

# Cover



## Publisher's Page

Originally I was going to call this *Baker's Dozen - Weird Tales* then realized that people would assume that this would be a collection of only stories from *Weird Tales*, which it is not. The same was true if I called it *Strange Stories*, *Uncanny Tales*, *Strange Tales*, *Creepy*, *Eerie* and so on. Then I thought about the stories I'd picked for this collection. In an effort to mix things up I've included a detective story that relies on superstition, an adventure story about South Africa, and a tragic love story. It was while deciding whether this last really belonged in this collection that I realized that the theme, if there is one, is of hauntings. Things that happen that leave a lasting impression on one.

The cover this Baker's Dozen is from the second issue of *Strange Stories*. It the inspiration for "Fulfillment" by Will Garth. Garth is a house pseudonym used by many authors. In this case it is not known who wrote the story. It looks as if this was one of those cases where the editor had purchased a bizarre painting and commissioned someone to write a story around it. They wrote a pretty good tale from it.

*Ghost Stories* magazine was a bedsheet size magazine aimed more for the general public. The magazine contained stories about noted psychics as well as stories about ghosts and hauntings. In it's early years it would frame made-up stories of hauntings as first person narratives retold by an established author, as is the case for "The House of the Screaming Skulls." by M. Bouillard As told to Ed Poirers. M Bouillard was the narrator but Ed Poirers was the actual author.

### Credits

1

The Closing Hand by Farnsworth Wright. *Weird Tales* March 1923. Art: none. Words: 1000.

2

The Terror by Night By Charles Willard Diffin. *Strange Tales*. Jan. 1933. Art: H. Wesso. Words: 7500.

3

In the House of Screaming Skulls by M. Bouillard As told to Ed Poirers. Ghost Stories, Dec. 1926. Art: photo. Words: 2900.

4

The Man Who Was Dead by Helen Topping Miller. All-Story Weekly March 3, 1917. Art: "Mori", Words:4000. A "different" story

5

A Grave for Grogan by Norman A. Daniels. Black Book Detective, March 1942. Art: Vic Thor . Words: 4000.

6

The Black Laugh by William J. Makin. Strange Tales, January 1932. Art: ?. Words: 3700.

7

The Accusing Voice by Meredith Davis. Weird Tales March 1923. Art: none. Words: 5100.

8

The Tide on the Moaning Bar by Fannie Hodgson Burnett. The Argosy Oct. 1899. Art: none. Words: 12,700.

9

Man Who Paid By Jim Preston as told to Will Whitmore. Ghost Stories, Oct. 1926. Art: photo. Words: 1600.

10

Fulfillment by Will Garth. Strange Stories. Apr. 1939. Art: "H"?. Words: 2800.

11

The Volcanologist by Philip M. Fisher, jr. All-Story Weekly, Oct. 4, 1919. Art: None. Words: 9700,

12

The Cult of the Dead by Gabriel Wilson. Strange Stories, Oct/ 1939. Art: Unsigned. Words: 4800.

13

The Image of Seshra by James Branch Cabell. Romance, Oct. 1920, Art: William Hurd Lawrence . Words: 4800.

total words: 64,500.

## The Closing Hand by Farnsworth Wright

SOLITARY and forbidding, the house stared specterlike through scraggly trees that seemed to shrink from its touch.

The green moss of decay lay on its dank roofs, and the windows, set in deep cavities, peered blindly at the world as if through eyeless sockets. So forbidding was its aspect that boys, on approaching its cheerless gables, stopped their whistling and passed on the opposite side of the street.

Across the fields, a few huddled cottages gazed through the falling rain, as if wondering what family could be so bold as to take up its abode within the gloomy walls or that old mansion, whose carpetless floors for two years had not felt the tread of human feet.

In an attic room of the house two sisters lay in bed, but not asleep. The younger sister cringed under the dread inspired by the bleak place. The elder laughed at her childish fears, but the younger felt the spell of the old building and was afraid.

"I suppose there is really nothing to frighten me in this dreary old house," she admitted, without conviction in her voice, "but the very feel of the place is horrible. Mother shouldn't have left us alone in this gruesome place."

"Stupid," her sister scolded, "with all the silverware downstairs, somebody has to be here, for fear of burglars."

"Oh, don't talk about burglars!" pleaded the younger girl. "I am afraid. I keep imagining I hear ghostly footsteps."

Her sister laughed.

"Go to sleep, Goosie," she said. "'Haunted' houses are nothing but superstition. They exist only in imagination."

"Why has nobody lived here for two years, then? They tell me that for five years every family moved out after being here just a short time. The whole atmosphere of the house is ghastly. And I can't forget how the older Berkheim girl was found stabbed to death in her bed, and nobody ever knew how it happened. Why, she may have been murdered in this very room!"

"Go to sleep and don't scare yourself with such silly talk. Mother will be with us tomorrow night, and Dad will be back next day. Now go to sleep."

The elder sister soon dropped into slumber, but the younger lay open-eyed, staring into the black room and shuddering at every stifled scream of the wind or distant growl of thunder. She began to count, hoping to hypnotize herself into drowsiness, but at every slight noise she started, and lost her count.

Suddenly she turned and shook her sister by the shoulder.

"Edith, somebody is prowling around downstairs!" she whispered. "Listen! Oh, what shall we do?"

The elder sister struck a match and lit the candle. Then she slipped on her dressing-gown, and drew on her slippers.

"You're not going down there? Edith, tell me you're not going downstairs! It might be that murdered Berkheim girl! Edith, don't--"

Edith shot a glance of withering scorn at her sister, who lay on the bed with blanched face and wide, terrified eye.

"There is something moving around downstairs, and I'm going to find out what it is," she said.

Taking the candle, she left the room. Her younger sister lay in the darkness, listening to the pattering of rain on the roof and straining her ears to catch

the slightest sound. The noise downstairs ceased, but the wind rose and the rain beat upon the roof in sudden furious blasts that made her heart jump wildly....

Ten minutes passed -- twenty minutes -- and Edith had not returned.

A door slammed, and the younger sister thought she heard something moving again, but the wind began to sob and drowned out all other noises. Between gusts, she heard the portentous sound and each time it seemed nearer.

Then--she started as she realized that something was coming up the stain. Once she thought she heard a cry, to which the wind joined its plaintive voice in a weird duet.

Nearer and nearer the strange noise came. It mounted the stairs, step by step, heard only when the wind and rain softened their voices. It passed the first landing, and moved slowly up the second flight, while the girl fearfully awaited its coming.

The wind howled until the house quaked; it shrilled past the eaves and fled across the fields like a hunted ghost.

And now the girl's pounding pulses drowned out the screaming of the wind, for the presence had invaded her bedroom!

She cowered under the covers, a cold perspiration chilling her body until her teeth chattered. Her imagination conjured up frightful things--a disembodied spirit come to destroy her--a corpse from the grave, gibbering in terror because it could not tear the cerement from its face -- the murdered Berkheim girl, with the knife still sheathed in her heart -- or some escaped beast, licking its lips in greedy anticipation of the feast her tremulous body would provide. Or was it a murderer, who, having killed her sister, was now bent on completing his bloody work? A flash of lightning split the sky, and the thunder bellowed its tremulous warning. The girl threw back the bedclothes and shrank to the wall, her eyes starting from their sockets, fearful lest another flash reveal some sight too ghastly to contemplate.

Slowly the being dragged itself across the floor, lifted itself onto the bed, and uttered a choking sound of agony.

The girl sat petrified. Then, timorously, she extended a shaky hand, but quickly withdrew it in dread of some hideous contact.

Again she thrust her trembling hand into the gloom, farther, farther, until it touched something shaggy and wet.

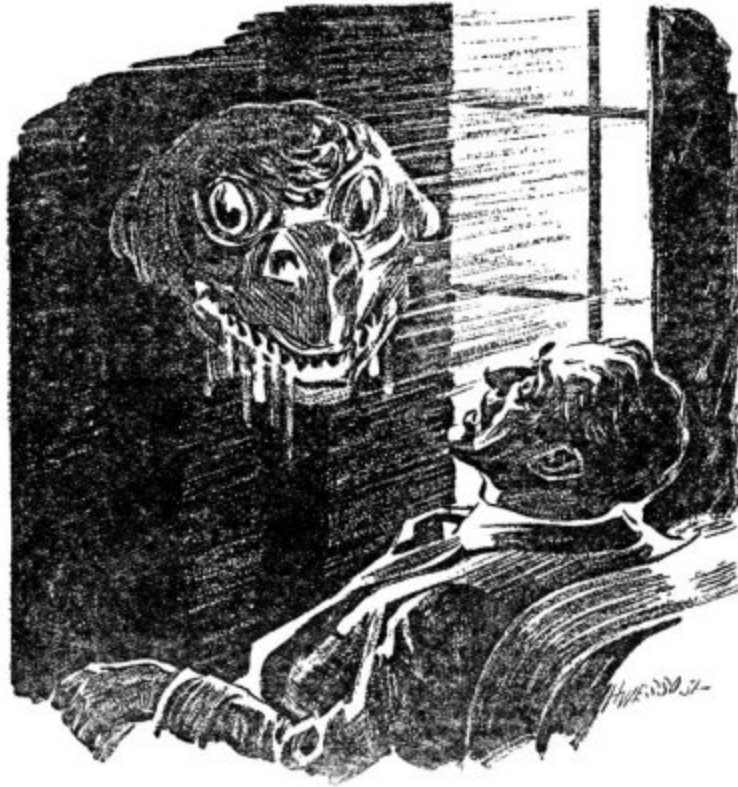
A clammy hand closed over hers, and she started to her feet, with a horrified scream.

The icy hand tightened with a sickening tremor, and dragged her down. Then her tortured senses gave way, and she fell back unconscious upon the bed....

WHEN she awoke, it was day. Beside her, on the bed, lay the bleeding body of her sister, Edith, stabbed in the breast by the burglar she had tried to frighten away.

The younger girl was clutching the clotted wisps of hair that had fallen across the breast of her sister, whose cold hand had closed over hers in the last convulsive shudder of death.

## The Terror by Night By Charles Willard Diffin



*A head, of mottled green and brown!*

ONE by one the twelve men and women filed in and faced the prisoner. And the man before them, still mute, stood quietly, with his fine gray head erect, while he met with expressionless eyes the gaze of each juror in turn.

"Guilty," the foreman said, and the gray eyes, which had been so unyielding, inscrutable, so unchanging through all the long days of the trial, locked with theirs steadily and unflinchingly.

Then the judge spoke, though only fragments of his denunciation reached the conscious mind of the man before him.

"... This hideous crime ... most cold-blooded-- most revolting murder that has ever ... your education, your training, your wealth and standing in this community ... your refusal to defend yourself, if intended to elicit sympathy, has failed ... the court is glad there has been no recommendation for mercy...."

Until at last the bare white walls echoed again the fateful words they had so often heard: "The judgment of this court is that you shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead!" And only then did the steady gray eyes close, and, for an instant, the man falter like a fighter struck to the heart.

*Hanged by the neck until you are dead!* Only hard, calloused and unfeeling nerves can remain unmoved by those words, and this man was not entirely unaffected. But when the stern voice had ceased he bowed slightly toward the judge, then whirled quickly to face the spectators in the courtroom.

Somewhere in that crowded room was a pair of eyes that met his in understanding....

"They've had all the facts. Jim," he called in a clear voice, and for one fleeting instant his lips twitched in a wry, enigmatical smile, "they've had the facts. When it's all over, you give them the truth--the whole damnable truth! They won't believe it, but tell them anyway--" Then the sound of the judge's gavel.

FACTS sent that silent man to the gallows. Sent him with a smile on lips that had almost forgotten how to smile and with glad welcome for the release which only death could bring. He did not want to die--not by hanging--but, God knows, he certainly didn't want to live.

"Tell them the truth," he ordered. And, may God help him wherever he is now, this is the truth:

\* \* \* \* \*

IN the darkened room Whitmore raised his head that had drooped sleepily. He could see nothing at first; but the touch of the table about which they were seated was reassuring. On his left was Jim; and Jim's wife, Sally, was seated at his right. One hand of each was held in each of his. Two or three others were there too, all good friends. Directly across from him, hidden in the darkness, was his wife, Betty Whitmore; and in the same concealing darkness there was, of course, the medium who was conducting the seance.

