

WAR OF THE SCIENTISTS By John Russell Fearn

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STORIES



Fish Men of Venus

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

THORNTON AYRE * A. R. STEBER * MILTON KALETSKY

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THE CASE OF THE MURDERED SAVANTS

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Thornton Ayre.

First published *Amazing Stories*, April 1940.

Even the scientific detective, Brutus Lloyd, was baffled by the mystery that surrounded the murder of America's finest men of science . . . or was it murder?

"Another scientist murdered! Extry! Extry! Paper, sir?"

"Yeah." Rex Thomas took the evening edition of the *Observer* and studied it with a frown—indeed, more than a frown. There was a look of blank horror on his young, good-looking face.

Dr. Brian Thomas, famous metallurgist, Rex Thomas' own brother!

"It isn't true," Thomas whispered to himself, stupefied. Then he went on, thinking aloud,

"A knife in his heart like all the others before him? No—it's too damnably horrible!"

And he was the fourth scientist in a row! Four prominent scientists in as many months—

Horley, the great neurologist had been slain first. In quick succession had followed Bennet of physics, Jansen of astronomy and now—

He looked up sharply, controlling himself as he became aware of people on the sidewalk glancing at him curiously. With sudden decision he thrust the paper in his pocket and headed swiftly for police headquarters.

Inspector Branson, the bull-necked, chief of the neighborhood precinct station, looked up from his desk as Thomas was shown into his office.

"Inspector, I—I just read about the murder of Dr. Brian Thomas. He was my brother, my twin brother. I'm Rex Thomas, radio specialist."

Branson smiled faintly. "I'm aware of that, Mr. Thomas. Matter of fact, you've saved us the trouble of roping you in for questioning."

"Roping *me* in—?" Rex Thomas echoed in amazement.

"We're satisfied with your actions," Branson said reassuringly. "At the time of the murder, you were working overtime at the Apex Radio Factory—last night, that is. Don't worry; we know all about you.

"We wanted to question you about your brother's associates. Do you know any of them? If we can get a clue to anybody who might have a reason for getting him out of the way, we might have a lead that will direct us to an arrest. Can you recall anybody likely to have a motive for wishing your brother out of the way?"

Thomas scratched his blond head.

"Guess not," he sighed. "I came here to ask if you'd got any line on the killing—though I don't suppose you would tell me if you had. I rarely saw my brother. He lived in a world of his own—a scientific world of research. I have my life; he had his. All I know is that he lived in a house in the suburbs with one manservant. I can't imagine who'd want to kill him."

"Hm-m." Branson compressed his lips. "Just as we can't yet see why this steady murdering of scientific men is going on. No apparent motive. It's the damndest thing I ever

heard of!”

“A maniac, perhaps?” Thomas suggested, thinking hard.

“Perhaps— However, while you’re here you can add your identification to the body. It’s in the morgue.” Branson pressed a button. “After you have identified the body, you are free to go, but not out of the city. You’ll probably be needed later on. Everybody connected with your brother is under suspicion at the moment.”

“I understand,” Rex Thomas nodded; then as the plainclothes man came in he turned and left in his company.

At the morgue he went through the ordeal without a word, merely nodding his head dazedly as he gazed on the waxen face of his dead twin—a face so like his own.

He hardly recalled how he went out into the street again. Though he had had few dealings with his ambitious, scientific brother, the murder had come as considerable of a shock. Thomas went home to his apartment lost in thought. He was just in time to catch the telephone ringing noisily.

“Yes?” he said absently into the mouthpiece.

“Hello, Rex!” It was the familiar voice of Beryl, his fiancée. “I rang before but I got no answer.”

“No—no, I’m late.” Thomas roused himself. “I’ve been at police headquarters.”

“That’s what I’m calling about. I’ve just seen the paper. It’s terrible, Rex! Terrible! What are you going to do? What are the police going to do?”

“I dunno. I’ve got to stay in town, that’s all I know. But I don’t think I’ll have much trouble—my alibi is watertight.”

Thomas forced himself to realities, put more warmth in his voice.

“Thanks for the sympathy, Beryl—thanks a lot!”

“But of course I had to sympathize!” she cried. Then, quietly, “But I admit I had another reason too. Are you fit to come to the dinner tomorrow night? You know, the one dad is throwing? It’s a pretty highbrow affair, I suppose, but there’ll be lots of ignorant folks there, like you and me, who aren’t interested in scientific mumbo-jumbo. After what’s happened I wondered if you’d be fit to—”

“I’ll come,” Thomas said briefly. “Don’t worry, I’ll be okay. I’ve yet to see the event that makes me pass up an evening with you. See you tomorrow evening, dear.”

“Around seven. Good-by.”

“’By, Beryl.”

Thomas hung up slowly, then shook himself.

“This won’t do, Rex, m’lad! Snap out of it! Grab yourself a shower, a bite and some shut-eye. Then you’ll be all set.”

He followed out his own prescription accurately—but when it came to sleeping, he hit hard against a problem. The moment he started to doze something happened to him. It was as though he were dreaming while still awake.

A vision, hazy in outline but nonetheless distinguishable, insisted on hammering itself into his consciousness. He could have understood a strong recurrent reminder of his radio work, for he had been working until all hours on a new receiving set design for weeks—but this was something utterly different.

The scene represented some sort of laboratory, or else a surgery. It seemed to be filled with chemical and medical apparatus, electronic tubes, magnets, mazes of wire. In the center of the

room was a long surgical table, obviously for the purpose of major operations, if the arc-lights, at present extinguished, hanging overhead were any guide.

But easily the most puzzling thing of all was the presence of six chairs, like those used by a dentist, with helmets on the top of each. Curious helmets, indeed, like those of an aviator's outfit. On a rack nearby, shielded by glass screens, were numberless probes, scalpels, and saws. . . .

Thomas woke up sweating, cramped his eyes shut, then opened them again. Convinced he was the victim of a nightmare, he tried to settle himself again. But the vision came back, in a slightly changed form. For a brief moment or so he saw his brother—his *dead* brother—lying on the formerly empty surgical table, gazing in sheer terror at something unknown.

Straps were about the other's body, pinning him down. His head had been shaven as bald as a peeled egg. He seemed to be saying something, struggling to speak.

"Brian!" Rex Thomas screamed suddenly, sitting up. "*Brian!*"

He was shuddering all over. Shakily he switched on the bedlight and gazed around the quiet, deserted room. Nothing was any different.

The events of the day, of course! The horrible things that had happened had all warped into his consciousness and produced this. It had to be a dream, because his brother was dead. . . .

He waited a long time to calm himself, and thereafter slept at fitful intervals with visions here and there. He felt pretty washed out by the time he rose next morning. And sown deep in his mind was a profound bewilderment.

Many a time in the past his being a twin had given him unexpected visions of his brother, particularly in time of trouble—but how could it apply to this occasion when his brother was in the morgue?

A bad dream—nothing more.

Rex Thomas arrived to attend Beryl's dinner party after a day of gradual recovery from his heavy night. The immense sweep of the girl's home—the residence of Jonathan Clayton, famous inventor—the myriad lights, the efficient servants, the cordial voices, did much to clear Thomas' mind. And the girl herself, an entrancing dark-haired, gray-eyed vision in evening dress, practically consummated the cure.

"Hello there, Rex!" Beryl came forward eagerly as he entered the great lounge and picked his way among the guests. "How's tricks?"

She smiled at him impishly, then seeing his serious face she went on,

"Anything wrong, dearest? You look tired— Your brother, of course?"

"Yes—sort of preying on my mind." He shrugged his shoulders. "But I swore I'd leave my troubles at the front door, and I intend to."

Someone else was greeting him then.

"Glad to see you, Rex." It was the girl's father who came up with extended hand. Big, gray-headed, strong-necked, he looked more like a champion athlete than an inventor—and probably the best inventor the United States Government had ever employed for regular service.

