

THE UNSEEN STRANGLER

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But for that faint odour and the queer imprint on the dead man's neck, there had been nothing to mark the visit of the killer.

The whole thing seemed a fantastic nightmare. Terhune had looked in the letter-box before he had left and had found in it a small packet addressed to Warren Demster. In the packet had been another scarab!

It must have been put there by the murderer before he departed.

The Golden Trout Inn looked strangely safe and remote when at last the detective reached it. He was greeted by the proprietor, who knew him well, and also by a tall, thin, dark-skinned man who was well muffled up in spite of the warmth of the evening.

This was Mamoud, the servant of Max Hargreaves, an Egyptian who had been with him for many years.

Hargreaves was looking worse than ever. His face was whiter and more flabby than ever. His lips trembled, and his eyes nearly bulged from their sockets.

"Pull yourself together, Hargreaves. I can do nothing to help you if you won't help me," growled the detective. "I've bad news for you, so brace yourself."

"What did Fothergill say? Has he received threats?" demanded the trembling man. "Tell me quickly!"

Terhune told him about Sir Andrew Fothergill and Warren Demster's death as gently as possible, but it looked very much as though Hargreaves was going to faint.

"Hargreaves have you any idea what Demster was going to show me when he went to his safe?"

Hargreaves thought hard, then shook his head.

"I haven't! You say he spoke badly of me, as—as though he'd something against me? That's very queer, for out of the party I think we got on better than any other pair. Maybe the contents of the safe will show what was in his mind."

"Hm! That's the trouble. It's one of the latest safes made, and Demster was the only one who knew the combination of the lock. We can't open it until we get permission from his solicitors, and that may take some time," admitted Terhune. "We were hoping you could help us—"

"Effendi! Effendi!" It was the voice of Mamoud, from outside the door of the room. Hargreaves unlocked it and let him in.

Mamoud was trembling, either with eagerness or fear. "This parcel arrived by post. How could anyone know you were here?"

Hargreaves gripped the back of a chair to steady himself.

Inside was an ordinary cardboard box, and when it was opened, there, nestling in a pad of cottonwool, was one of the fatal scarab beetles.

Hargreaves lowered himself to the edge of the table. His legs seemed too weak to hold him.

"I'm not going to stay here," grunted Hargreaves, suddenly standing up. "I won't stay here another hour. They'll come for me tonight. You've got to take me somewhere else, Terhune. Why don't you have me arrested and put in jail? I'd be safer there."

"I can't do that," confessed the detective. "But we can make you safe enough. I'll be

here to guard you tonight, and so will Mamoud. I'll sleep in the same room with you, if you like."

Hargreaves shivered. He was in an extreme state of jitters.

"No, I won't do it. I've just thought of something. I've got a yacht lying down at Beaulieu, near Southampton Water. It's only a small one, but there are bunks for four. Will you drive me down there, Terhune?"

Seeing it was wise to humour the man, Paul Terhune agreed to do this, sent off a long-distance call to Woods telling him what he was going to do, and before long found himself once again at the wheel of his car.

The run was uneventful. It was well after dark when they reached the lonely creek where the small cutter was moored.

It was not a very cheerful place, but Hargreaves seemed relieved when they were aboard and moored in the middle of the fairway.

Away in the distance they could hear a great liner from New York coming up the Solent. The tugs were signalling to each other with their sirens.

They cooked some sort of a meal and settled down. Hargreaves was calmer than Terhune had ever seen him, then about ten o'clock he became flustered again.

"My sleeping draught! I didn't bring any with me. I'll never get a wink of sleep without it, and will be a wreck in the morning . . . Mamoud, you imbecile, why didn't you remind me I had used them all?"

The Egyptian hung his head and murmured his sorrow. Max Hargreaves flew into a temper and struck him in the face.

"It's your fault! You're supposed to look after such things for me. You can go out and seek a doctor who will make

some up. Hurry! If you're not back before midnight, I'll break every bone in your body."

Mamoud salaamed humbly, and backed out of the cabin. He could be heard untying the dinghy and rowing ashore.

"But he'll find nobody willing to make up special sleeping draughts at this time of night. It's ten o'clock!" protested Paul Terhune, angered at Hargreaves' outburst.

"Nonsense! He'll find somebody who will do it for a large fee. Mamoud never fails. That's why I keep him. He'll fetch back the stuff before midnight, you can depend on that!

His eyes glared, and he thumped the table in the cabin. His nerves were in a very bad state. He badly needed a sleeping draught.

Then he made an effort and calmed himself.

"Let's play two-handed patience," he suggested.

Terhune was agreeable. It was better than sitting there staring at each other. Cards were produced, and duly dealt. Paul Terhune was about to take up his cards, when through the open porthole close beside his head came a faint odour.

Whether it came across the creek, or from the deck immediately above, he could not tell. It was so faint Hargreaves did not seem to notice anything. He was already busy with his cards.

Paul Terhune tingled with excitement. It was the same slightly musty smell which he had noticed near the bodies of the two murdered men.

Did this mean the murderer was near?

"Excuse me a moment!" he murmured, and made for the deck.

What will Terhune find on deck? Has the killer trailed Max Hargreaves already? The answers are in next week's gripping instalment.