Even in the utter blackness of the great living-room where heavy drapes had been drawn across every window, Whitmore might have sent an unseen smile toward the blond head of the beautiful girl he called Betty. He was looking toward her now but he was not smiling. Rather, his eyes, wide in the darkness, were trying to focus upon something closer by.

Smoke in the moonlight--in a room that held neither smoke nor light!  
Lazily twisting convolutions of gray-green; almost invisible, almost unreal!  
Yet it was there, a ghostly mist that rolled lazily in the darkness where only its own dim light could be seen.

And then from the mist came something more substantial. Formless at first, it hardened, took on shape and substance, until it became a hand, a woman's hand ... and Whitmore released the living human hand of the woman at his right and reached out in slow wonder to touch that other ghostly hand before him.

Slender, soft and warm, it clasped his own fingers; and then, while still he held it in amazement, it was gone, melted to mist within his grasp.

"Great!" he exclaimed when the lights were on. "That's great, I tell you. You all saw it, but I touched it. I took right hold of it. It was real, material, a genuine materialization."

"I don't like it," said Betty. "I don't like it a bit, Jack. I'm going to be honest,"--her voice trembled a little here--"I'm going to admit I'm afraid."

"Afraid?" laughed Whitmore. "Afraid of a woman's hand? Great Scott, Betty, I didn't know you were that jealous."

ELIZABETH WHITMORE tried to smile in response, but appeared to find it difficult. "No," she said slowly, and her lovely violet eyes were troubled as they rested upon her husband and the flush of enthusiasm that had swept his face. "No," she repeated slowly. "Not afraid of a woman's hand. But Jack, dear, what else is there where that came from? How do we know it will always be a *kindly* hand? How do we know it will be human?"

It was the medium who cut short Jack Whitmore's roaring laughter. She was a foreigner, short and squat. The fat folds of her face perspired easily. But her eyes buried in those folds could still flash fire.

"Monsieur laughs too easily," she snapped. "Ze little lady, she is right. There is more things out there zan what you call human. Some are not human yet. In time zey will be--maybe! And some--" The eyes now were completely lost in the folds of that fat face that was twisted into lines of horror which seemed somehow absurd. She uttered a series of quick exclamations.

"Some of zese things, zey are not dead; zey have nevaire lived--not like you and me."

Here she shrugged her ample shoulders in a gesture that was meant to be reassuring. "But nos-sing is to fear," she told Elizabeth Whitmore. "I protect myself; I protect you, always!"

"All right," Whitmore agreed. "You seem to know your stuff, anyway. I'll take your word for all that.

"Twenty, I think you said." He was writing a check and doubled the amount as he wrote, then slipped it into the woman's hand. "We'll expect you next week this same time. And in the meantime we may have a seance or two of our own."

THE medium had reached the outer door, both Mr. and Mrs. Whitmore accompanying her. She whirled sharply on them at Jack's remark.

"No." she said sharply. "*C'est impossible!* I forbid!"

And again Whitmore laughed, this time more to cover his annoyance than from any appreciation of the unintentional humor of this woman's command.

"Oh, come now--" he began; and again she cut him short.

"Listen," she exclaimed. "I tell you somesing--"

"I did not do that which to-night you have behold. I am ze voice medium: always do my controls speak with ze voice. In all my life nevaire have I produced ze materialization. Someone else has made to accomplish this. It was yourself, I think, Monsieur, who was ze medium tonight."

The door closed noisily, and Whitmore crossed to a big French plate to regard himself in the mirror. "J. P. Whitmore, Medium!" he announced. "Readings by appointment only. I'm going to be good, Betty; wait till you see me in my full regalia."

Then, at sight of the troubled look in the violet eyes, he threw one arm about his wife and waltzed her gaily back into the room where the others waited.

"Ze circle, she will form about ze table," he announced in burlesque imitation of the medium. "Boys and girls, you are about to see something real in the way of materializations." He was reaching for the light switch as he spoke.

IT was perhaps a half hour later that Elizabeth Whitmore screamed. A heavy chair crashed in splintered fragments in the far corner of the room. Then her voice cut the darkness with the keen lash of terror:

"Jack, it's touching me! Its hair--all matted and shaggy!" Again she screamed, "Jack, help me; take it away! Take it--"

She was still standing, a pathetic figure in the middle of the room, when the lights flashed on. Her eyes were wide with terror, hands outstretched, as if warding off the thing those eyes had seen. And in that timeless second, while yet she stood stiffly erect, there dropped from her hand to the rug below three flecks of white foam that might have clung to the jowls and slavering mouth of some prowling beast.

Her eyes were still round with fright as she fell unconscious to the floor. Jack Whitmore leaped in the same instant and managed to save her from the worst of the fall. Her weight drew him down; he was half-fallen, half-stooped, above her when one of her hands that had been tightly clasped fell open directly below her face. And Whitmore threw himself back with a strangled oath.

"Look!" he choked. "Hair! Matted hair and flesh!"

He was staring at a dark mass in Elizabeth's opened hand--a clump of clotted black hair--and, hanging to it, a mass of what might have been flesh from which every vestige of blood had been drained ... and his own eyes opened wide with horror as he saw that hair and flesh undergoing a change.

Its paleness turned purple; then was transformed to iridescent, brown ooze--until only a pool of horrible liquid lay in the palm of Elizabeth Whitmore's inert, unmoving hand. The black clot of hair was the last thing to go ... then that, too, was gone, and in the nostrils of every person in the room was that stench which can carry only one suggestion--death and dissolution.

TO almost every man there comes at times that heart-freezing, blood-congealing sensation we know as fear. Yet Jack Whitmore, had he been pressed for an answer, might have admitted laughingly and with entire honesty that to him fear was an unknown emotion. And on this night, whatever there may have been of terror in the minds and hearts of the others in that room, there was no least thought of fear to distort the calm judgment of J. P. Whitmore.

So, too, on the following night, though the horror of it was still with him, and though still at times he seemed to be filled again with that revolting odor, there still was no fear. Even horror had been mastered by a stronger urge.

Curiosity, and something more than curiosity--he was possessed by a wild, insatiable desire to know more of this. And even the imploring look in the lovely eyes of Elizabeth Whitmore could not deter him.

"Jack," she said through bloodless lips, "--that *thing!* How can you want to know more--see more--of it? It "wasn't"--she paused at a loss for a suitable word--"it wasn't *decent*, Jack! I've tried to tell you--but I can't!"

"No," Whitmore agreed slowly, "it was too utterly damnable for words; but just what it was, just where it came from, I'm going to know." And no arguments or entreaties from his wife could change that decision.

"You'll not be there, nor any of the others," he told her. "I don't know that I can get the results alone, but I'm going to try, Betty."

Entirely lovely was Elizabeth Whitmore as she stood beneath the rose light of her boudoir, her robe of filmy lace falling softly about her; and her husband took her in his arms for one moment to kiss away the tears which were so near the surface of those beautiful eyes. "Lord, but you're an angel, Betty!" he exclaimed. "And don't you worry--not for a minute. I can take care of myself."

"AN angel," he was repeating as he went down the broad staircase, "--and I think it's something pretty damn close to the other extreme that I'm looking for to-night!" He jerked savagely at the weighted cord that drew the heavy drapes across the living-room windows, then seated himself in the same place at the table.

He did not know how to bring the results he was after. He could only sit in the dark that was almost tangible, where it seemed that the blackness was something that he could reach out and actually take in his two hands. And at last the turmoil within his mind subsided. He was thinking of Betty, and, "Lord, but I'm one lucky man," he was telling himself, when something drove these wandering thoughts out of his mind.

It was not fear, but a prickling sensation that almost stung him as it moved swiftly up his spine. He knew now he had felt it the night before, and now there came, too, a lethargy that swept quickly through him.

How he knew it was the same thing that had returned, Whitmore could never have explained, but he knew it by some new and added sense when first that ghostly glimmering appeared in the far corner of the room. Certainly he could not have recognized it by sight for in this place of darkness his eyes were of little use. Only by some inner vision did he know that here was no clumsy body such as Elizabeth's description had led him to expect, yet knew, too, that it was the same fearful visitor as before.

A waving cloud of gray-green light that spread out over the floor, that reached almost to the ceiling! That and only that was all his straining eyes could see.

It had been light with a light of its own, like fox-fire in the woods, this unnameable thing in the corner of the room. Now, suddenly, it was dark, and still Whitmore knew that it was there.

HE forced his laggard muscles to raise one heavy hand to the holster under his arm. That hand held a .45 automatic when it dropped heavily back to his

lap.

"This throws a heavy enough slug to stop anything that's able to move," he had told himself an hour before. But now he was not so confident--not here in the dark where some strange power had already reached out to paralyze his muscles; where something that had become invisible still hovered, its presence made known to him by that strange sense. No, decidedly, even the clutch of a heavy caliber gun did not instil its customary confidence. And with that feeling of helplessness there came to Mr. Whitmore the knowledge of fear.

He tried to raise the gun and found it too heavy for his waning strength. He could not move; and suddenly, with a sharp abruptness that sent a chill along his spine, he knew that he must move; he knew with a knowledge that transcended all sense of sight or sound that something unthinkably beastly and vile was coming toward him, closer ... closer....

Jack Whitmore had yet to learn the full meaning of fear. The understanding of its uttermost depths was to come later. But, for the first time in his life, beads of cold perspiration gathered slowly across his forehead and trickled into his eyes. And then--

Those velvet shades he had drawn so savagely across the window were hung on iron rings; sharply now through the silence he heard them tinkle. He heard one slip with a tiny metallic clang, and, as the drapes fell of their own weight and adjusted themselves from the slight confusion into which he had drawn them, they opened to make one narrow crack, that a band of moonlight might throw itself softly across the middle of the room.

Just one narrow line of light, one single band of silver against the dull red of the rug--against that and on something else that caused Whitmore's breath to stop.

A HEAD, of mottled green and brown. It must have been a foot across; flat and triangular like that of a venomous snake. There were leathery lips, wet

and dripping; and curved teeth that shone yellow against the dark wetness of the jaws. There were fleshy tendrils like thick hair hanging from flabby-pouched cheeks, and above all this nameless horror were two eyes that the band of silvery light brought suddenly to life. Eyes of fire, eyes so full of hatred, of blood-lust, of demoniac fury that Whitmore's own eyes came to them in irresistible fascination.

One instant only--one instant of utter horror, of a terrible conviction that here was nothing of earth; nothing, even, of hell. This was something that could have been nurtured only amid the dark recesses of some half-world!

One instant only while Whitmore's brain raced like an engine gone wild as if to make up for his deadened, helpless body. Then even that instant ended, and, where the moonlight had disclosed a thing of frightful visage, there was only a viscous pool ... and still the moonlight shone wanly while that, too, vanished to blue-white mist and was gone.

Forgotten was the gun as it thudded upon the floor. Forgotten was all but one recollection--the remembrance of the brilliant light that would come with the opening of the door ... and somehow Whitmore lashed those reluctant muscles and forced them to carry him across the room in one drunken, stumbling run until he crashed heavily against the door, flung it open, and clung weakly to the paneled wood.

The blinding glare of light was about him; he felt that he was safe, yet there was that which drove him on. And his last blind rush across the room ended in a crashing of glass where he thrust his bare fist through a window that he might fill his lungs with air pure enough to wash them clean of the foulness they contained.

One wrist was bleeding where the glass had raked it. He paid no heed but struggled to fling open the window, lean out, and let the nausea that had swept him have its way for, with the first touch of that soft moonlight, there had come to him again that intolerable scent of decay.

"I'M through!" Whitmore admitted. "Don't say another word, Betty dear, nor give it another thought. I know when I have had enough."

But he was evasive when his wife questioned him as to the happenings of the night before. Nor could he have had any slightest knowledge of the terrible forces he had put into motion; for he smiled happily into the violet eyes that smiled back as he said: "Never again, angel-child! There'll be no more of that devilry in this house.... Now, what show do you want to see to-night? I'll phone Jim and Sally to join us. I want to talk with Jim anyway--tell him about last night."

They returned well after midnight. Whitmore's man was waiting for him; he handed his employer a packet of papers. "They were left for you, sir," he said.

Jack Whitmore swore softly under his breath as he hurriedly inspected the documents. "It's that confounded subway extension matter," he explained to his wife. "You run along to bed, Betty; I'll follow after a while. I've got to go over an unholy mess of figures; got to be ready for a directors' meeting to-morrow."

He threw off hat and coat, switched on a shaded lamp at the table in his big living room, and, instead of taking the papers to his study, he dropped unthinkingly into the same chair he had occupied the night before.

