. Been dead a couple of hours. Used to be a model of Renan’s. I’ve had to——”

“I’m at Renan’s now,” cut in Hal. “I ran into a——”

“Great! Good work!” exulted the C. E. “Get a statement from him about the girl! Her name’s— wait a minute — Yeah — Name’s Phillis Webb. Pretty blonde of about nineteen or twenty. Make it about——”

“Wait a minute, please!” pleaded the reporter. “I ran into a maniac near Renan’s. He’s the guy that’s wanted for those assaults we featured, those three dames. He was yelling something about a girl without arms. We found a girl, another blonde, on a side road. He’d stumbled over her in the dark. Had blood all over him. He ran off in my car. The girl—her arms were

cut off at the shoulders!”

“Fine!” chuckled the C. E. “We’ll ran an extra! I’ll get the Law after your car. Get Renan to run you in. Make it snappy sonny! We got work!”

RENAN’S statement in the extra was brief and to the point. Phillis Webb had been a model of his over six months ago. He hadn’t seen the girl since. She was a very charming young lady, and had the great fortune to possess a pair of the most exquisite legs he’d ever seen. The crime must have been committed by a mad fiend. He was very, very sorry.

He didn’t know the other girl, though she must have been a very lovely young lady. She also must have been murdered by some maniac, possibly the same person who’d murdered Phillis Webb, probably the crazy bum who’d escaped in Parker’s car.

Parker called Anita Moss at ten-thirty that night, full of excuses. She hung up on him just as soon as she learned who it was. The reporter stamped up to his rooming-house and swore he’d never think of her again. There were other blondes, plenty of them.

But he moped around the STAR office next morning, thinking about the last date with Anita. She’d been so—uh—Hell! He reached for the telephone. Anita answered, her voice cold, indifferent

“I couldn’t help it, Sugar,” he protested for the tenth time. “It happened just as you saw it in the paper. That nut got away with my car and I had to ask Renan to bring me back to town. I had to rush back to the office to help on the extra and—Yeah, I know I was late last week, and the week before that, but I made up for it, didn’t I? How about me dropping over tonight? I’ve got to see you. I’ll get a car somewhere and we’ll go for a nice little——”

“I’m sorry, but I won’t be home tonight,” Anita cut in sweetly, too sweetly. “I’m—I’m——” Her voice dropped secretively. “I’m not supposed to tell a soul, I haven’t even told Mother,” she said. “But I’m going to tell you.” Hal felt a little better—very little. “I’m going to pose for a painting. I was going to tell you last night. Mr. Renan asked me last week and made me promise not to tell anyone until the picture was finished. We’re to experiment with poses to-night. He thinks I’m beautiful!”

“Yeah? Experiment with poses!” Hal had a wild desire to hang up before he lost his temper. “That little French fairy! Well, let me tell you something! If that guy tries to——”

HAL PARKER left the telephone with a cold emptiness in his chest. He'd queered himself with Anita. He'd forbidden her to have anything to do with Renan, and she'd reacted just as he was afraid she would. He was very definitely *persona non grata* with Anita Moss now.

He flopped into a creaky chair at a desk in the office and jerked a copy of the extra open before him. Black headlines stared. Columns of finer type. There'd been a rehash in the morning paper with pictures. He spread a copy on the desk.

More glaring type. A couple of pictures. Yeah, that's where the girl was stretched out. The black spots on the road were blood. There was the impression of her back in the dust. He shuddered as he recalled the ghastly details of the scene. A picture of the alley where Phillis Webb was found. Blood spots there, too. The public would get their money's worth of chills in that copy.

A smeared picture of the mad man who'd scrambled in his car. They'd got that from the Police poster. If the cops ever found that guy he'd buy like——

The stiff paper crumpled in Parker's stubby fingers. A line of fine type leaped out at him. Miss Webb was a former model of Andre Renan's, whose studies of blonde beauty have caused considerable comment in artistic circles. M. Renan devoted his talented brush entirely to portrayal of blonde——

Great God! The reporter stared straight ahead for a moment, frozen by the weird idea crawling in his mind. Phillis Webb was a blonde. The armless girl in the road was a blonde. Anita was a blonde—Renan painted nothing but blondes! What, if——

Parker grabbed for the telephone, called the Moss home in Marvin. No one answered.