"Evening, sir." Thomas returned the grip. "You seem to have quite a few people around here tonight. I—"

"Indeed, yes! Come along, I want you to meet some of them. See you later, Beryl."

The girl nodded slowly, her face clearly disappointed at the sudden separation. But her father was determined. One by one Thomas found himself being introduced to some of the country's leading scientific experts. Among them were the ax-faced, unpleasantly sharp Professor Eliman, wizard of brain surgery; and then a gnomelike little man under five feet in height, with an immense forehead down which curled a lock of hair shaped in a Napoleonic "J".

This little man was talking in a surprisingly bass voice to Joseph Clough, the financier, when Jonathan Clayton tapped him on the shoulder.

"Lloyd—a moment. I want you to meet my prospective son-in-law. Rex, meet Dr. Brutus Lloyd. You can call him an expert in any branch of science and criminology, and be right every time."

"Correct," Lloyd beamed, extending his small hand. Then, his frosty gray eyes narrowing a little, he added,

"Clayton errs, my young friend. He should have said prospective *step* son-in-law. Eh, Clayton?"

Clayton shrugged. "I regard Beryl as my own daughter."

"*Culpa levis*—excusable negligence," Lloyd sighed. "Unfortunately my profession demands an accuracy of facts—even to daughters. If either of you think the less of me for the correction, it won't make the least difference."

Clayton said nothing. Rex Thomas gave a faintly puzzled smile, the smile of a man who hears the unexpected for the first time.

Then he said, "I seem to have heard of you before, Dr. Lloyd."

"*Seem to!*" Lloyd echoed, glaring. "Before you, young man, you behold the greatest scientist of the day—*teres atque rotundus*, a man polished and complete."

"Don't mind him, Rex," Clayton chuckled. "He got that way from reading Latin in his chemistry experiments, and—"

"Of course," Lloyd said, changing the subject, "you're the brother of the late Brian Thomas?"

"Yes, and there's something I'd like to—"

Thomas broke off as Beryl came up in high spirits.

"So here you are, Rex! Dad, what do you mean dragging him off like this to meet your brain-bulging cronies? We've things to talk about."

Thomas found himself whirled away, but for the life of him he could not find the inspiration necessary to rise to the intended jollity of the occasion.

"Sorry, Beryl," he apologized, as the girl went in to dinner on his arm. "I've a heck of a lot of things on my mind. Tell me something—your last name isn't really Clayton, is it? Dr. Lloyd let the cat out of the bag."

Beryl shrugged. "I never thought it mattered. After all, you're going to change my name anyway, so why worry?"

"I'm not worrying," Thomas said. "You're all that counts, anyway. Incidentally, is Dr. Lloyd here professionally or as a guest?"

"Guest, of course. He's known dad quite a long time. Why?"

"Just wondered if he could explain something rather queer. It'll do later."

The girl glanced at him curiously, but said nothing. For some reason she spoke little during the dinner; and Thomas for his part ate little. He was aware of feeling rather out of the

conversation, which seemed to shuttle back and forth between financial expositions on the part of Joseph Clough and scientific comments by hatchet-faced Professor Eliman.

Dr. Lloyd seemed to have little to say, but Thomas noticed his shrewd little eyes darting from one face to the other as he dug heartily into the well-prepared courses.

Rex Thomas felt thankful when the meal was over. Quietly he took Beryl to one side.

“I’m going to borrow Dr. Lloyd for awhile. Mind?”

She sighed. “Seems I’ve little choice. You’re sure *I* can’t help you? I’m good at patching up troubles.”

“You’d fail this time. See you later, darling.”

Thomas caught Dr. Lloyd in the hall as he was crossing with Jonathan Clayton to the lounge.

“Oh, doctor, a moment! I wonder would you mind very much if I consulted you?”

The little scientist halted and frowned. “I have hours for work and for play, Mr. Thomas. While appreciating your desire to utilize my vast powers, I must say—”

“But this is urgent!” Thomas cried. “Desperately urgent!”

“Well—” Lloyd stroked his “J” of hair pensively. “All right,” he agreed.

“Take the library,” Clayton invited, throwing open the door for them. “See you later.”

CHAPTER II

The Stained Scalpels

“Now,” Dr. Lloyd snapped, as the door closed, “I have little time for trifles, Mr. Thomas. Please come to the point immediately.”

“Fair enough. It’s about my brother, Brian. He was murdered like three other great scientists before him, and nobody knows why, the police least of all.”

“Hah!” Lloyd snorted, his small face cynical.

“He was murdered,” Rex Thomas went on tensely, “and yet last night I had the strangest dream. In fact, it wasn’t a dream—more a kind of vision. In that vision my brother was still alive, yet only a few hours before I had seen him in the morgue.”

Lloyd gestured irritably. “I am not here to play games, Mr. Thomas. What is this? A new insight into nightmares, or what? I have no time for half a story. *Qui timide rogat, docet negare*, young man—he who asks timidly courts denial! Be frank. I, Brutus Lloyd, order it.”

“Sorry, sir. I thought—” Thomas shrugged, puzzled by the scientist’s odd manner.

“You see,” he went on, “it struck me as strange that I should get a vision like that with Brian dead. We were twins and—well, twins often get visions of each other doing things. Common between them. Sort of telepathic link, you know.”

Lloyd’s eyelids lowered insolently. “I require no tutor in scientific matters, Mr. Thomas. However, the statement is interesting and—A, twinship with a dead body is intriguing, and—B, the problem of the recent murders has commanded my attention. So—continue!”

Thomas obeyed, and during the narrative Lloyd sat perched like a gnome on the edge of the desk, stroking his lock of hair thoughtfully. When it was over he raised an eyebrow.

“A laboratory, eh? Helmets? Dentist’s chairs? Hm-m! You are quite sure it was your brother’s body in the morgue?”

“But of course! I’d not be likely to mistake my own twin, would I?”

“Twinship of minds—twinship of motives,” Lloyd mused. “Hm-m—most interesting.”

“Again,” Rex Thomas said slowly, “I’m wondering if the murders will stop now. Suppose Dr. Clayton happened to be the next one.”

“If he did, grief would descend on Beryl, eh?” Lloyd asked dryly. “You want me to clear all this up in order to save your fiancée from distress.”

“Partly that, yes,” Thomas admitted. “It will take a detective of your ability to get to the bottom of the whole thing.”

Lloyd rose in scorn. “Detective!” he sneered. “I, sir, am a specialist! I do not work for gold, but for pleasure. God gave me a brain beyond the normal, and I use it. If, of course, the Government should reward me afterward—Well, *exitus acta probat*—the result justifies the deed.”

“You mean you’ll look into it?”

“For three reasons,” Dr. Lloyd responded. “A—I must find out for the sake of my psychology notes how a dead man can impress a living twin; B, I must find out why an unknown laboratory has chains like those in a dentist’s surgery, and C”—he smiled blandly—“the mightiest of brains needs relaxation. This case will provide it.”

“I don’t think so,” Thomas said nervously.

“What you think is mere foolishness, young man. Have you enough pull to get yourself a brief vacation?”

“I guess so.”

“Excellent! I shall need you probably for physical aid; I am no Hercules. Mentally I am more than sufficient. You will be at my house at exactly nine tomorrow morning. And now, *redire ad nuces*—let us return to the ‘nuts,’ ” Dr. Lloyd punned.

He opened the door and marched briskly to rejoin the guests.

It was late in the evening when most of the dancing and fun were over that a knotty point of argument arose among the scientists. It led them finally, Rex Thomas and Brutus Lloyd included, into Jonathan Clayton’s own private laboratory.

“Here you are then, gentlemen—synthetic flesh!” Clayton cried triumphantly. “Does this convince you or not?”

He raised something that looked like pink rubber from a bowl and stretched it back and forth.

“The latest miracle for surgical work,” he added quietly. “Practically as good as the real thing, full of minute fibers to carry the bloodstream. Doubt it if you can!”