The lamp made a circle of light upon the table where Whitmore scanned endless figures and estimates. He was not aware of the darkness that filled the rest of the room; he was not aware of his own solitude; and his mind was entirely engaged with the engineers' report and what their test borings had disclosed.... The first sound that reached his ears went unheard.

CONCLUSIVE proof, this, of how far from his mind was anything more supernatural than the modern magic of the machine age in which he lived. The sound was repeated twice before he realized that he was hearing

something like the whistling intake of an asthmatic breath. Then his head snapped up sharply, and, for a moment, he stared incredulously about him.

"Absurd!" he said half aloud; "I've seen men go to pieces--get the shakes--but, by the gods, I thought I was immune!"

His eyes had gone unconsciously toward that place where, one night earlier, they had stared into eyes of flaming red. He found nothing, although that same strange chill sensation along his spine had half prepared him to see a gray-green whirl of mist in the darkness. By sheer will power he brought his gaze back to the papers and the circle of light, and he forced his mind once more to concentrate upon the figures there.

"... And it is the recommendation of our Mr. Donnelly that further borings should be made at the points indicated on the attached layout--" He pushed the papers quietly aside; his mind refused to be coerced when, in his ears, there sounded again the labored breathing. And the same mysterious something that had spoken to him on that other occasion told him again that here was the loathsome, nameless thing, returned this time unbidden.

AND again there came to the stout heart of Whitmore that gripping fear, for, though he had not yet turned to look, he knew that this time the thing had come to him in the light. Dim, that light in the big room where it reflected and was diffused from the lighted circle of the table, but even this subdued glow was brighter than the impenetrable darkness of those other nights ... and Whitmore realized that light, the only weapon he knew, was losing its effectiveness.

He did not turn at once; that chill that was gripping his heart was spreading in ever-widening waves throughout his body.

In all the high-ceilinged room there was but one sound: the whistling intake of that horrible breath through a tight throat, and a softer, deeper-toned *huff!* as the breath was released. This eery combination of sounds was repeating itself with gruesome regularity....

In that instant the mind of Jack Whitmore split sharply into two halves; he was two selves, and one of those selves swore and cursed at the other:

"Coward! Fool! Turn around, you poor damned idiot. There's nothing there--nothing to be afraid of! And if there is anything there, you're man enough to wring its ugly neck!"

But that other self stood in frozen, terror-stricken immobility. Not until the rasping breath grew perceptibly louder did Whitmore move. Then there clamored in his brain one thought, repeating itself over and over: "It's coming! It's coming nearer. In another minute it will touch you!" It was the thought of that touch that gave the man strength to turn slowly about.

AT first there was nothing! Then half-way between him and the far corner of the room, amid the heavy shadows, was something darker even than darkness itself. Those white papers gleaming in the bright light had been blinding; there was time needed for Whitmore's eyes to adjust themselves--time in which every second seemed like a lagging hour.

Dimly in that darkened room he saw first only the outline of a body, a stooped, shrunken body it seemed. The figure of a man, standing motionless. Then, while Whitmore watched, that creature of the shadows took one halting, forward step, and even in the dim light Whitmore could see the sunken cheeks, the long, matted, gray hair that hung in a bedraggled fringe half over the face, as ragged seemingly as the tattered fragments of cloth that clung to the gaunt frame below.

Then one hand was slowly raised, a hand more like a claw of some carrion bird than anything resembling a human hand. But it came tremblingly upward to the face and brushed aside the hanging hair, and, with that, Whitmore for the first time saw the eyes!

They were cavernous eyes, deeply sunken in their sockets, which, in that emaciated face, were like the two black openings in a skull; yet from their shadowed depths they blazed as Whitmore watched, blazed redly with the

same menacing look he had seen in the reptilian eyes that had stared at him the night before.

It was the same *thing!* Whitmore knew in one intuitive flash that these horrible bodies were so many disguises for a still more horrible, more venomous and loathsome creature that was using them for some terrible purpose. And as before it announced its coming in a manner unmistakable.

The charnel-house odor which assailed the senses of the helpless man was almost more than human nerves could bear; and still Whitmore stood, not moving, beside that big table with its single light where a scattered litter of papers shone whitely. And the thing came on.

THAT single light shed a mellow glow; it reflected softly throughout the room; shone dully here and there on polished mahogany and lost itself at last in the neutral tints of the textured walls. And with equal delicacy it illumined the face from which Jack Whitmore could not remove his horrified gaze.

Not one single muscle of that face moved; and, rigidly set in the cold grip of death, there was no mistaking the meaning of the waxen pallor nor, more horrible yet, the discoloration that spread across half the face. Only the flashing hatred of those eyes gave visible manifestation of the fearful light that had forced itself into this body.

And for Jack Whitmore, standing there unmoving, hardly breathing, time lost all meaning and measure; all comprehension of normal things, all memories of the every-day world were lost. They were erased from his mind as if they had never been, and in all the great universe there was nothing but this nameless horror, nothing but two eyes that blazed redly with malevolent menace meant unmistakably for him.

One slow step; another as dreadful, as inexorable; and another-- and, with that slow measured approach of something which had no right to existence in the world of living men, the fear which had been born in Jack Whitmore's

heart that other night seemed to have reached its full stature. Had one of those dreadful claw-like hands reached within his breast to close about his heart, that deathly clutch could have been no colder than the grip of the fear that seized upon him now. Dimly he felt his whole body shiver; there were spasms of trembling that jerked and twitched at his deadened muscles.

SOME part of Whitmore's mind was reaching deep among buried memories for phrases half forgotten. His lips were moving stiffly.

"Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness ..." he murmured. But Whitmore was afraid, and the ghoulish visitant came slowly, haltingly forward; inch by inch it forced the helpless, dead body to drag itself along in the dim light.

Closer! And now one bony, claw-like hand rested upon the table....

Closer yet it came, and the hand at the end of an arm whose thinness was apparent through the half-rotted cloth came slowly up and out-- out toward Whitmore's face!

Reaching and straining it hung there until the dreadful body took one last forward step ... and with the first touch of long fingernails to his cheek, that other half of Whitmore's mind, that self which had never yielded, took quick command. The response of his muscles might have followed a tremendous electric shock.

One hand which had hung limply at his side shot up and out. It contracted into a hard fist, and that fist came up from below carrying all the force and driving power that Whitmore's heavy body could impart.

Where or how he struck the thing Whitmore never knew. That other self which was in control was shouting frantically to him, driving him in one backward spring towards the drawer in the end of the table, and his searching hand found the long flashlight that he sought, and pressed the switch.

No dim light then; Whitmore had had this lamp made for his own use underground. The beam which he directed toward a huddled mass on the floor seemed in that dark room like a blazing headlight of a locomotive. It was like a solid bar of light, like a torrent of liquid force that battered and poured upon that huddled heap of rags and flesh ... and the thing which had maintained a semblance of wholeness in the dim light lost all form, became a pool of utter horror, and then was gone. And only the strangling air of the room told of that vileness which had lately been there.

IT was a pale and shaken man who left his car that following day to walk up to a house whose door bore a card announcing that within could be found one Madame Zembla. Whitmore's sleepless eyes in his fear-paled face seemed almost as dark and sunken as those other terrible eyes had been.

All this, it seemed, was noted by the searching eyes in the medium's fat, expressionless face. "Ah," she said softly, without waiting for Whitmore to announce his errand. "It is zat you have done as you say. You would have your own way about this. And now..." She shrugged her broad shoulders disdainfully and waited for Whitmore to complete the sentence.

"For God's sake--" began Whitmore. There seemed no words by which he might convey to another human even a faint understanding of this dreadful truth.

"Oui" said the Madame softly. "*Pour le ban Dieu*--and for the sake of your little lady who was 'fraid. Now tell me," she demanded sharply, "is it that you have done--what?"

And Jack Whitmore told--not as Mr. Whitmore, capitalist and builder of subways might have spoken condescendingly to a disreputable charlatan; this was another Whitmore who spoke contritely and humbly and who implored the fat, ill-dressed woman before him to come to his aid.

"It is," she said at last, "zat you have left ze door open, and there has walked in a somesing that seizes any dead body it can for to make it live. You have left it open, that door, and once open, it is hard to close. It may be I can help, but, of a truth, it is *dificile!*"

WITH this promise of help another thought came uppermost in Whitmore's questioning mind. "This thing," he stated abruptly, "it was alive, I tell you. I don't mean the body. That was dead, dead! I mean the thing that was in that body.

"Where did it come from? Where is it now? Are there," he demanded, "things like that in the world of the dead? Is that what we have to meet when we go on from here?" For the first time in his life, J. P. Whitmore had turned his inner vision away from the things of this world toward a future that seemed highly problematical, and the visions he saw with that inner gaze were disturbing.

Something of this may have shown in his face, so pale and drawn; his hoarse tones may have hinted at the questions he had been asking himself. At least, there was something which made the medium lean forward and place one pudgy hand on his knee. "In your language," she said, "you have ze-- what you say?--quotation: 'a little knowledge is a so-dangerous thing,' and even ze little knowledge you have, it is all bad.

"No," she stated, and her voice rang clearly with conviction, "there is heaven and there is hell--though not such a hell as you might think. We will know more about both of them some day, I think, you and I." She touched herself swiftly in the sign of the cross, then went on:

"But zis thing, it comes from neither place; it has, perhaps, escaped. There are those over there who will help us to send it back where it belong....

"No, not to-night," she told Whitmore. "My help, it is needed by others than you. But to-morrow night I come."

With one sharp look she checked Whitmore's hand that had half withdrawn a bill-fold. "This," she told him, "is not a matter of ze money. It is a matter of somesing even more important--*vraiment!*--a great deal more important!"

THERE was a door--how well he knew it now--a door to some hideous half-world that held things neither of heaven nor hell, nor yet of the world of men. And he had left that door open!

J. P. Whitmore at his beautiful home some hours later faced the oncoming night with trepidation ill concealed.

"No, no," he said with unwonted irritation, "don't wait for me, Betty dear. You go along. I--I've--some matters to attend to, some very important matters.

"Jack," she began hesitantly, "you're not going to--"

"No; there'll be no more of that," was Whitmore's brusque response.

Jack Whitmore who had known pretty women beyond number had found, as others have done, that true beauty is confined to the few. Betty Whitmore's position in that restricted group could not be questioned. With beauty of form and feature, and that added beauty which comes from something within, the wife of J. P. Whitmore had all of loveliness that might be desired.

And Whitmore could not face that appealing figure standing at the foot of the broad staircase; he could not meet the troubled look in her eyes gone suddenly deep and dark. He could only repeat his reassuring words and hope they might bring greater conviction to his listener than they did to himself.

"No, no; nothing of that sort, Betty! Just business, my dear. Now run along." He turned without the customary good-night kiss and entered the living room.

HE was to remember that last caress he had failed to give--remember it while he stared with hot, dry eyes unseeingly into a future where there was only darkness and in which there was nowhere an answer to the questions that hammered and beat within his brain ... but now Whitmore was thinking only of light.

He switched on every lamp in the room, then dropped into his big chair and resolutely forced his eyes away from that far corner toward which they turned fearfully.

There were business papers upon which he tried vainly to focus his attention; he threw them aside for a book. That too failed.

He found a pencil in his hand: reached for a pad of paper and made meaningless marks--meaningless to him, although their significance to a psychiatrist might have been startling. From geometrical figures the pencil point passed on to more rhythmic, swinging lines. It was some time later that Whitmore realized, with a start, that his hand was moving unguided by himself.

The paper where he had been writing was black with a crisscross of confused marks over its upper half, while, below, it bore regular lines. Here was the writing of a cramped hand where one word was repeated over and over throughout all the lines.

J. P. Whitmore's big sprawling chirography was as individual as the man; had he consciously tried, he could not possibly have imitated the crowded, vertical letters of this writing at which he stared. But neither, for that matter, would he have written the one word, "don't," again and again.

Only in the last line did an additional word appear. And here this repeated command became, "Don't go--don't go."

WITH an abruptness which indicated the nervous tension that possessed the man, Whitmore suddenly revolted against his own inexplicable conduct.

"To hell with it!" he exploded, hell with it all! I'm sick of it; sick--sick--sick! Sitting up here like a scared schoolboy, afraid of the dark, afraid to go to bed."

He crossed swiftly and snapped off a master switch, and without another look toward the threatening darkness behind him, he passed out of the room and up the broad stairs where Betty Whitmore had stood.