He tried them again an hour later, with the same results, and thought of carrying his idea to the Sharpsburg Police. They'd do nothing but laugh at him. He knew that, for the idea was insanely fantastic. There wasn't anything to do but play it out alone.

At four that afternoon, he borrowed a car, a pistol, and bought a small flashlight.

HAL PARKER left Sharpsburg at seven-thirty with the pistol and flashlight on the seat of the borrowed coupe beside him. It was just beginning to get dark.

He passed the side road upon which he had seen the armless corpse of the young girl, and he unconsciously speeded up. The place gave him the creeps.

The woods around the Renan house loomed up ahead, and Hal throttled to a crawl, tried to pierce the

darkness under the trees and see if there was a car in front of the house. He couldn't see a thing

For a moment he thought of turning in at the Renan drive, then discarded the idea. There was a good chance of his being wrong in his weird idea. Renan might want Anita for nothing but a model. If so, he was making an ass out of himself. If not — Hal shuddered.

The car rolled slowly past Renan's.

He could go on to Marvin. Maybe Anita hadn't left home yet. He could talk with her and try to persuade her to— He shook his head slowly. Anita'd think he was merely jealous—and, dammit, he was! Shucking off to the buff in front of that French squirt! He'd seen Renan's pictures! Damn all artists! Who wouldn't be jealous! But it was more than jealousy to-night!

There was a little side road about a quarter-mile on the other side of Renan's. It led down to a stream back in the woods. He could run the car down that road and walk back.

Hal swung the car into the sandy, rutted road and drove for two hundred yards, then stopped. He got out, jammed the borrowed pistol and the flashlight into the side pockets of his dark gray coat, left the car and headed back for Renan's with a quick, nervous stride.

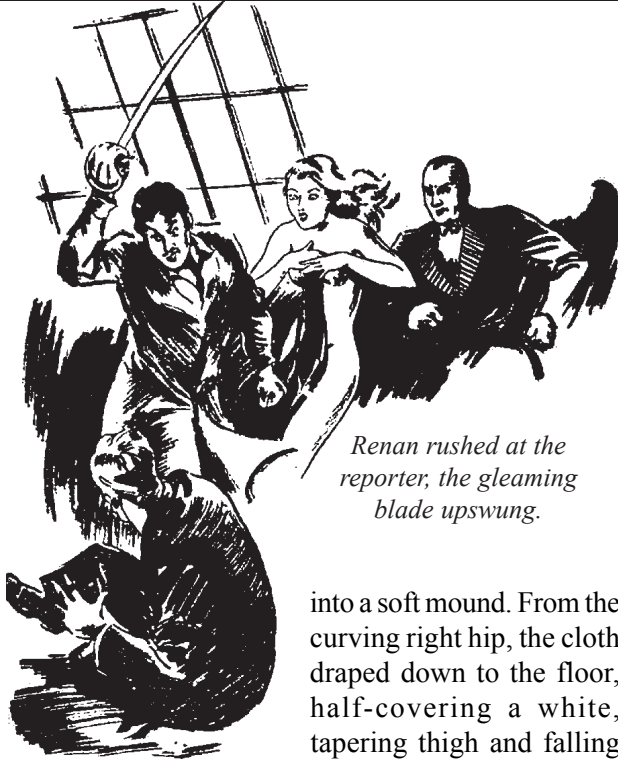
He reached the Renan drive, turned in and crept toward the house.

There was a car, a light sedan, parked in the driveway. It was the Moss car. Anita had undoubtedly told her folks that she was going to visit a girl friend to get the car for the evening. The reporter muttered a lurid string of profanely descriptive language about artists in general. Anita was in there now —with Renan!

Hal silently made his way around the corner of the house, pushing carefully through the thick shrubbery and trees. He reached the cleared space on the north side of the house. The big glassed window of Renan's studio spilled a fan of warm light out into the darkness. The reporter crept toward it, stared in.

ANITA was standing against the back wall of the studio which was draped with heavy folds of thick, black velvet. Her smooth white body stood out like an ivory cameo against the dark background, and Hal gasped.