“You see, it doesn’t do to doubt the mind of Dr. Clayton,” observed Professor Eliman, smiling cynically. “I’ve known about this invention for some time, only it wasn’t ethical to reveal it without permission.”

“And I’m grateful for your confidence,” Clayton said seriously. “This is not a Government invention; I can use it privately and aid medical science immensely. I had hoped to create life —”

“Waste of time, in my opinion,” Joseph Clough commented. “I made my money soaking people, not helping them. However—”

“I suppose,” Lloyd remarked, “*you* financed this synthetic flesh idea, Clough?”

“Sure. I’ve financed dozens of Clayton’s private inventions. Plenty in ’em, on the side.”

“*Auri sacra fames*—accursed lust for gold,” Lloyd sighed. Then as the scientists gathered round to inspect the synthetic flesh, he wandered slowly around the laboratory, his keen eyes glancing up and down. Presently he stopped at a horizontal mirror lying directly under a massive telescopic tube.

The mirror was rather surprising. It was not polished and clear, but of unusual construction.

“My latest,” Clayton said proudly, hurrying up. “Not quite ready yet for offering to the astronomical field. It’s an element detector.”

“Can it be that I, who know all things scientific, am at a loss?” Lloyd mused, frowning.

“Probably, this time. This is a new idea. Watch!”

Clayton moved to a switchboard and busied himself with controls. The laboratory roof rolled open along a section to a clear moonlit sky. Upon the mirror there appeared the moon’s image, but instead of the usual craters and seas there was a multitude of network colors of every imaginable hue.

“The moon,” Clayton observed. “Ordinarily it is revealed as a white surface, of course. What minerals and ores it may possess are unknown—or were unknown until I invented this.

“It is a well-known fact that different metals give off different light-values, ordinarily undetectable. But this instrument of mine, by a prismatic system, can detect different light-values by reflection instead of actual illumination.”

“Clear as mud,” one of the scientists laughed.

“I’ll make it clearer,” Clayton apologized. “We know the elements of any star by the flame color we get through the prisms. *Reflected* light has defeated us so far—but I’ve solved it. Hence the reflection of light from the moon reveals clearly what elements it has.

“See”—he pointed his finger at a dull gray streak—“here is lead. Probably a great field of solidified lava. In turn, we have iron ore deposits, gold seams in considerable quantity, silver, oxides—”

“Remarkable!” Lloyd exclaimed, his eyes brightening. “A satellite worth a good deal, eh?”

“Definitely,” Clayton smiled, switching off. “A world of valued metals revealed for the first time through my invention—but unhappily a world two hundred and forty thousand miles off, and unreachable—as yet.”

“I’ve suggested ways and means of crossing space—in fact, most of us here have—but our host won’t listen,” Professor Eliman said. “Sometimes I think you’re unprogressive, Clayton. A genius, and yet too conservative. You say space conquest means wars—horrible wars.”

“I do,” Clayton sighed. “That is one reason why I am rather reluctant to reveal the secret of this detector to any but my immediate friends. When men realize what is up there, in the sky—”

“And there are other dangers,” Thomas put in quietly. “A maniac is at work somewhere killing off brilliant scientists. Suppose you were singled out, once your profound knowledge became known?”

“Absurd!” exclaimed Professor Eliman, with a cynical grin. “The maniacal killings of scientists are not worth considering. At least, *I* am not afraid, and I am sure Clayton is not.”

“’Course he isn’t!” exclaimed Joseph Clough reassuringly.

“I just happened to recall my brother’s murder, that’s all,” Thomas said quietly.

Clayton gave a shrug. “Isn’t this getting rather depressing, gentlemen?” he asked. “Suppose we repair to the lounge.”

Lloyd marked time with the group until Rex Thomas caught up with him.

“This is not the laboratory you saw in your vision, I suppose?” he asked softly, as they went through the doorway.

“No. And in any case I wouldn’t distrust Dr. Clayton. I know him too well.”

“Many of the dead scientists were his friends,” Lloyd murmured. “*Fide, sed cui, vide*, Mr. Thomas—trust, but see whom you are trusting.”

“You don’t think—” Rex Thomas stared, appalled; but Lloyd only gave an unfathomable smile and gently massaged his “J” of hair.

When Rex Thomas arrived at Dr. Brutus Lloyd’s suburban house next morning, he found the little scientist ready and waiting in his open roadster outside the gates. If anything, Lloyd’s big Derby hat and enormous overcoat made him look odder than ever.

“About time!” he snapped testily. “Get in!” Then as he started the car moving he added, “We’re going to see Inspector Branson. He has the matter in hand. Good man, Branson—within limits.”

“So I thought.”

“Your opinions do not concern me, Mr. Thomas. Tell me, did you have any more visions last night?”

“Well, sort of. I saw that unknown laboratory rather hazily, but not my brother.”

“Yet if you saw the visions and they are directly connected with your brother, it seems to indicate he is still alive,” Lloyd mused. “In other words, *mens invicta manet*—the mind remains unconquered.”

“Yeah—something’s damned phony somewhere and I don’t like it.”

Lloyd said nothing further, seemingly lost in thought until police headquarters was reached. Then he marched into Inspector Branson’s office holding his crook-handled, neatly rolled up umbrella.

“Morning, Branson. Four scientists have been murdered—all with knives. What have you done about it?”

“I—”

“Nothing!” Lloyd thumped his umbrella on the floor. “Just nothing! And for this we pay a sales tax, a property tax, and Heaven only knows what else!”

“So,” Branson said bitterly, “you’ve decided to bust in with some high-flown scientific theories, eh?”

“There is no law against a specialist, Branson—and *such* a specialist! You ought to be grateful. *Brute ad portas*—Brutus is at the gates!”

Branson gave a resigned sigh. “Okay, I know it’s useless to try and get rid of you. Matter of fact, this scientist business has rather got me stymied anyway.”

“Ah!” Lloyd’s eyes glittered with approval.

“So few clues—in fact, none at all,” Branson growled. “In each case, the murder was committed in a room which has a gravel path outside it—so there were no soil footprints or anything else to guide us. No finger marks on the knives or anywhere else.”

“And each time the murderer drove the knife straight to the heart?” Lloyd asked slowly.

“Straight to the heart,” Branson affirmed.

“Hm-m. The paper mentioned surgical knives. I’d rather like to see them.”

“Right.” Branson pressed a button and gave instructions to the clerk who entered. “I think they’re called scalpels,” he added.

“You think! *Vis inertiae!*”

“Huh?”

“The power of inertness,” Lloyd beamed, snuggling back in his chair. “Of course, I admit that genius is only given to the few—”

Then he straightened up again as the clerk returned with a steel box. Branson laid out the ticketed and labeled knives on the desk with his handkerchief.

“Exhibits One to Four,” he commented briefly.

The diminutive scientist studied each one in turn, narrowed his eyes at the tarnished stain on the gleaming blade in each case.

“Scalpels, yes,” he said slowly. “But the stains?”

“Blood, according to the laboratory. The scalpels are leading us to look for a surgeon as the culprit. And—”

“Blood tarnishing stainless steel?” Lloyd asked pointedly. “*Da locum melioribus*, my friend—give place to your betters! Blood!” he sneered. “Clear those boneheads out of your laboratory and get some real men of science. This isn’t bloodstain: it’s an acid of some kind—and it’s on each knife, too.”

“But I have the report—” Branson began, but Lloyd waved a small hand.

“Light your pipe with it! Don’t presume to talk to me of science, Branson.”

He pondered a moment, then wrapped one of the knives up in his handkerchief and thrust it in his pocket.

“I’m taking this—and don’t start any arguments. I want it for two reasons—A, to prove what the stain really is; and—B, to prove to a very dense world that it is not always the obvious solution which is the right one.”

“In other words, you aim to make a monkey out of me?” Branson snapped.