He saw her through the door that connected their two rooms. She was asleep, breathing softly and regularly, and from some window of her room a broad band of moonlight threw itself irregularly across her bed. It showed the regular rise and fall of her breast, showed, too, the faintest ghost of a smile that tugged at the corners of her lips as, even in sleep, some memory moved her to that ever-ready mirth.

And Whitmore's eyes shone with tenderness and admiration as he tiptoed quietly away and reached for the switch that plunged his own room into darkness. But from where he lay he turned that he might look through that open doorway where a band of moonlight lay caressingly across Betty's bed.

HOW long he slept Whitmore never knew. He knew only that he had gone to sleep with a mind at rest; and farthest from his thoughts was any suspicion that the repeated warning of "Don't go-- don't go" might have ended with the words, "to sleep!" But he knew it when he awoke--knew it with a certainty that sent that gripping hand of fear once more about his heart.

What was it? Where was it? Something threatened, some danger more terrible than any that had come to him before. Almost it was as if a voice had been shouting to him, as if it were this voice that had wakened him, and with that he knew that the warning concerned his wife.

Betty! She was alone in her room! He cursed the muscles that were slow in sending him out of bed and toward that communicating door.

And at last Whitmore learned the full meaning of fear. Like one who has been dashed through treacherous ice into the black waters waiting beneath, that inner self which was the real Jack Whitmore found itself plunged down and yet down into depths of nerve-gripping terror whose frigid chill checked his heart in the very middle of a beat. And this fear was all for his wife.

That band of moonlight had moved. It lay now across the pillow where Betty's face would have been.

*Would have been!* For Whitmore, his rush checked for one frozen instant as he reached the doorway, stared with straining eyes; yet where his wife had been he could see only an irregular blur.

Horried, stricken with a paralysis that left him clinging to the doorway for support, he saw that blur take form and become a furred animal whose hair, like that of a monkey, was long and stringy.

ONE strangled cry escaped from his throat, and at the sound the crouching thing leaped to the floor with a motion too quick for the eye to follow. Creatures of the wild can do it; they can move so quickly that it is as if they were in two positions at the same instant. And this nameless thing that had been huddled over the face and figure of lovely Betty Whitmore was abruptly there no longer, but stood beside the bed looking squarely at the man..., And Jack Whitmore, who now knew fear learned also to recognize hate.

That same red fire was in the creature's eyes; it might have been a reflected glow from some smoldering pit of hell. Here was hatred, yet not a human hatred; nor was it the ferocity of a wild beast. Here was something that defied all words or thought to compass it, and it shone from narrowed eyes in the head of a great cat-beast like nothing Whitmore had ever seen.

Still that dreadful paralysis held him in its grip. He knew, though his eyes were fastened on the beast, that his wife was in her bed. He sensed too that that regular breathing had ceased. He heard her give one feeble, gasping moan.

In the moonlight a curtain fluttered. The soft breath of the summer night touched Whitmore's face, and his own indrawn breath died strangling in this throat, as again there came to him the horrible stench of putrefying flesh.

There was no measure of time, nor none to measure it. In one instant the throbbing, beastly carcass was standing erect, held there by that hideous something within it that gave it the semblance of life. In the same instant, while yet that one feeble moan whispered through the room, it was back where it had been.

IT landed, straddling awkwardly the silken folds under which was the lovely figure of Betty Whitmore. Her head that had fallen to one side upon the pillow was swung face upward as the creature landed. And now Whitmore could see in that band of moonlight that which transcended all else there had been of horror.

Her eyes were closed in a face that was waxen pale; her lips, soft as the innermost petals of a rose, had gone dry and colorless; and suddenly those lips were covered by a beastly mouth in a face where decay had already left its mark.

The scream that burst from Whitmore's tight throat was that of a raging animal. He launched himself in one spring that threw him heavily against the bed while his two outstretched, straining hands tore frenziedly at something of flesh and fur into which his fingers sank.

Then he found himself standing once more; he was breathing heavily, mumbling over and over in a broken, hollow voice, while he stared with unbelieving eyes at the thing upon the soft floor-coverings of Betty's room.

A dead thing!--yet a thing where the workings of death had been thwarted. And now that process of dissolution, which by some devilish magic has been checked, went on with terrible speed, and before his eyes, Whitmore saw that which darkness should always conceal.

Betty! It was his next conscious thought. Betty was safe. But Betty must not see this! He tore his eyes away, then turned swiftly with the sudden realization that Betty needed help.

HE must get a doctor at once. His arms were outstretched to reach her, to raise her up--but they were checked. For the figure that had been that of Betty Whitmore, the silent body that had lain so quietly was galvanized to life; while yet he reached forward, it snapped abruptly to a sitting position. Then, in the merest flash of time it threw itself out from under the silken robes, the soft, rose-colored coverlets that had sheltered Betty Whitmore, and sprang from the bed.

And still the moonlight followed it. Still that broad band of silver touched softly on those features that Jack Whitmore had loved. And the eyes that stared back in fierce triumph were red with the fires of hate, red as some glowing reflection from the deepest pits of hell, and the rose-petal lips drew back in an animal snarl.

Only for a moment did Whitmore see this malevolent transformation. Then between him and the face of his wife that had become so unbelievably beastly there came other pictures.

So plainly he saw them! They blocked out even the face, distorted with fiendish exultation....

There was the open door ... and through that door there came a formless, slow-rising cloud.... In its folds were faces, horrible faces, of what had once been animals and men, and Whitmore, staring at that ever-moving spectral cloud, knew that within it was a nameless horror, something beyond the comprehension of men. It had found the open door and was using these

putrescent bodies as a vehicle. It was imparting to them its own quivering, vibrating life and it was seeking another, more desirable way to manifest itself. It was searching for a living human being whose soul it could displace!

STILL it was a small thing which broke the spell in which Whitmore was held. A bit of lace at the V-shaped throat of the dainty robe that Betty had worn! It rose and fell softly in the moonlight with the regular breathing of that horrible breath that had been blown into her body ... and with that Jack Whitmore went quite mad.

Betty was dead. He knew it without any emotion. She was dead; and this--this thing!--

The throat above that lace-edged robe was white and soft. Jack Whitmore's hands were still about it when the police broke in; his fingers were sunk into that soft flesh with a grip they loosened only with difficulty....

"The poor young thing," said an Irish officer compassionately as he stared at the body on the floor, at its soft half-opened lips, its drooping lids. "Like an angel she looks! ... And why did you do it?" he demanded of Whitmore. "Only a fiend from hell--"

He did not complete the sentence, nor did Whitmore reply. There had begun for him the long silence which was to last throughout the trial; which, except for that outburst in court, was to continue until his death.

"They've had all the facts," he cried. "Give them the truth--the whole damnable truth. They won't believe it, but--"

## **In the House of Screaming Skulls by M. Bouillard As told to Ed Poirers**



ON the banks of the Ludre stands the Chateau Lavignac. It is set upon the crest of Lavignac Hill, overlooking the town and commanding a very beautiful view of the river for many miles. It is the ancestral home of my parents. For centuries it has been the dwelling place of the Bouillards. Though it has been renovated during recent years, the old chateau still retains an atmosphere of age coupled with something that to the sensitive and superstitious is peculiarly uncanny.

Is it any wonder that I have been unable to sell or rent the place? Terrible tales have been told all over the countryside about the chateau. It is called

by the superstitious folk the "Chateau of the Screaming Skulls."

There is an old story handed from generation to generation by word of mouth; and if it were not for the fact that I have seen these skulls with my own eyes I would be inclined to doubt the veracity of this weird tale. I have never heard the screams, but I have seen the skulls. I cannot say that I am very proud of the story and it isn't often that I tell it, for it does, no credit to my illustrious ancestors. Of course, in those days might was right.

Back in the seventeenth century before Chateau Lavignac was built, the land upon which it now stands was owned by one Jules DeFronte. He was a small farmer, tilling his soil and loving it for what it yielded. He lived with his wife in a little cabin. They were a hard working, thrifty couple who loved their little home, set upon the hilltop nestled among the pines. Their few acres of ground were to them as their life's blood, for they had been handed down to DeFronte through a long series of generations.

Now, there were in the town of Lavignac, Jacques Bouillard and his wife, the good Madam Bouillard. He was the first of my noble ancestors of which there is any trace. Before him they were nobodies. Bouillard had acquired a good-sized fortune and was the head of a large and rather influential family. Though he was not titled, he was of wealthy bourgeoisie that could meet the nobility on terms of equality, due to his tremendous wealth and his power over the country people. Bouillard owned all of Lavignac Hill, with the exception of the piece of land held by DeFronte.

MADAM BOUILLARD was very beautiful and intensely ambitious. With Monsieur Bouillard she had planned to build a fine house on Lavignac Hill, that would be the talk of the countryside. Of all the acres they owned, however, none were so desirable for the site of this house as the land held by Neighbor DeFronte. Time and time again they made offers to DeFronte to buy his land, but he would not sell. He could not bear to part with the land that had been his father's father's.

Many times Bouillard went to him offering inducements--but to no avail. DeFronte was obdurate. He would not sell on any condition.

As the story runs, my noble and none too scrupulous ancestor came back from one of those meetings vowing to himself that he would get the DeFronte farm, if not by fair means, then by foul.

Whether or not Madam Bouillard was the author of the wicked deed that was done, I can not say. It is not fair to intimate she instigated the dastardly crime that followed, without being definitely certain. It is a known fact, however, that she had a hand in it, and, if she was not the prime mover, she at least was well up in the front. Some women do influence men to crime and, when a man is under the influence of such a woman, who am I to say which one is most to blame?

A FEW days after the final meeting with DeFronte, in which he received the decided answer, Monsieur Bouillard rode over to the DeFronte cottage. Smiling, he offered his hand to DeFronte, telling him that he had given up all desire to buy his land and that he had decided to build the chateau on the land which he himself owned. He expressed a very sincere wish that since they were to be neighbors, they should bury the past, be friends, and he hoped the few harsh words he had spoken would be forgotten. To show his sincerity and sorrow for the way he had treated Monsieur DeFronte, he invited him and his wife to be his guests at his home in town on Christmas Day, which was then only two weeks away.

Of course, an invitation to the Bouillard's on Christmas was not to be neglected in the town of Lavignac, at least, not by people in the humble position of the DeFrontes. So when Christmas Day rolled around Jules DeFronte and his wife mingled with Bouillard's other guests, probably looking, in their plain homespun clothes, like two sparrows at a peacock picnic.

As the story goes, my noble ancestors went out of their way to make the DeFrontes comfortable, taking great pains to have them introduced to all

the guests and deeply resenting any attitude of indifference shown toward them. It was plain that they were to be considered the guests of honor. When the DeFrontes sat down to dinner they felt morose and decidedly uncomfortable. They remained noticeably silent. This can easily be understood.

My ancestor's jewels were the talk of the countryside. He was famous for his collection of antique plate, specially wrought silverware and golden vessels. Around the DeFrontes were placed many dishes of the finest workmanship, their value a well established fact. The poor farmer and his wife never had seen such exquisite things and they could not keep their gaze away from them. They relieved their embarrassment by staring at these various works of art. Jules DeFronte's attention was especially fixed on a small goblet that was placed at the right hand side of his seat. It was filled with the most exquisite wine my ancestor had out of his cellar. Out of it DeFronte drank, during the course of the meal, and he continued to gape at it and fondle it whenever his hands came near it.

A lull came in the conversation, giving Madam Bouillard a chance to remark.

"I see, good neighbor DeFronte, that you greatly admire that goblet. It is well worth your attention, for it is valued at over three thousand francs."

DeFronte started. This remark must have attracted the attention of all those at the table, both to the farmer and the goblet. It also served to connect them both in the minds of those present. The fact that DeFronte had paid particular attention to the work was registered with those at the table.

Two days after the dinner, soldiers came to the house of DeFronte and arrested him and his wife. They were thrown into prison without being informed of the charge upon which they were arrested. They were left there for two weeks, then taken out and hauled before the magistrate. Monsieur and Madam Bouillard appeared and accused the prisoners of stealing the valuable goblet. The poor farmer and his wife were disconsolate, for they had no more stolen that goblet than I had.

At the trial many witnesses bore testimony to the effect that Farmer DeFronte had paid particular attention to the goblet at the dinner in Bouillard's house on Christmas Day. Madam Bouillard told a damning story, the most of it, I am frank to admit, untrue. She told of the conversation that took place, how the goblet had been set before the prisoner for him to use, and how she had been attracted by the attention he had paid to it. Two of the Bouillard's servants came forward and said that they had observed Madam DeFronte and her husband lingering in the dining room after the rest of the guests had withdrawn to the parlor.