The girl was practically unclothed, covered only by a fold of thin cloth the same shade as the drapes in the hallway—the hue of dark, dried blood. Her milky skin seemed whiter, softer against the harsh color. The fold of cloth slashed across her body from the left shoulder to the right hip. One firm little breast peeped over the dark cloth, the other pressed the fabric out



Renan rushed at the reporter, the gleaming blade upswung.

into a soft mound. From the curving right hip, the cloth draped down to the floor, half-covering a white, tapering thigh and falling to engulf her tiny feet. Her left leg was bare from ankle to hip, a stirring sweep of warm white flesh. Her oval face was slightly flushed, red lips parted to disclose the glint of even teeth, and her eyes, masked by thick, curving lashes, were bright. A golden fog of hair clouded about her little head, cascading down upon her shoulders, trailing over one arm.

Hal gulped. God, Anita was pretty!

Renan was standing at the other end of the room, to the left of the huge window. Hal could just see him. His black-haired head was perched to one side, studying the effect of the dark red cloth against Anita's glowing, creamy skin.

Even as Hal looked, the dapper little artist pattered to the girl and whisked the red drape away. The reporter choked an angry shout in his throat. Anita didn't have anything on under the drape!

Renan handed her another drape of heavy black velvet. She swung it about her soft body. Renan arranged it, pulling it up over one shoulder, dropping it lower on the other, fluffing her long blonde hair across the bared shoulder. Placing his hands upon her arms to arrange them, turning her about, touching her breasts, her thighs...

Hal's hands balled into hard fists. His jaw thrust forward. By Golly, if that little French squirt thought he could get away with anything like, that, he was cock-eyed! The reporter took one step forward, stopped, growling.

MOGGS had come into the studio. He said something to Renan. Both of them left.

Hal stalked to the huge window, intending to rap upon the glass, attract Anita's attention. He reached the glass expanse. The murmur of half-whispered words reached his ears, and the hair rose upon his neck as he listened.

"She has the body we need, Moggs! It matches the head, legs and arms we already have!" That was Renan's voice!

The reporter slipped along the wall and discovered that the voice's were coming from an open window of a room toward the front of the studio. He crept closer to the window, froze motionless as he listened.

"My God! Please! Not this one, too! The Police will——" That was Moggs. His voice trembled with terror.

"One word from me, Moggs," Renan cut in mockingly, "and you feel the 'Widow's Embrace' again! You go back to *Ile du Diable*, or perhaps the *reclusion boxes* on St Joseph's!"

"No! No! Not that!" gibbered Moggs. "I couldn't stand it! I'll do anything —anything!"

"I thought you would," Renan laughed raspily once. "I go back to Miss Moss. In a moment you are to bring in this tray. This goblet contains wine. I shall take it. The other goblet goes to the girl. You must see that she takes it. It contains cyanide!"

"Please! Can't we——" started Moggs.

"Kill her like you killed Phillis Webb?" asked Renan softly. Moggs gasped. "Like you killed the girl on the road?" went on the artist.

"I—I'll do it!" whispered Moggs.

"Splendid! I must have her body as a model," resumed the painter, and the mad throb of fanaticism was in his voice. "My Blonde Venus must be perfect! Miss Webb's perfect legs, perfect arms from the other, the exquisite head from the girl in France—and now the perfect torso! My Blonde Venns will live! The most perfect sculpture in the world!"

Crouched below the window, Hal gulped dryly, stunned by the horrible significance of what he had heard. He had suspected Renan of murdering those two girls, but not like this. The painter was insane!

AS a painter he had selected the perfect points of several living models, then incorporated them into a perfect individual. Now, in his madness, he had turned to sculpture, to take the perfect features of murdered models and blend them into a perfect statue! Their dead flesh would serve as molds for—God! It was

unbelievable!

He pushed to his feet and staggered back to the studio window, dazed.

Renan had already returned to the room, was saying something to Anita. Moggs came in the doorway, bearing a tray containing two goblets. Anita had pulled the black velvet drape up about her shoulders. The man servant started toward her reluctantly.

Hal watched his approach with widening eyes, the breath stuck in his throat. Anita reached for the nearest goblet.

Cyanide!

A choking roar of fury burst from Hal's lips and he flung his stocky body against the window, bursting through the glass. Sharp splinters bit into his face and hands as he crashed through and charged into the studio.

Anita jerked her hand back from the goblet, screamed, and fainted, her perfect white body sinking to the floor in a welter of black velvet drapery.

Moggs froze, eyes bulging from their deep sockets, the tray jerking until the two goblets sloshed liquid over his white hands.