Lloyd chuckled as he headed for the door, remarking dryly to his puzzled client,

“*Avito viret honore*, Mr. Thomas—he flourishes on ancestral honors. You’ll hear from me later, Branson.”

“I’d better!” Branson roared, as the door closed. “You’re stealing my evidence!”

CHAPTER III

The Dead Undead

“It is possible,” Dr. Brutus Lloyd said, as he drove down the street, “that—A, your visions were *not* the result of supper; and that—B, your brother Brian is not dead, or at least was not dead when you saw him in your vision.

“It is likewise possible that—C, extreme fear caused telepathic power to be established between you. That is by no means uncommon in twins.”

“But I saw Brian in the morgue! You forget that!”

“I forget nothing!” Lloyd retorted. “Nothing!”

He became silent after that, patting the knife in his pocket reflectively now and again. Once he arrived home, he stalked straight into his laboratory, threw on a gigantic smock, then went to work on the knife with reagents and burners. Thomas, interested but baffled, lounged around watching.

At last the little scientist straightened up and fondled his lock of hair.

“Bloodstains! Bah!” he exploded finally. “The stain on this knife contains proportions of sodium chloride—salt, to the uneducated; phosphate, lime, a trace of sulphuric acid, and cochineal for coloring. No man with that mixture in his veins could ever live. No man—not even I, and I can do most things.”

“Then where did the stains come from?”

Lloyd said slowly, “The facts are these: A—the knives were found in the heart each time; B, they were removed by the police, and the blades would not be contaminated with anything else afterward, that much is certain; and—C, they contain the fluid which was in the bodies at the time. That is obvious.”

“Then why didn’t the police chemists find the mistake?”

“They probably did—they *must* have, but they couldn’t reconcile the mystery, so they said it was bloodstain. You understand?”

Rex Thomas scratched his head. “Damned if I do! Sounds nutty to me.”

“Branson referred to accurate stabbing by the murderer each time,” Lloyd mused. “We are asked to believe that the murderer was able to drive true to the heart on *four distinct occasions*. I don’t believe it!”

“Then just what do you believe?”

“I believe that the bodies were never alive anyway!”

“*What!*”

Lloyd grinned insolently at the sensation he had created. He added calmly,

“Synthesis, my friend! Synthetic flesh!”

“But, dammit it all—” Thomas gave a gasp. “Say, Dr. Clayton is the one who understands synthesis. But it is inconceivable that—”

“*Palmam qui meruit ferat*, Mr. Thomas—let him bear the palm who has deserved it. Yes, he invented synthesis, *but*— What I do not like are—A, the sinister implications behind all this; B—the suggestion of its being a cover-up for something else; and—C, the decided shadow cast across Clayton.”

For a long time Dr. Lloyd stood brooding over the knife in his rubber-gloved hand; then turning suddenly he picked up the telephone and dialed hastily.

“Hello, there! This Branson? Good! This is your superior, Brutus Lloyd. I want you to exhume all four murdered men right away. They never lived, anyway—”

The receiver squawked in response and Lloyd stood glaring at the instrument.

“What do you mean, am I mad?” he snorted. “You’re talking to Brutus Lloyd, Branson—*clarum et venerabile nomen*—an illustrious and venerable name! I am a scientist; you are not. Therein lies infinity—You *what?* Why, man, I believe the four scientists never died by a dagger but were actually used for some other and probably more diabolical purpose.”

Again the receiver rattled with Branson’s irate voice.

“My reasons?” Lloyd asked calmly. “A—the blood on the knives might be a mixture worth selling to a chemical works; B—no murderer could strike dead true to the heart four times on the run, and—C, most significant of all, the scientists who are presumed dead would probably be far more useful alive.

“Dig up those corpses! What? Oh, I’ll bring the knife with me tonight. See you at seven, and you’d better have a body dug up. No reason to? The Brian Thomas death hasn’t been looked into yet? Then conduct your autopsy on him. See you at seven.”

Lloyd put the receiver back, and as he did so Rex Thomas added,

“Of course, Brian won’t be buried yet. His immediate associates have planned a big funeral. I heard about it this morning. I asked to go, of course—tomorrow. Only you wanted me, you said, and—”

“I fancy that the events of this evening will make the undertakers short of a job,” Lloyd murmured. Then more brightly, “But now for lunch, my friend. This afternoon my brain will knit into a concrete whole what it has already learned; and this evening— Well, *flectere si nequeo superos Acheronta movebo*—if I cannot move the Gods, I will stir up hell! Come!”

On the stroke of seven, Dr. Brutus Lloyd’s goblinlike figure walked into Inspector Branson’s office. The inspector was looking rather bewildered but he was cordial enough.

“You were right,” he said, as Lloyd returned the knife to the desk with a clatter. “Come and see the result of the autopsy. Only been at work on the so-called Brian Thomas so far, but the other bodies are probably the same—”

“Definitely!” Lloyd thumped his umbrella down. “Don’t dare to doubt it!”

He and Thomas followed the inspector to the surgery down the corridor, and presently stood gazing at the result of the medico’s work under the bright lights.

It was the corpse of Brian Thomas which lay there—and when he could bring himself to look fully at it, for the medical mutilation had rather sickened him, Rex Thomas experienced dumb wonder. For it was not a real man which lay there—but a contrivance of springs and padding which gave the illusion of stiffness and yet fleshy pliability! The rigor mortis of a dead body was perfectly simulated.

The staggering fact was that the “man” was only a model with a flesh covering. There were no internal organs, not even a heart. The wound from the assassin’s scalpel had simply passed through the outer casing.

“This—this is incredible,” Thomas whispered. “So like my brother; even to the eyes.”

“Dead eyes always remind me of dusty grapes,” Lloyd murmured. “These eyes probably belong to a walleyed dog. They give the impression of death.”

“As to the identity of appearance to the real Brian Thomas, any expert modeler could do it with synthetic flesh as easily as with clay, if he had the frame to work on,” Branson said thoughtfully.

“Which reminds me—I’ve got some new information. Crandal, the well-known sculptor, has disappeared. Been missing for several months now. His relatives thought he had gone to South America, but they seem to think now that something must have happened to him. They asked us to help only this afternoon. Seems to me it might mean something.”

“There *are* times when I realize why you became an inspector,” Lloyd commented cynically. “Crandal, eh?” he repeated sharply. “Hm—. I seem to recall a lot of his big sculpture shows were financed by Joseph Clough. Mystery, indeed! *Crescit eundo*—it increases as it goes.”

“This synthetic flesh is a new one on me,” Branson muttered, shaking his head. “And as to the *reason* for such elaborate precautions—I give up.”

“Without an autopsy, you would have considered this and the other three bodies to be normal corpses,” Lloyd observed. “Proof indeed that my genius is far ahead of the normal intellect.” He pushed his Derby farther back on his scholarly brow and said gravely,

“Branson, we face a crisis!”

“So I’ve figured for some time,” Branson said sourly.

“Consider the facts! We have—A, somebody with a knowledge of synthesis and sculpture; B, such a person must be a brilliant scientist, and—C, when four famous scientists are picked out *by* a scientist, it is for a reason distinctly detrimental to the victims and the world at large. Otherwise, *why* the precautions?”

Lloyd paused, then added, “Suppose, Branson, that you had found synthesis. Impossible, I know, but suppose you had? Suppose you could model a man at will but could not make him live. What would you do?”

“Open a waxworks, maybe,” Branson hazarded, rubbing his jaw.

“Or else make imitation corpses, fix daggers all ready in their apparent hearts, and steal the real people!”

“Hell! You’ve got something there. But one couldn’t model a person so accurately without knowing every detail of his physique.”