Finally, the goblet itself was produced and two soldiers swore that, when they had searched DeFronte's cottage after the arrest, they had found it hidden in a cupboard.

In face of such a formidable array of testimony the denials of the poor farmer and his wife were useless. So, according to the cruel code of the time, they were sentenced to death. Neither had spoken while the trial was in progress, but as the magistrate finished pronouncement of penalty, Madam DeFronte sprang from her chair, pointed her finger at Bouillard and his wife, and her voice rang with a weird prophetic note as she said vehemently:

"As there is a just God in Heaven, Jacques Bouillard, you and your wife will rue this crime. It will haunt you to your graves. You have damned yourself to grab our land. Neither you nor your breed will prosper with it. Your friendship shall be fatal and all those that you and your children shall love will die in sorrow. You will have no happiness in this world and will burn in eternal fire in the next. As sure as they die, Jules DeFronte and his wife will be with you day and night until eternity. Never, as long as your blood flows upon this earth, shall you or your posterity be rid of the specters of Jules DeFronte and his wife. Remember."

She was quickly silenced and dragged off to prison with her husband. Two days later they were dead; but Jacques Bouillard was to find that the curse of Madam DeFronte was to come to pass.

NO sooner were the DeFrontes dead than my most worthy ancestor seized their land. He cut down their loved trees and wrecked their homestead; he began building the house of his dreams in its place.

Before many moons had passed over Lavignac Hill the mansion was complete, and arrangements were made for a monster house-warming to which the gentry for miles around were invited. It was a gala occasion for Lavignac. The gentry came in silks and satins. Merriment ran high. Huge bonfires were built on the grounds, while inside the great hall a feast such as was never seen in Lavignac, was spread.

During the course of the evening, Madam Bouillard left the great hall to get some of her rare jewels to exhibit to the guests. The great staircase was dimly lighted by candles placed in niches especially built into the wall and grotesque shadows played on the wall. The curse of Madam DeFronte was forgotten, so Madam Bouillard paid no heed to the weird dancing shadows. She walked resolutely up the stairs.

Suddenly she stopped, frozen with terror. She screamed--and a piercing, agonized scream it was. The guests ran out and up the stairs to where their trembling hostess was standing. She was rigid as one petrified. Her lips moved, but she was speechless. All she could do was to point to the landing above her. The guests looked and were aghast at what they saw.

Sitting on the stair railing were two grinning, leering skulls. A sickly, repulsive grin was on each, and the eye sockets were distorted to give a most grotesque slant to the whole head. It was horrifying.

One of the guests, more adventurous and playful than the others, approached them. He came within three feet of them when they let out a most bloodcurdling series of cries and moans. Undaunted, this brave fellow struck at them with his sword and they fell clattering to the floor. They were real skulls, no phantoms of distorted minds. They crashed to the floor with a noise that resounded throughout the halls of the great house; and there they were broken into bits.

"This is a trick," someone said; and everyone present was inclined to agree with him. Here were two real skulls, and it was hard for any normal-minded

person to believe that they came of their own free will. They must have been propelled by some outside force and what could be more logical than to assume that that outside force was a pair of human hands?

Suspicion immediately fell upon a servant of the house and he was flogged to make him confess. But the poor fellow was innocent. This was soon proven. My ancestors were convinced that it was not the servant who was the instigator of the trick, but some supernatural power.

ABOUT a week later when Monsieur and Madam Bouillard were preparing to visit the home of a neighbor some miles away, the skulls appeared again. This time they came when the house was asleep, resting for the morrow's journey. At two o'clock in the morning terrible screams went reverberating through the halls of Chateau Lavignac. Instantly all was in confusion. The ghoulish yells came again. Faces peered out of doors, and half dressed men came running out into the halls. There, perched on the staircase, were the two skulls.

Not very much sleeping was done in Chateau Lavignac that night. In the morning, Monsieur Bouillard took the skulls and threw them into the courtyard, where he watched them break with a resounding crash into a thousand pieces. But the very next night they were back in the house again.

As time wore on, my worthy ancestors led a most intolerable existence. Every time any great event would happen at Lavignac, the skulls would appear and let out their fiendish cries. No servant would stay at Lavignac, not even overnight. Guests became fewer and fewer, and only the oldest and most courageous friends dared visit the Bouillards at all. Invitations were declined, for people remembered the curse of Madam DeFronte which prophesied misfortune to all friends of Bouillard. Yet no one can say that my worthy ancestor was lacking in courage, for he went on living in the chateau, regardless of the ghoulish disturbances.

It was the stark reality of the skull that added the touch of horror to the curse. If they had been mere ghostly wraiths, it would not have been so hard

to believe that they were the result of the curse of the poor farmer's wife. But they were real and any attempt to break them or get rid of them met with the most vehement resistance in the form of uncanny, unearthly screaming.

Misfortune followed close upon the heels of the family. Jacques Bouillard lost most of his fortune. Every venture into which he went was fatal. His most intimate friends met with great distress, and they died some of the most horrible deaths one could imagine. After a few years, shunned by all of their friends, tired of life and sick at heart, the master and mistress of Chateau Lavignac died, leaving their son little save the chateau.

WHEN the heir of Jacques Bouillard took over the house, the skulls screamed all night. In his headstrong youth he tried to get rid of them by breaking them again as his father had done, but the very next night they reappeared as before. From subsequent developments it seemed that the fury of the specters lessened after the death of Jacques and Madam Bouillard. At any rate, so the story goes, they only appeared at Christmas when they howled all night. There never has been a happy Christmas in the Bouillard family since that dreadful night when the DeFrontes came to dinner.

When the next in line of the Bouillards was married, the skulls screamed in fiendish delight on his bridal night, nearly scaring his young wife to death.

There are two restrictions that the skulls impose on every generation of the Bouillard family: They must not be removed from the house. At frequent intervals this is tried by some headstrong member of the family, with the result that they scream all night long. Nor can anyone give a dinner at the chateau. It has been tried, but each time the guests have fled in terror when the skulls began their unearthly howling.

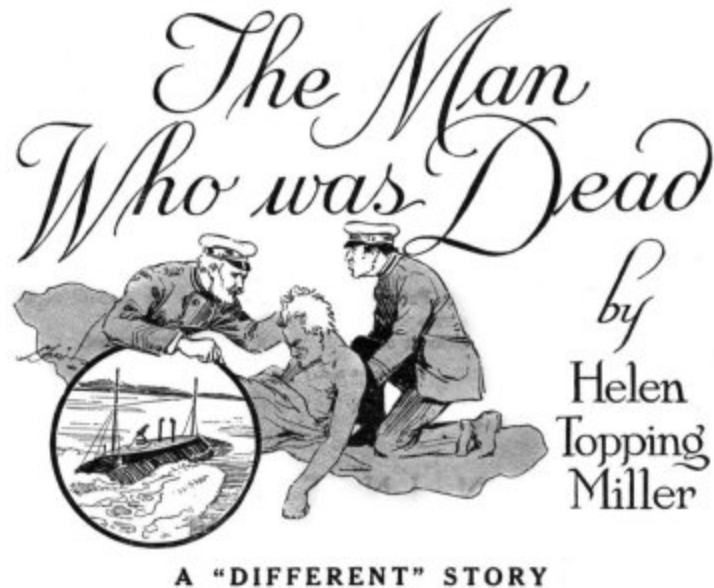
Sorrow has been the constant lot of the family since the curse was laid on it. Down through the generations, the chateau has passed from one hand to another. None of the families have ever been able to live in it for any great

length of time. It cannot be sold, for nobody will buy it; and the skulls make it so uncomfortable for anybody but the Bouillards that nobody will rent it.

The skulls are still there, but they remain quiet unless somebody makes an attempt to get rid of them. Then they scream. They have not been heard in years; in fact, since my father, when he was a young man, threw them into the Lugre. That night all the servants left in terror, and my poor mother was almost scared to death with the awful moaning and shrieking that kept up all night. Next morning, there were the skulls, perched on the staircase again.

Since that time the skulls have remained at Lavignac undisturbed and far be it from me to ever touch them.

## The Man Who Was Dead by Helen Topping Miller



NINE hours out from Bermuda where the green waves snarl at the blue like greedy cur dogs, Burke laid himself back in his bunk and gave himself up to the business of dying.

It was hot on the ship. The little stateroom was hazy with heat, and the electric fan beat the dead air, an ineffectual, spinning blur. The open port-hole was a mere circular glimpse of brassy sea and blinding sun, affording no relief.

It took a long time to die!

Burke, prone on his dry, restless pillow, wondered a little at the prolonged labor of it, the enduring weariness, the relentless grip of a shattered body upon a tired and sickened soul. Life had seemed to him so frail a thing--a candle flame flared into nothing by a breath. Why was it so hard to die?

He had seen men die--in fever camps among the gaunt, silent pines, in border fights, suddenly twitching--strangled by floods or smothered by flames. And always death had seemed an easy thing, a hand which sponged

out the symbols of the clay as though they were mere handwriting upon the waters.

But now the summer was nearly spent, and since the plum-trees' blossoming Burke had been dying.

Seven weeks in the bulb-farmer's house on the little inlet of glass-blue water--seven weeks which had brought to him each morning a stronger look of doom in the eyes of Henley--and now nine hours on board ship and still he could not die!

Henley was a fine fellow--a fine doctor. He had fought the strange, bursting pain which swelled and quivered in Burke's breast--fought it with morphia and with strange drugs with long names, even with cocaine. But the gnawing devil who possessed Burke's body was not to be appeased with potions. Great physicians, wise, simple men, had looked at Burke and fingered his pulse and shaken their honest heads. Queer, unwashed quacks, sought out from strange corners of the earth, had worked their blatant exorcisms in vain. But still Henley fought on doggedly.

That Henley loved Jeanne, Burke's strong, beautiful daughter, was a thing the sick man knew well, and also that the miracles which the young doctor wrought were miracles for love. But in Bermuda, Burke had seen the desperate cheerfulness burn out of Henley's face, had seen his hope conquered, heard his voice sink to the dead level of optimism which we accord to dying men and children. Burke saw these things with something of relief. Henley had given up. Now he could die. He was eager to begin it!

Lying there with the thick, warm air over him like a cloak, he experimented, wondering a little how men set about thrusting through this hindering of the flesh. He held his breath tentatively and relaxed on the hot bed, trying to wile his coward spirit forth. But the pain tore at him, beat and shook and rasped him, until his body was taut and dominant again. If only the pain would leave him in peace he could die!

He turned a little on his side and looked at the little bottle with the blue label. It held the drug which Henley had promised to try--the drug which would give Burke at least ten hours of sleep--veronal. At two he was to

have it. It was twelve now--he could tell by the hot slant of the sun in the port-hole. At two perhaps he could die!

Of what use was his life? For fifty-five years it had blessed no man--not even himself! How he had wasted it, this little strand of golden thread which had been given him! How he had snarled and tangled it, dragging it into remote and evil places, tangling the feet of innocent folk in the coils of it until now it hung upon him like a loathsome web which he could not shake off.

When he was gone Jeanne would have the money which Burke's canny old mother, looking askance upon her wandering son, had entailed upon his daughter. So long as Burke lived the income was his--a waster's penny spent before it was gotten. But at his death the whole beautiful sum, compounded and plethoric from the nourishing of quiet accumulation, was Jeanne's.

Jeanne would hoard it wisely--Jeanne and Henley. Perhaps, he thought with grim humor, they would build him a monument--he, Burke, the unstable, immured forever beneath one unchanging stone!

The sun slanted up the painted walls, glinted on the futile fan, burnished the plank ceiling. The pain in Burke's chest thrust up and gripped at his throat, wringing his tongue dry, setting every fiber of him on edge. He panted and sweated, picking frantically at the hot sheet under him.

Then Henley came in. Henley was a young man, a little stooped, with tired eyes. In the hospitals back in the States Henley had always been the first to plead for morphia when the patients sweated, gray-faced with suffering. Burke saw compassion in Henley's eyes as he lay livid, with clutching fingers. Henley would give him the veronal now. Then, perhaps, when this rending of the flesh had been subdued, he could die!

With strong, shaking fingers Burke pushed back the hot, rumpled sleeve of his pajama coat. His eyes were eager as he watched Henley finger the blue-labeled bottle hesitantly. His tongue was like-sandpaper, and speech was gone from him, but his eyes and his snatching fingers commanded.