Renan started toward the reporter, anger showing in his bright black eyes, yet smiling uncertainty.

"You damn' murderer!" roared Hal, digging for the pistol in his coat pocket. The front sight caught in the lining and wouldn't come loose.

Renan left the floor in a mad leap, the smile wiped from his working face by insane hate. Screaming curses tore from his lips.

Hal jerked the trigger of the gun in his pocket, firing through his coat. He felt the hot flash of the powder against his hand, the jerk of the recoil, saw a spurt of plaster from the wall on the other side of the studio. He had missed. The acrid smell of burned powder and cloth filled his nostrils. Then the mad painter was upon him, long fingers clawing for his throat.

The reporter tore his right hand from his pocket and lashed out to land a short jab in Renan's chest. The little painter coughed once and swarmed, on him, tearing at his face, his throat. Hal smashed a fist into his snarling month, felt his knuckles grate against teeth.

RENAN staggered back, struck a low, heavy stool and went sprawling. Hal lunged after him. The little painter snatched the stool from the floor and flung it straight into the charging reporter's face. The edge caught Hal across the eyebrows, almost tearing his head from his shoulders. He dropped to the floor, harsh bells clanging in his skull, bright lights flashing before his eyes. The room seemed to revolve dizzily.

Renan dashed the blood from his smashed lips, his

dark eyes whipping about the room for a weapon. Two heavy crossed sabers were upon the wall near the doorway. The painter yelped in triumph, darted for the weapons, snatched one from its steel scabbard.

The rasp of the steel upon steel bit into Hal's consciousness. Dully, he was aware of Renan rushing toward him, the gleaming blade upswing. Somehow, it just didn't matter. He was so tired, sleepy.

Anita—Something snapped in Hal's brain. With him gone, Anita's soft body would be a dead mold for—

Hal lurched forward, his thick shoulders catching Renan's thin shins, knocking him off balance. The painter screamed with rage as he fell forward. The saber, unconsciously released from his fingers as he fought for his balance, clanged to the floor, the heavy blade slicing into Hal's left thigh.

The reporter clutched Renan's legs and jerked, flinging the painter to the floor. He caught the dapper little artist about the throat, banging his head against the floor, felt the body beneath him go limp.

Anita's shrill scream snapped him back to sanity. He jerked to his feet, expecting to meet an attack from Moggs.

The man-servant was still standing where he was when the reporter burst in through the window. Hal jerked the pistol from his pocket and started toward him.

Moggs' left hand darted to one, of the glasses on the tray, lifted it up to his lips and drained it at a single gulp. A queer look of surprise shot over his face, a ghastly grin twisted his month. The tray crashed to the floor. Moggs dropped, dead before he hit the floor.

HAL PARKER called the home of the STAR City Editor a half-hour later. The C. E. himself answered the telephone.

"Listen," said the reporter, "this is Hal—Dammit! Shut up and listen to what I have to say!" He grinned as a shocked silence came from the other end of the wire. "I've cleaned up those two girl murders. Renan and his servant were the murderers. Yeah, I'm at Renan's now. I thought at first that he was trying to get fresh with the girls—trying to—uh— Yeah. I thought he murdered them to keep their mouths shut, butchered them to throw suspicion elsewhere. I was wrong. Here's what happened..." He gave the details. "Moggs is dead. Took cyanide. Renan is a bit roughed up, but he'll live to fry." Hal rubbed the slash on his thigh. "I found the parts of the bodies in a vat of formaldehyde in the basement, found the casts. Yeah, Renan was going to use them as molds for a statue. Blonde Venus. That washes everything up. Got all of it!"

The C. E. fairly purred.

“Good work! Great! Couldn’t have done better myself. We’ll run another extra! Say, the cops found your car. The bum’s in jail. You coming back to the office now?”

“Not,” said Hal very distinctly, “so as you could notice it! I’ve got a Blonde Venus right beside me here and I’ve got to take her home.” He felt a warm hand slip around his neck, a soft breast press against him.

“And say!” he finished rapidly. “Tell those cops to take their time coming out here!” His hand patted firm, curving flesh that sent a tingle through him. “I’m in no hurry!”

He hung up. Minutes sped past.

“Anita, baby,” he said huskily. “We’d better hunt your clothes. Not that I—well—Hell! Those cops’ll be here as fast as they can make it, Damn ‘em!”