“Most of that could be overcome by photography,” Lloyd snapped. “And cameras can fit into a tie pin if necessary. Personal contact would help, of course; therefore we can assume that the culprit knew each of the dead scientists very well indeed. Well enough to know every anatomical detail worth knowing—”

“The culprit’s a doctor; got to be,” Branson said doggedly. “Those scalpels prove it! Seems to me the thing to do is to check up on the immediate acquaintances of the four dead scientists and start a new trail from there. Eh?”

Lloyd smiled blandly. “Commendable—but do you imagine so clever a criminal as this one seems to be would appear as *himself* each time when near his intended victims, just to provide you with a clue? *Satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum*, Branson—eloquence enough, but so little wisdom!”

“Then we’ll look for somebody who knows something about synthesis!” Branson retorted.

“That’s easy,” growled Rex Thomas. “Dr. Clayton invented it.”

Lloyd put a hand to his eyes and thumped his umbrella on the floor.

“*Deus avertat!*” he groaned. “God forbid! He has to go and throw away my most important clue like that—Idiot!” he blazed, waving his umbrella overhead. “Why the heck don’t you keep your trap shut?”

Branson smiled bitterly. “Keeping things back, eh, Lloyd?” he asked coldly. “Trying to steal a march again with your cockeyed science? Okay, we’ll see! I’ll have Dr. Clayton roped in on suspicion of murder in two bats of an eyelash. Why, the thing’s a cinch!”

“Wait!” the little scientist roared, his gray eyes frigid with command. “Wait, confound you! I’ll not have you upsetting my well laid plans! I wasn’t trying to hold back anything. Why should I? I can outthink you any time. No, I wanted to piece together one or two things first.”

“Yeah? Such as?”

“A—would Clayton freely admit his knowledge of synthesis if he were connected with an affair like this? B—what is the connection between Clayton and his wife?”

“Wife?” Branson stared. “I thought she was dead.”

“No. I found out long ago that his wife, the mother of Beryl, is serving a life sentence in a State penitentiary. Her name before marrying Clayton was Kimberley. Beryl is the stepdaughter of Dr. Clayton, of course.”

“So what? What’s all this got to do with synthesis?”

Lloyd sighed. “*Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio*—in laboring to be brief I become obscure. Not that I expected you to see anything in the observation anyway,” he added tartly. “You—”

“Oh, the hell with all this!” Branson interrupted impatiently. “I’ve got to pin a conviction on somebody, and Dr. Clayton is that one man.”

“Now wait a minute!” Lloyd snapped. “Get this, Branson. I’m not obstructing you in your duty, but I have certain privileges I mean to exercise. I can’t stop you clapping a warrant on Clayton—but I want two clear hours in which to see Clayton first. In taking him out of the way, you may ruin the best clue I’ve got. Now, what about it?”

Branson hesitated. “Well, all right. I guess that can’t make much difference—but I warn you, it’ll be too bad for you if you mess things up!”

“If I mess things up!” Lloyd smiled insolently; then, thumping his Derby back into position on his head he moved to the door. “*Festina lente*, Branson—make haste slowly. Come, Mr. Thomas.”

Out in the corridor Rex Thomas came out with a string of apologies. The only response he got was a flinty glare from Dr. Lloyd’s gray eyes.

“Well, I’m sorry anyway,” Thomas repeated, as they settled in the car. “But just what do you figure you can get out of Dr. Clayton?”

“A solution,” Lloyd snapped. “Now keep quiet. I must think.”

He started up the engine with a sudden roar. Soon the car left the comparatively quiet main street, headed through the heart of the city, then out to the night-swathed country road leading to the scientist’s suburban residence.

“Listen, sir,” Thomas said presently, “what do you make of all this? For instance, I didn’t know Beryl’s mother was in prison. What’s that angle?”

“There isn’t any. At any rate, not yet. I put it in to give that fool Branson something to work over. Pity about Branson—he’s got brains, only they’re muscle-bound.”

“Well, about my brother? Do you think he’s still alive?”

“Possibly—” Lloyd was silent for awhile, then unburdened himself again.

“Let us consider. A—the four scientists have been kidnaped and models of their bodies left in their places to present the impression of murder. B—their deaths would set the police looking for a murderer and *not* a kidnaper. C—we also realize that the kidnaper knew he could not return the bodies, hence the synthetic duplicates.

“Therefore, surely your uneducated brain can grasp that something fiendish is indicated which will incapacitate said scientists from any chance of return!”

“Good Lord—yes!”

“Ah! *Interdum vulgus rectum videt*—sometimes even the rabble see things aright. The kidnaper would have no reason to take the scientists if he intended to kill them. He could do that without leaving models. And what are scientists noted for?”

Lloyd preened himself for a moment in his own ego.

“For their *brains*, young man! Their brains!”

“You don’t mean they have been kidnaped so something can be done with their knowledge?”

“Exactly! In that vision of yours you saw a surgery and your brother with a shaven head. Heads are shaved before brain operations—”

Lloyd’s small face was set into granite lines now.

“*Graviora manent*, my young friend—the worst is yet to come. The man who made the synthetic bodies is a first-class modeler—and we may assume the disappearance of Crandal, the sculptor has something to do with that. A first-class surgeon would be needed for the synthesis. And that—”

Dr. Lloyd broke off and glanced in the rear-view mirror as the roaring of a powerful car became evident behind them. Rex Thomas twisted round in his seat and was met with a dazzling blaze of headlamps.

“Doing sixty, I’d say,” he cried. “If he’s not careful—Hey, what the devil—”

He fell back in his seat and stared ahead in wild alarm at the narrow road. Almost at that moment an immense sedan swept alongside and suddenly drove inward.

Lloyd’s small hands missed the steering wheel of his roadster entirely. The car twisted sideward, careened over the bank, then went smashing helplessly through a mass of scrub and dust to the base of a deep ditch. It brought up with a crash on its side.

Head singing from the impact, Thomas eased his position and listened for a moment. For the time all was quiet;—then at a sudden flash and crackle of flame from the engine Thomas came to life.

“Dr. Lloyd!” he yelled. “Hey, where are you—”

“Here!” the scientist panted, struggling to free himself. He became visible against the rapidly gaining flame, his Derby jammed down onto his nose.

“My foot— Give me a tug, dammit! Can’t see where I am—”

Thomas fell out onto the grass, caught the little scientist round the waist and heaved with all his strength. They both fell clear as the ignited gasoline spurted and crackled over the remainder of the car.

With a sudden effort Lloyd tore his hat free, stood glaring at the flaming wreck and stabbing his still safe umbrella fiercely in the ground.

“Deliberate!” he breathed, his bass voice quivering. “Now we *know* there is something definite. Scum! *Servum pecus!* Servile herd! That car cost me plenty— However, the insurance is paid up.”

“We’re losing time,” Thomas told him anxiously. “Whoever was in that car was heading Clayton’s way. Incidentally”—he frowned—“I got the number just before we went over the bank. What was it now—XJ 4782.”

Lloyd looked vaguely surprised. “So, there are times when another brain can be quicker than my own. Remarkable! Now stop driveling and help me up the bank. Swine! They’ll pay for this!”

At the top of the bank Lloyd stared grimly down the dark road.

“About four miles further yet to the Clayton place,” Thomas said.

“I am quite aware of it. Come on.”

As they trudged Thomas said, “Wonder how they knew it was us in your car?”

“You mean *me!*” Lloyd retorted. “You don’t count, Mr. Thomas. The enemy has nothing to fear from you, whereas they stand appalled at my genius. Seeing you, the brother of the missing Brian Thomas, and me in close company for several days—for I do not doubt we have been surreptitiously watched—and finally seeing us emerge from police headquarters and head this way, it would be sufficient for the dumbest criminal to grasp that we threatened danger.

“We were singled out for destruction by ‘accident’. Plenty will probably happen now.”

“You’re right. We’d better hurry—”

“I am not a track-runner—nor have I legs like an ostrich. *Ultra posse nemo obligatur*—none is obliged to do more than he can.”