Henley pushed the hypodermic into the hot flesh. Burke could feel the tingling fibers drinking, gulping at the cool sleep which drained from the merciful needle.

The brazen disk of the port-hole had faded to a cool, blue-gray shimmer when Burke's brain quickened and pierced through the restful oblivion which had possessed him. The air in the stateroom was fresher now, and he could feel the cool stirring of the fan. Was this death--this strange lassitude which overcame him? This weakness which turned his bones to pulp and his body to water?

He could not lift his fingers from the sheet where they lay stiffening. He could not hold his eyelids open. Of their own weight they closed. His skin felt cold and rigid upon his body. Strange-moving currents rushed in his ears.

How keen a man's mind grew at the last! How avid his ears! Burke could hear the voices of the crew on the deck outside, hear the whispering mop of a galley boy in the corridor. He could almost detect the pulse-beat of some one who sat in the room with him--Henley, undoubtedly.

Once the person came to the bunk and felt Burke's pulse. Burke could not see, but he felt the warm wave from an approaching body on his face, the pressure on his chilling wrist. Did his heart still beat, he wondered? How long it took to die!

It was night now. The light above his bunk was burning, he could feel the rays smiting his eyeballs through closed lids. Two men were whispering at the door. One was Henley.

"Practically the end," Burke heard Henley say. "You can hardly detect any heart action with a stethoscope."

Burke's lips were stiff and chill, but the vagabond soul of him grinned. What a joke--to hang about and watch his body die!

Did all men haunt their own flesh like this, he wondered? What a damn fool way to end it! He wanted to be away--to explore whatever came next! And

here he floated like a silly vapor with ears agape, listening to the wash of the sea on the port-holes and the tiptoeing of solemn people overhead.

But the pain was gone. All the things of the body were gone, every sensation, every desire. A naked soul was a comfortable thing to live with. Was he dead now?

He must be dead at last!

Men were stepping softly into the room, speaking in hushed voices. They crossed his hands upon his breast. Some one laid a cold, wet cloth over his face.

At last!

But did he have to hang around this husk of his forever?

It was dark, and the heat had gone out of the air. Burke found himself thinking of Jeanne--Jeanne who had always been loyal to her scapegoat father! Would Jeanne care--now that he was dead?

He had never done much for Jeanne. He was sorry now that he was dead. Since her mother's death she had been a wide-eyed, self-confident girl, living a haphazard life with relatives who despised Burke cordially. He had brought her a red dress once from a filibustering trip to Guatemala. He was glad of that dress. It made him feel better now that he was gone!

Strange what ideas the preachers had about death! He had heard one at his wife's funeral, long ago, orating about the gates of onyx and streets of jasper and the swelling music of the spheres. He had pictured death as a sort of torchlight procession into a wealthy and melodious land. And here it was--no change at all! You simply withdrew a little way out of your body and listened to what was going on in the world. What a joke on the preachers!

It was morning now. Burke could hear the clink of crockery in the galley, the scurry of feet above on deck, the quickened purr of the engines. Men were coming down the corridor. He could hear them arguing, Henley and the captain and the ship's doctor.

They were going to bury him at sea-- that was it. And Henley was protesting that they were only twenty-four hours out--that the ship carried her own ice. Henley was trying to save him for Jeanne, to be anchored forever under a memorial weight of stone. Burke was glad when the captain prevailed. The sea was free and wide, and no man knew what lay therein. Burke had always loved the sea.

There was no vision left to him, but he knew that they carried him up on deck--carried his rigid body with the soul of him somehow trailing along. He was conscious of the live stir of air outside, of the warmth of the sun, even of the smell of the sea.

They laid him down on a clean-smelling canvas with a linen sheet folded about him. Soon they would sew him in with a lead weight at his feet. They would moor no dragging weight to his spirit, he knew. He wondered where it would go when his body slid, still and stiff, into the sea!

Death was a great adventure. And men feared it!

Why didn't they finish him up? The captain, a stolid English-Lutheran, had gone below to rummage for his service book.

"We now commit his body to the deep--" Burke remembered that much of it.

They were all watching something on the port bow, something which had stolen up out of the salty dawn, something which brought a shrill quality of fear into the voices of the passengers. Burke had heard it coming. His spirit-ears were very keen. He had heard it creeping with a soft crackling, under the surface of the sea.

A submarine!

Men were running along the decks now. He could hear sharp cries, loud commands, the yelp of the megaphone, purring bells, the frightened leap of the engines!

How did a submarine happen to be on this side? And why should it attack this ship--a slow, peaceful boat, loaded with wool and onions? There were not many passengers aboard, Burke remembered--only Henley and himself and a few farmers from the islands, of polyglot nationalities.

They were making the boats ready now. He could hear the tackle rattle in the chocks. The screws leaped breathlessly, flinging the boat forward in great, plunging jerks. But by the low, tense voices of those on deck Burke knew that the under-sea boat was gaining--that it was frankly pursuing them!

Suddenly the ship gave a quiver as though she winced from a blow. There was a sound of ripping amidships on the port side, and a sharp, sulfuric odor and a jar! Then the deck under Burke heaved up with a roar, and dust and splinters fell in his face. He could hear water rushing below.

The engines choked, roared, and stopped. Feet tore up the companionways. There was much loud shouting and the nervous rattle of boats being lowered. Burke heard Henley's voice--even, unafraid. There were plenty of boats, the young doctor was saying, and the New Jersey coast was only a night away!

Then it was still. The ship was rolling, and Burke's stiff body rolled a little way across the shattered deck. The water was washing over him now, and his feet rose foolishly as the waves smote them.

"We now commit his body to the deep!"

How easily his body floated! If only they had got that lead weight fixed, the rites would have been accomplished automatically. The ship must be going down, he could feel the whirl and suck of the waters. The suction kept him spinning, but still he floated. Death had been withheld from him, and now burial was denied him. Even the sea refused his bones!

The ship was gone now. The sea quivered, but the violent heaving had ceased. The boats were gone. They would not linger near the vortex of a plunging ship to salvage him--a worthless dead man. He was alone. All the face of the moving waters was his.

Then a soft sound of washing waves came to his ears, a liquid, gurgling sound of something rising from the sea. The submarine--he had forgotten it. It was coming up now, creeping near to see what ruin it had wrought. He heard the flip of a screw--voices.

They spoke a language he knew. Burke knew many languages. Now they were shouting. A man plunged overboard. Burke could hear his splashing progress as he wallowed nearer. Then a hand clutched him.

He felt himself towed, inert, unresisting, violently through the torn water. The hull of the under-water craft rose sleek and slippery as the belly of a fish. With a line they dragged him up, bent him double, thrust his stiff limbs through a hatch.

Men bent over him, talking in a tongue that he knew. One laid his stiff hands straight.

"Dead!" he muttered.

But another contradicted him in a tone of authority, rolling Burke's eyelids back with a practiced forefinger.

"This man's not dead," he declared. "He's been drugged!"

They brought a strange steel apparatus and pressed it against his chest. They inflated his sunken ribs and sent a current rending through his spine. And all the while Burke lay and grinned in his soul. Of course he was dead! What fools to try to bring a dead man back to life!

Then suddenly something flashed through his rigid body, snatching his soul rudely out of the restful inertia where it had floated.

It was the pain!

The pain!

He was alive!

He was alive!

As the strained fibers of him vibrated with the returning current of life Burke felt a hot anger surge through him. Meddling fools! Why had they disturbed him--tortured him back to earth--thrust this diseased clay with its pangs upon his tired soul?

He opened his eyes--they came open quite easily now--and looked at the men who stood around him. Kindly men they were with tired eyes, men who looked like the fathers of sons and the sons of fathers. And yet not an hour ago they had sent a peaceful merchant ship careening to the bottom of the smothering ocean.

An old man with a white mustache bent over him. His fingers were on Burke's pulse. His straight, strong lips curved in a smile.

"He's coming out," he said in the tongue which Burke understood. "He's had a stiff dose--combined with acute angina pectoris. I have seen such suspended animation only once--in Freiburg!"

Burke closed his eyes again wearily. Now it was all to do over again--the thing he had thought well done! Again he cumbered the earth, a disgrace to his friends, a blight upon Jeanne! Why couldn't they have let him die?

They were discussing him. Two of them were arguing. He must be put ashore. There was some discussion about the boat. But Burke only lay still, very weary, hating the body with its pangs which he had been forced to reclaim.

The old man gave him something through a hypodermic and the pain lessened. He felt stronger, quieter, even a little hungry. They brought broth in a quill and dripped it between his set jaws. His lips were cracked and cold, and the salt of the broth stung them. They wrapped him in hot, dry clothes and rolled him in a heavy blanket.

Then they put him ashore. A boat came out from some little cove and crept alongside the bulging belly of the submarine. Two men went into it--two men and Burke.

He did not see where they were going. His eyes were still weary and he kept them closed. But his ears were keen as ever--as keen as when he had thought himself dead. He heard the boat grate on gravel and the voices of men speaking English. He heard the rumble of a motor and the swish of long grass beside the path.

Then the men who spoke English carried him away in the motor. He did not care. If he could not die it did not matter greatly where he went. He wondered vaguely whether Henley was saved--Henley and the captain and the ship's doctor. Henley had given him too much veronal. But he had meant well--poor old Henley. Then, whatever it was that the white-mustached one had given him overcame him and he slept soundly. For the first time in hours his avid brain was still.

When he awoke he was in a hospital. He knew it for a free hospital by the rows of beds and the unironed, coarse garment that he wore. There was an ice cap on his head, and a cool, moist bandage lay lightly over his dry, stretched mouth. Burke lay back with a sigh. He knew hospitals for agonized places, aching with loneliness. He had lain in many from Buenos Aires to Stockholm. All alike they were!

At last they let him go. They gave him strange, cheap clothes which did not fit him. They gave him no money--hardly a civil farewell. The pain was better and he felt stronger. But he was still a sick man--sick and penniless and alone in a strange place. He could not work. He did not know how to beg. That was one scalawag's trade which he had never tried--begging!

He would go back to Jeanne.

Jeanne was loyal. She would take him in and care for him. Then, perhaps, soon he would die and she would be free.

He had a ring left yet--a little cheap ring. He pawned it for enough to land him on the Jersey side, sixteen miles from New York. He could beat his way in.

He had traveled from Bonong to Tampa on a fruit boat once, eleven thousand miles, eating at the captain's table and paying nothing. He knew

how to work it. It is proof of Burke's skill that he did work it. He arrived in New York--riding in a Pullman car with money in his pocket. There are still men who ride Pullman cars who think they are clever with cards.

In the city Burke went straight to the little house on Twelfth Street. He had been gone four months. The leaves were off the vines now. The flowers were dead in the window boxes. He could see the light of a fire through the window.

Very softly he closed the little iron gate and climbed the two steps. He could see the room through the half-closed curtains.

Jeanne was there--and Henley. She was sitting on the arm of Henley's chair and they were studying a book together. Burke could see the pictures in the book. It was an automobile catalogue!

Then he remembered. The money! Of course the money was Jeanne's. She had that--the only thing he could give her. The red dress had been so little. He was glad that Jeanne had the money. Then with a start that pained him he realized that now he was alive the money was his again--the income of it as long as he lived.

He had done so little for Jeanne!

If he had died!

He cursed the foreign crew with fervent tongue.

Then came a chilling thought. Jeanne did not know that he was alive! To Jeanne and Henley he was only an indulged memory, hidden from troubling under a sleeping sea!

To Jeanne he was dead!

He turned away.

Straight down the two steps he went and into the street. The pain surged up quickly in his breast but he fought it down.

He would miss Henley. Henley knew what to do for the pain. But he walked away and did not look back,

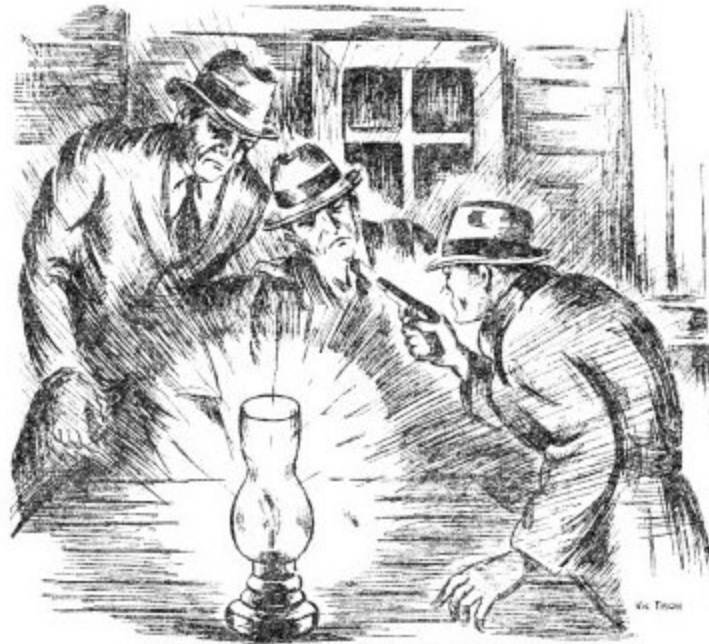
At the Grand Central he boarded a fast train, very magnificent. The world was under his feet again, and his face was set upon the old road.

For Jeanne's sake he was dead!

Those gentlemen, the editors, who hold their fingers continually upon the capricious public pulse, maintain that nowadays the people will have nothing but love stories.

Gentlemen, I insist that this is a love story!

## A Grave for Grogan by Norman A. Daniels



DETECTIVE-LIEUTENANT PAT KENNEDY wasn't an acrobat, but he certainly looked like one as he swung from a rope and guided himself down the sheer side of a brick wall. Foot by foot he descended, his objective a window ten stories above the ground.

Once this building had been a theater, but enterprising promoters had turned it into a night club with a few hidden rooms that served as gambling dens. The place was equipped with all kinds of protective devices to announce the orthodox coming of an intruder.

Somewhere inside the building were two dangerous killers, men who hated police officers with the intensity bred over long years of fighting them.

Kennedy knew the danger he faced, but it added to his determination to take the men--dead or alive. He slid down the rope another notch and his toes touched the window sill.

He clung to the rope with one hand, used the other in an attempt to raise the window, and swore softly when it refused to move. He drew a knife, opened

the blade with his teeth, maneuvered it expertly, and the latch was forced back.

A moment later he was inside. Kennedy snapped on his flash, avoided a cheap desk and a couple of chairs. He opened the door, listened, and when he heard nothing, stepped into the hallway.

Tony Judel and Joe Varno were holed-up in here. It wasn't the first time that this place had been used as a cooling-off spot for men with the heat on them. Kennedy mopped sweat with his handkerchief and drew his hip bolstered gun. He spun the cylinder experimentally and then moved in the direction of a door beneath which a stream of yellow light shone.

He listened outside the door for a moment and heard the sound of ice clinking in glasses and the slap-slap of playing cards as they were thrown on a smooth surface. He tightened his grip on the knob, turned it gently until the latch was all the way back. Then he put his foot against the panels and gave the door a mighty kick. Simultaneously he catapulted into the room.

Both men seated at a small table were on their feet instantly. One reached behind him and the lights winked out. Kennedy raised his flashlight, pressed the switch and for a bare second the path of light revealed two thugs, their teeth bared in a snarl of hatred. Then a gun blasted and the flashlight seemed to be picked out of Kennedy's grip by an invisible force.

Kennedy lunged toward the open door. One of the thugs, bent on making a break, met Kennedy head on. Both men were sent reeling back by the impact. Kennedy was the first to recover.

He jumped forward, located the thug with his hands and punched for the crook's chin. He missed and took a glancing blow on the cheek. The thug's fist suddenly was seized in an iron grip. Cursing and yelling to his companion for help, he felt himself yanked forward.

Kennedy hammered a short jab into the pit of his enemy's stomach and drew a sharp grunt of pain as a reward. The thug was doubled up. Kennedy judged the direction of his chin, slapped an experimental jab in that

direction and followed it up with a vicious hook. The thug fell backward and landed with a thump that resounded through the huge, empty building.

AS Kennedy turned, the other man leaped on his back. Two strong hands grasped his throat and squeezed hard. Kennedy reached up, secured a grip on the long, disheveled hair of his opponent and pulled. He sent the man upward and over his head to finally crash against the wall four feet distance. Kennedy found a match in his pocket. As the tiny flame cast flickering shadows around the room, he saw that the first crook was reaching for the gun he had dropped.

Kennedy kicked the weapon away, discovered the light switch and turned it on. He whipped out his own gun, smoothed his hair back and pulled a chair into the middle of the room.

"A fine way to welcome a visitor," he said grimly. "Come on, you two--get up!"

The shorter of the pair was Tony Judel, a baby-faced, pink-cheeked killer. Joe Varno was a gangling, six-footer. Both men arose warily and kept their hands shoulder high.

Kennedy indicated a davenport across the room. "Have a seat, boys. This is a social call."

Joe Varno made a wry face.

"Yeah--you just dropped in for tea. We know you, Kennedy. We know why you're here too. You think Tony and me bumped off your pal--Grogan. If we did--you prove it!"

Kennedy restrained an impulse to put his gun away and use his bare fists again. For once in his life, Kennedy almost believed in the third degree. Then he shrugged and relaxed.

"Look, you two," he said grimly. "Grogan and I were friends for twenty years. A month ago Grogan witnessed the holdup of a jewelry store. He didn't have a camera eye, but anyone with even fair eyesight could recognize you two mugs even if you were masked. In fact, he even saw you, Varno, without a mask. In the excitement yours became loose. But Grogan was the witness. Without his testimony, you could laugh off any arrest for robbery and murder. Yes--the clerk in that store died. It's bad for the health of a sixty-eight-year-old man to be slugged on the head with a gun butt."

Tony Judel leaned forward.

"We don't have to listen to this baloney," he snapped. "If you're making a pinch for that job, go ahead and make it. You can't prove anything. You just said Grogan was the only man who could convict us."

"Sure of yourself, aren't you?" Kennedy said. "You know that Grogan is dead. Somebody lured him to an isolated section a week ago. He never came back. You two birds did that because it was the only way to save your own skins. You knew Grogan would keep on going until he landed you."

Varno started to get up, but a gesture of Kennedy's gun reseated him on the davenport.

"Okay, copper, you can put the cuffs on me. I don't know what you're talking about and my lawyer will have me out of the coop in two hours."

Kennedy drew his handcuffs, approached the pair cautiously and cuffed Judel's left wrist to Varno's right. Then he sat down again. Both crooks used their free hands to wipe their sweating faces. It was earl autumn and there was a faint chill to the night air outside, but they were perspiring profusely.

"I know I can't convict you of killing Grogan," Kennedy went on, "because nobody saw you kill him, and we have no corpse for evidence. You win--so far--but I've got a little proposition for you. Grogan came of an old Irish family. He was a superstitious soul--believed in ghosts and banshees and the idea that a man's soul can't rest if his body isn't decently buried--in his own grave. Makes you laugh, doesn't it?"

VARNO spat on the floor.

"Listen, copper, we don't know anything about Grogan. We're glad he's dead. I wish every flatfoot in the world was dead--but that don't say we knocked Grogan off. What do you want us to do--give the poor stiff a decent burial?"

Kennedy walked over and stood before them.

"All right--you asked for it. Grogan told me this--that if he died at the hands of murderers, he'd return somehow to tell me who they were. Laugh that off. You don't believe in ghosts. Well, neither do I, but Grogan did and sometimes a man's beliefs transcend the doubts of others. I think Grogan will come back. I think he'll drive you two mad. What are you sweating about if you're not worried? It's not hot in here."

"I'm sick of listening to you talk." Varno snarled. "Take us in. We been pinched before and we always got out. This time ain't no different."

Kennedy looked down at them. He continued talking just as though he'd never been interrupted:

"Grogan worked hard on that jewelry store stick-up and murder. He knew you were the killers and he checked up. He found out that you maintain four different hideouts to hole up in when the heat is on. He planned to raid those places, but you got him first.

"Unfortunately Grogan never told anyone the location of those spots, with the exception of this joint. That's how I found you. Now--Grogan is dead. I know he is. I can feel it--even in here. His body is hidden and his soul is crying out for a decent burial. The corpse is at one of those hideouts. This is your last chance to produce it."

Judel shrugged his shoulders in contempt.

"He's clean off his nut. Maybe we better call a cop to protect us, huh?"

Kennedy reached down, grabbed Judel by the collar and shook him violently.

"You won't laugh long--either of you. I'll find his body. I'll--hey-- what's the matter with you guys?"

Both thugs sat stiff as boards, staring past Kennedy. Their faces were slowly draining of color. Judel's lips twitched. Kennedy turned around and gave a loud gasp.

There was a radiator across the room and on the white wall above it were faint, pinkish marks. Like writing being created by some invisible hand. Gradually the marks became brighter and brighter while three men stared with intense awe at the phenomenon.

There were four lines of it. The color of the writing gradually became blood red and then, as if the ink had really been warm blood, the letters ran.

"Grogan!" Kennedy exhaled. "Grogan--his handwriting! Blood! It's written in blood!"

As if some mysterious force impelled him, Kennedy approached the wall. He read the four lines and their meaning was at once clear. The ghostly hand had written four locations--four places which only the dead Grogan and the two terror stricken killers in this room, could possibly know. Kennedy reached up automatically and his finger touched the wall. As he backed away, the words seemed to fade.

Varno jumped up.

"It's a trick! A trick to make us talk!"

Kennedy approached them. He extended his hand and they shrank back at the sight of the crimson stain on his fingers. Very deliberately Kennedy touched Varno's hand. The crook stared down at the wet, warm blood that

was smeared across his flesh. He let out a weird wail and fell back on the sofa.

Judel just sat there, staring at the wall like a man entranced. Kennedy looked again. The handwriting had faded into oblivion.

He whirled on his two prisoners.

"So you don't believe, eh? Well, I'll admit that I didn't, either. I was trying to scare you into a confession, but I--I didn't have anything to do with that--that writing on the wall. I wasn't even near the wall. Nobody was! Grogan wrote those words in blood. His own blood that you two hyenas spilled."

"A trick," Varno mumbled. "It was a trick. There ain't no ghosts."

THEN he looked down at his hand again and gulped. There certainly was blood, anyway. It was clotting into a stiff mass. Kennedy jerked both men to their feet and drew his gun.

"We're traveling. This is how Grogan would have wanted it. Get going!"

"Wh-where!" Varno gasped.

"There were four addresses written on the wall by Grogan. It wasn't a trick. Such things can't be faked. Those addresses are the ones I wanted--the ones Grogan alone knew. We're going there. Something tells me Grogan will be there, too. When we reach the right one, he'll give us a sign."

"But-but you can't do that," Varno protested shrilly. "You can't. It's-it's inhuman."

Judel recovered some of his wits.

"Aw--pipe down. I tell you it's a new kind of third degree. Nobody can tell me there's ghosts--or that Grogan is walking around scaring us. Go ahead, copper, do anything you want. We don't know a thing."

Kennedy marched them downstairs, across the big ballroom and out the door. His car was parked around the corner and he forced them into the front seat. He unlocked one cuff, jerked Varno toward the steering wheel and passed the chain around it. He clapped the other cuff on Judel's wrist. Both thugs were hunched almost on top of one another. Kennedy's hands shook visibly as he reached into the glove compartment for another flashlight.

"Don't tell me you're uncomfortable," he said. "But I hope you are. Now if you try any tricks, you'll be wrecked with the car and me. We're going to that first address Grogan wrote--the house near the public dumping grounds on the outskirts. If you rats buried Grogan, that's as clever a place as any."

Neither of the prisoners replied. Varno still seemed incapable of speech and Judel was bolstering his courage by a constant stream of curses.

Half an hour later Kennedy turned into a rutted road and stopped beside an abandoned house. Smoke and ashes from the burning dump covered everything. Kennedy unlocked one cuff, brought it around the steering post and promptly closed it in place again. He menaced his prisoners with drawn pistol.

"Want to talk?" he asked softly. "Personally--I'm not keen on what I must do. There's no telling what will happen."

"We ain't got anything to talk about," Judel rasped. "You're nuts, copper, and Varno will be the same way pretty soon. But you're on the wrong track. We didn't knock off Grogan."

"Let's go!" Kennedy jabbed Judel's spine with the gun. He forced them to march inside the rickety old house. Ashes coated the floor, the discarded furniture, the stairs and the banister. They entered the big parlor. Kennedy brushed off a straight-backed chair for himself and straddled it.

Varno and Judel, backed against the wall, were sweating again. Judel's crafty eyes flashed across the floor. If anyone had been in this room within the last two days, footprints would have been visible.