After that they trudged on wearily in silence, for something like forty-five minutes. Then they moved quickly to the side of the road as a fast car came speeding up from the distance with headlights blazing. To their surprise it stopped beside them and Inspector Branson’s familiar voice came forth.

“Well, well, if it isn’t Brutus himself! Out of gas? Or isn’t that possible?” the inspector finished with malicious meaning.

Lloyd ignored the challenge. “Where the devil are you going?”

“To the Clayton residence. Got a call from there a few minutes ago from the head servant or somebody. Old man Clayton’s been stabbed and—”

“And you sit there making wisecracks?” Lloyd roared. “Get a move on, man! Quick!” he bawled at the driver. “Get in, Thomas—don’t stand there gaping.”

The car shot forward again. Pinched beside Branson, Lloyd said briefly,

“They had the impudence to run me off the road. It was a black sedan, number XJ 4782. Send out a squad car to nab it, and you will also probably get the man we want—and Dr. Clayton.”

“But he’s stabbed—”

“More modelwork, I fancy. Anyway, we’ll soon find out.”

CHAPTER IV

Ambition Diabolical

Once they got to the house and were shown into the library by a worried manservant, they found Beryl there alone, pacing nervously up and down and twisting a handkerchief in her hands. In a moment Rex Thomas ran from the group and clasped her in his arms.

“Okay, Beryl, take it easy,” he murmured. “You’re all right. We are all here now—”

“I am here,” Lloyd stated didactically, with a flourish of his umbrella. “And I still pin you to your two-hour promise, Branson. I’m going to do the talking here.”

“That’ll be a change, anyway,” Branson admitted sourly.

Lloyd’s eyelids drooped cynically, then he swung to the girl.

“Now Miss Clayton—or rather Miss Kimberley—where is the body?”

The girl looked at him in tearful surprise.

“But—but Dr. Lloyd, why so official? You usually call me ‘Beryl’—”

“Where,” he repeated calmly, “is the body? I am here as a specialist, not as a guest.”

“Do you have to be so damned blunt?” Thomas snapped.

“Yes. *Necessitas non habet mores*—necessity knows no manners. I—”

“Father’s in—in the laboratory,” Beryl said quietly; then with a sudden hysteria,

“It’s so horrible! Awful! Parker—that’s the manservant—heard a crash in the laboratory and went in to investigate. It’s terrible to think dad might have lain there all night otherwise.”

“And Parker phoned for the police?” Branson asked curtly.

“Of course. In fact, he had done it before I knew of the tragedy.”

Branson gave a sympathetic nod. For his part Lloyd turned briskly, and from familiarity with the house went straight through the hall and into the laboratory—that same laboratory in which the gathering had taken place only the previous night.

Without pause, the scientist went to the sprawling figure lying face upward on the floor, knife buried in its heart.

The moment he held the dead wrist Lloyd gave a grin.

“More rubbish for the garbage can, Branson,” he announced briefly. “Body’s stone cold, even though it has been dead for supposedly only an hour or so. Synthetic, like the others.”

“W-what?” Beryl gasped in amazement, hanging onto Thomas’ arm.

“A phony,” Lloyd said. “See—” And ignoring the girl’s cry he yanked the knife out of the breast and drove the keen blade across the outflung hand. In response the first finger was sheared off clean. But it was as hollow as the finger of a glove.

“It’s horrible! Horrible!” Beryl whispered, gazing.

“At least you might be more considerate in your stunts, Lloyd,” Thomas snapped, noting the girl’s white face.

“Do not presume to dictate procedure to me, Mr. Thomas!”

“What does it all mean?” the girl broke in urgently. “Where *is* my stepfather?”

“Kidnaped,” Lloyd said briefly. “Branson, have some of your men look the grounds over. There ought to be footprints this time.”

His keen eyes went round the laboratory and finally focused on the unlatched main window and an overturned instrument stand below it.

“Clumsy fools,” he murmured. “That is what startled the manservant, obviously. That fallen stand. Had the body remained until morning, as was intended, its coldness would have seemed natural— Hm-m!”

“What?” Branson asked, as he saw Lloyd gazing at an instrument case. As the scientist made no answer, the inspector went over to him and looked upon the glittering array. Then Branson’s brows knitted. Of ten scalpels, five of them were missing from their clips.

“Beryl,” Lloyd said, more familiar again, “how often did Dr. Clayton practice surgery?”

“Not very often—except sometimes when Professor Eliman used to call and they made experiments together. Why?”

“Each of the knives that have been stuck in these four—or rather five—model bodies have come from here!” Branson retorted. “That’s why!”

“But—” The girl looked mystified; then Lloyd said slowly,

“Since Dr. Clayton was not heard to call for help, it is possible that he was threatened with a gun by somebody at this window here. Hm-m— Beryl, your stepfather was the only inventor of synthetic flesh in this country, wasn’t he? Or I should say, *isn’t* he?”

“So he led us to believe, yes. But surely, Dr. Lloyd, you are not trying to suggest he made a model of himself, are you? That *he* is behind all this?”

Lloyd glanced at the instrument case and stroked his chin.

“No, I think he has proved himself innocent,” he said. “Nor would he be likely to kidnap himself. That clear to you, Branson?”

“Well, yes—though I have known criminals to apparently rub themselves out in order to make themselves appear one of the victims.”

“*Semel insanivimus omnes*—we have all been mad at some time,” the little scientist observed. Then with sudden decision,

“No—not Dr. Clayton. I’ve known him a long time and he’s on the level. But somebody else, close to him, is *not*!”

“Well?” Branson waited expectantly, as Lloyd pulled his “J” of hair resolutely and muttered to himself.

“*Quaestio vexata*—a vexed question. Give me time! A great brain hastens slowly—”

“Yeah, and while you’re spouting Latin, Dr. Clayton is probably in danger of his life! That reminds me—I’ve got to send out a call for that squad car. Be back in a minute.”

Branson went out vigorously; and presently Lloyd said,

“Your father—stepfather—made no secret of his synthetic invention, Beryl; but he *did* suppress the formula, to the best of my information. That right—or did anybody else know the formula besides him?”

“Why, yes—practically all the scientists who came to see him—most of whom have been murdered since, or kidnaped.”

“Hm-m,” Lloyd mused. “And to scientists synthetic flesh would appeal from the scientific and not the diabolic point of view. The only man closely acquainted with Dr. Clayton who is not a scientist is Joseph Clough.”

“The financier? Yes,” Beryl admitted. “But aren’t you forgetting that he helped to finance many of father’s inventions?”

Lloyd gave a grim smile. “*Ubi mel, ibi apes*—where the honey is, there are the bees! I am just recalling that Joseph Clough also knows from this telescopic mirror here that there is gold on the moon—”

“Gold on the moon!” echoed Branson, coming in. “What’s going to happen next?” he demanded. “Anyway, I’ve given that car number to headquarters; they’ll put out a tracer for it. My boys tell me there are footprints about the grounds, all right—heavy ones, as though something had been carried by the person whose feet made the impressions. And—”

“If you have quite finished—” Lloyd said coldly. Then in the surprised silence he went on talking.

“Clough, from his long association with Dr. Clayton, must know all about synthesis, just as he knows the physical details of the other scientists he kidnaped. Don’t you see? He knows from that mirror that there is gold on the moon—a vast fortune, if he can only *get* it!

“Gold is the one bait a man of finance would fall for, whereas a scientist would not.”

“Some day,” Branson said, “I shall know what you are talking about. You mean Joseph Clough, the Wall Street big shot?”

“None other. My unerring judgment leaves no other conclusion.”

“Except the one that the critics are right when they call you nuts,” Branson commented. “Anyway, where’s the proof?” He waved his hands helplessly. “What *is* all this about gold on the moon?”

Lloyd told him. The inspector nodded dubiously.

“Maybe, but that gold is an awful ways off.”

“Two hundred and forty thousand miles,” Lloyd stated calmly.

“And empty space between! How do you figure any guy could get it?”

“That,” Lloyd said, gazing around under drooping eyelids, “is what puzzled Joseph Clough! So he kidnaped five of the best scientists to have them work it out! I recall a remark made in this laboratory last night, to the effect that Clayton had refrained from trying to master space travel for fear of possible after consequences.”

“And I remember something too,” Beryl put in, thinking. “Sometime ago, though, Mr. Clough once asked father and some of his scientist friends if they would pool ideas and try and work out a way to get at the gold lying on the moon—that and the other valuable ores.

“They refused for the same reason as father—because it might invoke wars and crime. Besides, they were pretty sure they couldn’t figure out a method—anyway, not individually.”

Branson murmured, “They wouldn’t do it of their own free will, so they may be having to do it by force.”

“Couldn’t figure it out *individually*,” Lloyd breathed. “But if it were done *collectively*—My God!” He stared blankly in front of him. “If a surgeon were fiendish enough, he could—”

Lloyd swung around. “If five of the greatest brains in the country were brought together to give a common result, there is no end to what might not be done! Science would leap ahead at terrific progress!”

“You mean mechanically pooled brains?” Rex Thomas asked slowly.

“Yes! You saw the operating theater, didn’t you? The fake bodies were stabbed with surgical knives, and they were taken from here with the obvious intention of deflecting guilt onto Dr. Clayton—until it came time for him to be taken as well.

“A—Joseph Clough is the money behind the enterprise; B—Crandal, the sculptor, has been ‘appropriated’ to make models; C—we are still short of a scientist to do the actual brain surgery, if any. Whom else but Professor Eliman, the renowned wizard of brain surgery? He, of all men, has avoided being attacked so far! Of course—because he is the culprit!”

"I believe you've got something there," Thomas said. "Remember how damned sure Eliman was last night that he wouldn't be overtaken like the rest of the scientists?"

"I've got to admit it, Lloyd, you know your surgeons," Branson said reluctantly. "Next thing we do is head for Eliman's place and rope him in for questioning."

"No!" Lloyd shook his head adamantly.

"What d'ya mean, no?"

"Give me time to speak!" Lloyd retorted. "Rushing to his home won't do any good—besides, you'd need a warrant anyway, or maybe you know that. Clough isn't the kind of mug to come because you ask him. What we need to know is all important—namely, the whereabouts of the laboratory where all the dirty work goes on!

"Fons et origo malorum—the source and origin of our miseries. There's one way to find out—make a phone call to Clough and play my hunch. If it's right, he'll unwittingly lead us to his laboratory."

"We've a phone here—" Beryl began, but Lloyd waved her aside.

"I shall phone within watching distance of his house. You stay here. There may be danger. Come, Branson!"

Twenty minutes later Dr. Lloyd was making his call. Branson crammed into the phone booth beside him with his ear to the outside of the receiver. Lloyd covered the mouthpiece with his handkerchief and raised the pitch of his rumbling voice a little.

After preliminaries with a servant Clough spoke.

"Well? Who is it?"

"Something's gone wrong," Lloyd said briefly. "Better get to the laboratory right away. I'll see you there."

Clough seemed to hesitate. "If you mean that clown Brutus Lloyd is on the track, don't let him worry you."

Lloyd glared at the instrument and said gruffly,

"I can't explain any more now. Hurry up. It's urgent!"

He hung up and asked laconically, "Well?"

"Guess your hunch was right. He's in it all right," Branson admitted. "Seems to have summed you up pretty well, too. Think he'll fall for the gag?"

"We'll soon know."

They climbed back into the car, moved farther up the road and into a side street. Sure enough, a monstrous limousine drew up after a while outside the Clough residence and the financier himself came hurrying out. After a quick glance up and down he jumped into the car and it moved smoothly away.

"Follow it," Branson snapped at the police driver. "And don't be seen tailing it even if you have to kill your lights. Lose him and I'll kick you off the force!"

The driver did not lose his quarry, though it was difficult keeping track through main streets and intersections, but at last they drew clear of the city and finally struck a country road. At Branson's orders the police car lights went out. Far ahead the red light over the limousine's rear license plate had become stationary.

Lloyd stared out into the night with Branson beside him.

"Nothing there, except an old house or something with all the windows dark," the inspector said.

“What did you expect—the Sphinx and the pyramids?” Lloyd asked sarcastically. “Clough probably owns the property anyway. We may find plenty. Let’s go—and have your revolvers ready!”

“What about you?” Bronson asked ill-humoredly.

“My umbrella, man, my umbrella! Come on!”

They climbed out and sped swiftly in a wide detour across the dark field, presently came within range of tree-lined grounds. Thomas caught Lloyd’s arm suddenly.

“Say—take a look! Two cars there—one the black sedan that tried to run us down earlier, and the other is Dr. Clayton’s! Say, they must have kidnaped him in his own car! What the hell —”

“Now I *know* I am a genius,” Lloyd breathed. “Definitely!”

“When you’ve finished telling us you’re a brainy guy, maybe you’ll tell us what we do next?” Bronson snapped acidly. “Railings all around the place—”

“Then we climb over. After all, Bronson, you said I made a monkey out of you—”

With surprising ease the little scientist set the example, mastered the high railing with ease and dropped down with his vast coat parachuting around him. In silence all of them gathered, then moved swiftly under the leaf-bare trees. Dimly across the drive they could see the parked unlighted bulk of Clough’s now deserted limousine.

“What now?” Thomas whispered.

“Reach! Drop your guns!” snapped a heavy voice—and with a cracking of twigs and underbrush Joseph Clough came up in the starlight.

“*Drop them!*” he thundered, as there was brief hesitation.

“Better take it easy, Clough—” Bronson started saying, but the financier cut him short.

“Dr. Lloyd, you’ll find a well three yards from where you are standing. Move to it, and descend into it. And don’t get any original ideas!”

The little scientist said nothing. He moved forward slowly with arms and umbrella raised, finally found the well referred to. Clough flashed a torch onto well-cleaned steel footrests.

“Down—the lot of you!” he barked.

Devoid of weapons there was nothing else to do. The well ended in a short tunnel, obviously some long disused sewer from the house. At the end of the tunnel a door was half open, from which gushed white light, clearly electricity.

“Go on—into the laboratory,” Clough ordered.

The party obeyed, marched forward into the white-lit expanse. Another armed figure came quietly from behind the door and said briefly,

“You can lower your hands, but don’t try anything.”

That voice seemed to smash the whole laborious investigation to pieces, for it was not the voice of Professor Eliman; not even the voice of Dr. Clayton.

It was the voice of Beryl!

Involuntarily Rex Thomas swung around to reassure his ears. The others turned more slowly. Without doubt it was the girl who faced them, but her features were changed—they were cold, hard, merciless.

“Beryl!” Thomas whispered, astounded. “What on earth are you up to? How did you get here?”

“Not much of a miracle, is it?” she asked tartly. “You master minds spent *your* time following Mr. Clough.”

“Your car outside—the Clayton car, anyway,” Rex Thomas breathed. “Of course! But, Beryl—”

“Shut up!” she retorted. “I’ll do the talking here.”

She moved to the door and shut it, stood beside Clough as he too held his revolver steady.

“So the great Dr. Brutus Lloyd walks right into a trap, eh?” Beryl asked cynically.

Lloyd smiled urbane, tracing designs on the concrete floor with the ferrule of his umbrella.

“This—this is the laboratory I saw!” Thomas exclaimed suddenly, gazing around. “Sure—there are the chairs with the helmets—six of them! But only *five* scientists— Beryl, what does this all mean?”

“The sixth chair is reserved for Brutus Lloyd here,” the girl said coldly. “Probably be a seventh for you, Rex. Even an eighth for Professor Eliman, whom I left until last because he is a dangerous man to handle.”

“You—*You* are the brains behind all this!” Thomas stared in dawning horror.

The girl nodded, her eyes frigid. She gazed at Lloyd suddenly.

“You might as well know how far wrong you went, Dr. Lloyd,” she said briefly. “I knew my stepfather’s formula for synthesis from the moment he invented it. I wanted to get at that valuable material on the moon as much as Clough here did. My stepfather was too conservative. Clough and I got together and decided on a plan.”

“I knew, from what my stepfather had told me at different times, that the pooling of several brains can perform what an individual brain can not. It was necessary to work out the scientific details. Simple enough, with the run of my stepfather’s laboratory.

“Brains give forth vibrations.^[1] You see that electromagnetic instrument over there? When all the scientists are placed in those chairs and vibratory helmets are put on their shaven heads, electric probes go to the seat of their brains.

[1] Science has long held the theory that thought is electrical in nature, and that the human brain gives forth vibrations which could be detected, picked up, and amplified by mechanical means, if we but knew what method to employ. However, it is certain that any vibrations the brain emanates are so delicate, that any instrument sensitive enough to pick them up would need to be very sensitive indeed. This isn’t impossible, however, because astronomers have instruments capable of measuring the heat of a star light-years away, or the heat of a candle (if one were there) on the moon’s surface, 240,000 miles away. Electrical instruments have been devised by G. E., capable of registering one billionth of a volt, or of registering the electrical charge in a cat’s fur, and similar delicate reactions. The instruments mentioned here are not impossible, and perhaps the day is not far off when the electrical vibrations of the human brain may be trapped by a new type detector and made audible, or recorded indelibly on recording tapes. The inference of this is tremendous, because here indeed would we have the perfect lie detector. No thought could escape such a machine.—Ed.

“They are powerless to move—the whole nervous system is paralyzed—and their individual will is also blanketed by a negative current. Therefore they give up their every scientific brain vibration, which is electrically amplified and recorded in what might be called the brainpan—that circular copper disk.”

“Diabolical!” whispered Thomas. “I’ve never heard of anything so fiendish!” Beryl’s grin was coldly mocking.

“The copper disk gathers all these vibrations into a composite whole—a vast store of individual knowledges made collective,” the girl went on, obviously reveling in her scientific achievement. “By wearing a vibratory helmet myself, connected to the brainpan afterward, my brain is able to absorb what has gone into it.

“Hence, space travel can be conquered as a start. Vast gold claims can be registered. Between us, Clough and I intend to start a scientific dynasty of our own.”

“In other words, you murdered all the scientists in order to get their knowledge?” Branson demanded.

“No—they are unhurt, but they cannot return because they will give me away. They can be used later—”

The girl smiled grimly. “Your brain, Dr. Lloyd, will be worth having.”

The little scientist bowed coolly but still remained silent.

“And yours, Rex,” the girl went on viciously. “You’re a good radio engineer; that’s why I got engaged to you. I’m doing nothing wrong—only applying scientific knowledge to the problem of progress. I think my subjects get terrified—but physically they are unhurt. I was somewhat reluctant to use my stepfather too. But then, he is so clever!”

“Where is he now?” Branson snapped. “You can’t get away with this, and you know it!”

“In there,” Beryl said dryly, as there came a desperate hammering on an adjoining door. “Along with the four supposedly dead scientists and Clough’s sculptor friend, Crandal. My dear stepfather worked from the details I supplied him, along with photographs. Nice quiet place here, and some of Clough’s men are always on guard.”

“Same men who tried to kill Dr. Lloyd and me tonight, I suppose!” Thomas snapped.

“Exactly.” The girl twirled her revolver menacingly for a moment, then she said briefly,

“As a detective, Dr. Lloyd, you disappoint me! When you telephoned Clough tonight, I had of course phoned him in between and told him what to expect. He answered according to my directions.

“I decided to let you come this far, so that I could use you without having to burden Clough with more kidnaping work, which is difficult and dangerous. In any case, your voice would have given you away. It is hardly like mine!”

“Alas!” Lloyd sighed, shrugging.

“What caused the trouble at my home tonight was the accidental discovery of the body in the laboratory by Parker,” the girl finished. “To keep up appearances I had to let Parker summon the police.”

“I’ll raise hell over that bungling,” Clough growled. “Leave it to me, Beryl.”

“*Varium et mutabile semper femina*—ever a fickle and changeable thing is woman,” Lloyd commented sadly. “And to think that *I* of all people should—*do this!*” he finished abruptly; and before anybody present had the least chance to fathom his action, he whirled his umbrella around with tremendous force, spurting a fine choking spray from the umbrella tip.

In an instant Beryl and Clough fired their revolvers helplessly, but the shots went wide. Gasping, choking for air, they dropped to the floor.

"I'm blind!" Beryl screamed, clawing at her face. "You fiend! You devil!"

Clough was too full of coughing to speak. Inspector Branson hauled him to his feet, clapped the bracelets on his wrists. Without ceremony he did the same to the girl. She stood quivering with fury and fright, drenched in spray, her eyes roving wildly.

"Don't worry, you'll both see all right in an hour," Lloyd commented briefly. "Weak solution of an acid I invented myself. Quite a lot in this umbrella shaft— All right, you men, get that door open."

The connecting door was unbolted immediately, and out of it trooped four haggard, totally bald men. Behind them came weary Dr. Clayton and the small, foxy figure of Crandal, the sculptor.

"Brian!" Rex Thomas shouted hoarsely, clutching the foremost man. "Brian, it's you!"

Brian Thomas nodded slightly, obviously too exhausted for words.

Clayton stopped in front of Lloyd and said quietly:

"I always suspected—but I never quite *knew*." He looked at the now passive, haggard girl unhappily. "It was because of her that I refused to proceed with ideas that might have fostered criminal notions in her brain."

"You don't have to tell me," Lloyd murmured. "I'm only too well aware of it."

"But you suspected Professor Eliman!" Branson cried. "You said so!"

Lloyd gave his insolent smile. "I stand as a supreme brain, Branson—a specialist. I gathered the following points: A—Beryl was not at ease when I purposely mentioned her real last name—Kimberley; B—Professor Eliman, had he been the culprit, would never have lifted scalpels from Dr. Clayton's laboratory, therefore the only other person was Beryl.

"C—Beryl was not even shocked when I slashed a finger off an apparent corpse of Dr. Clayton, where a normal girl would have gone weak in the knees; D—she had the chance to know everything her stepfather had ever planned or invented; E—she deliberately tried to substantiate my purposely false accusation of Professor Eliman.

"Lastly—F, her mother, Janet Kimberley, went to the State Penitentiary for murder in the first degree. Commuted to life sentence. Sorry, Clayton, but it's true."

"Yes—it's true," Clayton muttered.

"It was possible the girl might have carried on the same trend in a more modern way," Lloyd went on. "In various ways, besides those I have pointed out, she proved it. I purposely threw her off her guard so that I could see where the victims had gone. So, Branson, don't ever dare to question my genius again!"

Inspector Branson was staring blankly. "Hell, I don't know where you picked up all that!"

"I gave you a broad hint when I mentioned Beryl's mother. You could have traced her record from police records. I did—spent a whole afternoon doing it, though I'd known the relationship for some time. You, Clayton, married Janet Kimberley when Beryl was three, and thus became her stepfather. To save her daughter, who had taken your name, Janet Kimberley never revealed her own name was Clayton. Right?"

"Right," Clayton nodded. "That, I fancy, was the only decent spark Janet ever had."

There was a brief silence, then Dr. Brutus Lloyd pushed his Derby in place and reset his umbrella.

“Tough luck, Mr. Thomas,” he said, not unkindly. “But you’re young—you’ll find another girl.” Then he turned to glare at Inspector Branson.

“Well, what are you waiting for? Let’s go! And next time you’re in a mess, remember me—*magnum in parvo*, my friend—a great deal in a little space!”

[The end of *The Case of the Murdered Savants* by John Russell Fearn (as Thornton Ayre)]