"Wh-what you going to do?" Varno whined. "Keep us here all night?"

"If it's necessary," Kennedy answered. "I don't think it will be. Grogan knows we're here. He'll give us some sign. You boys didn't know him very well--you didn't know how an idea stuck with him. Like the way he wanted to be buried, for instance. That would have followed him in death. You can't deny those words written in blood. This is one of your hideouts, isn't it?"

"I never saw the joint before," Judel snapped.

KENNEDY lighted half-burned candles on the mantel. Varno seemed to perk up as if the light gave him new courage. Judel sneered.

An hour passed without a word being spoken. Kennedy arose from time to time and moved the candles. In a short time they'd be consumed. He looked at the walls closely and then sat down again. The shirts of Varno and Judel were wet, their faces grimy and their eyes shining in fear.

"Grogan!" Kennedy suddenly called out. "Grogan!"

"Stop that!" Varno yelled. "Stop it, you're driving me nuts. I--I can't stand any more of this. I can't stand it, I tell you! I--I--Tony--look! It's that blood again. Grogan's blood!"

Kennedy arose so fast that his chair toppled over. He swivelled and his eyes grew wide. The setting was just the same as it had been in the gambling place. There was a bare wall on the north side of the room. A rusty, ash-covered radiator was set in the middle of it and--just above the radiator--one word gleamed--in blood-red letters.

"No!"

Varno shrieked in terror. Judel struck him across the face savagely.

"Get hold of yourself, sap. The dick is staging this to make you sing."

But Varno's eyes were riveted on the wall. The single word was slowly fading away and at the same time the candles flickered as though a breeze passed before them.

"We'll keep going," Kennedy announced flatly. "We'll visit the next place that Grogan wrote on the wall. If it's not the right one, he'll tell us. No ghosts, eh? Listen--you guys are so scared you can hardly walk, but if I wasn't trying to help Grogan, I'd be just as scared. Outside--and remember there's a gun on you."

Kennedy said nothing as they drove back to town. A storm was raging somewhere in the west and Varno cringed with each flash of lightning. Judel just stared through the windshield.

Kennedy stopped the car beside a huge warehouse on the riverfront. They were still uptown and the sounds of traffic didn't reach this spot. Kennedy walked his prisoners into the warehouse.

At the door, Varno recoiled and began blubbing. Judel hit him again and whispered a warning. Kennedy marched them across the huge, empty floor toward a small office at the back. The warehouse hadn't been used in months. In the office they found a small desk, two chairs and a desk lamp that threw more shadows than light.

"We'll wait," Kennedy said. "If it takes a week--we'll wait. Grogan will come. He's bound to. He's restless. The ghosts of all murdered men are restless. Stand against the wall, you two. I'm going to look around."

Kennedy lifted the metal shade off the desk lamp. He gazed at the four walls thoughtfully and then he gave a grunt. With long, eager steps, he walked over to the farther wall. His fingers ran across it.

"Holes," he said grimly. "Bullet holes--about the height of Grogan's heart. He was killed here! I know it or he wouldn't have led us to this place. You stood him against the wall and blasted out his life."

Varno groaned dismally. Even Judel seemed affected now. His eyes were bulging and once again the sweat rolled down his face.

"But there should be blood-stains," Kennedy went on. "I don't see any. You washed them off. Then you dragged his body out of here and buried it. Where? Talk, you pair of killers. Talk before Grogan comes back and makes you."

JUDEL seemed to wilt. He said something, but it was so low that Kennedy couldn't distinguish the words. He stepped closer and Judel continued to mumble. Then, suddenly, the killer lunged forward. He had only one free hand, but he managed to smash home a vicious punch to Kennedy's face.

The detective reeled, tripped and fell. Judel gave a howl of glee, yanked Varno with him and leaped on top of the detective. His free hand sought Kennedy's throat and fastened there, leech-like. His knees held the detective prone and Judel kept howling in pleasure.

"Maybe your ghost will come back and haunt us, Kennedy. Maybe you'll write things on the wall to scare us. Anyway, you'll see Grogan. The two of you can have fun haunting me and Varno. Sure--that's it--see if you can scare us."

"Tony--Tony--don't kill him," Varno shrieked. "Don't do it. He'll come back, too. He'll meet Grogan. They'll both come back. Don't kill him. Grogan's ghost is enough."

Judel had a savage answer on his lips, but the words wouldn't come. He was looking across Varno's slumped form. His eyes grew wide and bulged slightly. The murderous fingers around Kennedy's throat relaxed their grip. Varno let out a scream and Judel's own shriek joined in chorus. They got up and retreated, step by step. Judel had one hand thrust out as if to ward off the horror before them.

Kennedy arose slowly, one hand stroking his discolored throat. He saw the same thing that made the killers cringe. There were three bullet holes in the wall. They formed a crude triangle and in their center--drops of blood

seemed to sprout out of the wood and slowly drip to the floor. They disappeared behind the steam radiator.

Then--mysteriously--they could be seen again. Drops of blood that gradually formed a straight line toward the door, like blood flowing out of the wounds of a murdered man. Kennedy had his gun out. Judel screamed. Kennedy grabbed his shoulder and forced him to follow the trail of blood that grew visible as they progressed. It led out of the office, across the wide floor and only Kennedy's flashlight revealed it now.

Then Varno collapsed. He sank to his knees for a moment before he toppled over, pulling Judel down with him. Varno's breath came in jerks and his chest heaved like that of a dying man. Judel raised his head. Kennedy was shining the flash ahead, picking out the trail of blood as it formed before their eyes.

"Yes--yes, we killed Grogan," Judel suddenly yelled. "We stood him against the wall. We shot him--both of us. There was blood on the wall. We cleaned it up. We dragged him out--right along the floor where the blood shows. We cleaned that up, too. Make him go away, Kennedy. Make him go! I'll tell you where we hid the body. It's in the river, in a block of cement. We made it look like a wharf piling. Even that wouldn't hold him. Make him stop! I'll go crazy!"

Kennedy drew a long breath. Suddenly the warehouse was flooded with light. Four detectives swarmed into the place. Judel saw them coming and the terror in his eyes was replaced by fear--not of ghosts--but fear of the electric chair.

"You heard him, boys?" Kennedy asked. "Send the diver down again. He saw that new piling yesterday, but he never suspected Grogan's corpse was inside of it. And thanks for the help."

CAPTAIN BURKE of the Homicide Squad slapped Kennedy across the shoulder.

"I take back whatever I said about this dizzy scheme of yours. It worked, and that's proof you're a smarter man than me. Say--that stuff looked great, didn't it?"

Judel strained forward, pulling Varno's still unconscious form with him.

"You mean that blood in the wall was phony? That Grogan ain't got no ghost?"

"About the ghost, I wouldn't say," Kennedy smiled. "The blood--it was really a form of invisible ink made a great deal redder to resemble blood. It was painted on the walls before we arrived, but until heat struck it--the words wouldn't show. Once I thought we were licked--when the words started to run. You see, we put the chemical into a colorless wax to make the letters stand out better when heat brought them into visible existence.

"That's why you boys were sweating so much. Remember that the words appeared just above a radiator? We had to have a lot of heat. These blood-stains on the floor--they're caused the same way. There are men in the cellar who followed the path we created and heated the floor until the stuff showed. It was tough going in that house by the public dump. We had to spread ashes around to cover the footprints we made. That was real blood I smeared on your hand though. I cut my finger to get it."

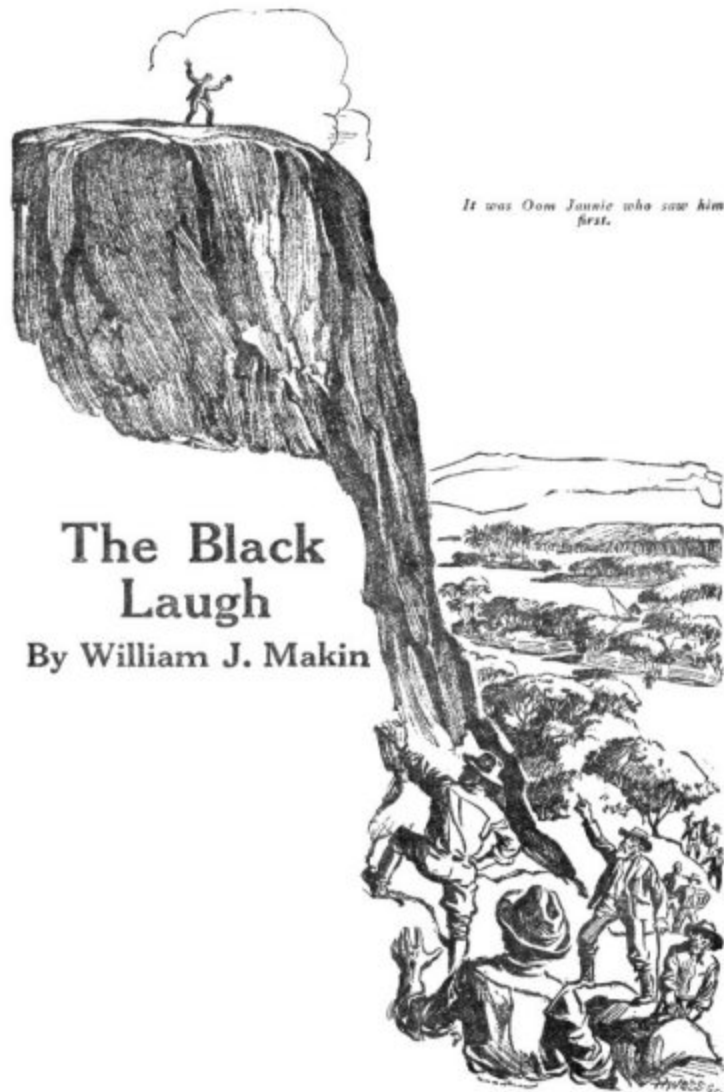
"But--but how did you know them four hideouts?" Judel gasped.

"Grogan was a good cop and good cops file reports every day," Kennedy said. "He recorded those four places just in case something happened to him. We checked up, found the bullet holes here and set our trap. Unless you confessed, we had nothing on you whether we found Grogan's corpse or not. We needed both the confession and the body. We saw faint marks where you'd dragged the body out and we arranged the blood spots accordingly."

"Fooled," Judel groaned. Then he kicked at Varno and cursed. "If it hadn't been for this mug, I'd never have fallen, but he was supposed to be a tough guy. When he cracked, I figured there was something to it."

"Take them out," Kennedy sighed. "And Judel--you'll know very soon whether or not there are ghosts. The electric chair will provide the means."

## The Black Laugh by William J. Makin.



I AWOKE with a start. There was blackness all around except for the dull red glow of the camp fire, now almost smothered in white ash. The awful stillness of the veld and that impenetrable darkness told me that it was the hour before dawn. A dreadful hour, and one that always finds me unprepared.

What had awakened me? I lifted my head from my sleeping bag and saw the vague, shadowy forms of my companions stretched in a deathlike stupor in a circle about the smoldering fire. Above was an empty blackness that had extinguished the stars. And, about me, that awful stillness that emphasized the miles of wilderness.

Then, tearing the stillness, came that rumbling laugh, a laugh that began in the depths and cackled to hysterical heights. A black laugh. It was that which had awakened me.

Again that laugh rose in its crescendo. I twisted my head in the direction of the camp fire round which were grouped our native "boys." A shadow moved. One of the natives was cackling horribly.

"For God's sake, stop that laughing!"

Maxwell, his fair hair all tousled, had leaped from his sleeping bag and was shrieking his command into the night.

"Stop it, I say! Stop it!"

Dead silence followed. The laugh was lost in the stillness. One of the sleeping forms grunted uneasily. That was all.

But I was astounded at the appearance of Maxwell. Standing there in shirt and shorts, he was trembling like a man with a bad attack of malaria. He shook his fist into that empty blackness, and cursed. I half rose from my sleeping bag.

"What's the matter?"

His eyes glinted at me, savagely. He did not speak, but walked to the camp fire, kicked some of the ash away, flung some logs into the embers, and then returned to his sleeping bag to sit upon it. He was still shaking as he sat there, all hunched up, as though expecting some terror would launch itself out of the darkness like a leaping leopard.

"That laugh!" he muttered. "You heard it?"

"Yes. One of the Kaffirs, damn him. Something funny came into his queer black mind, I suppose. I wish it hadn't. There'll be no more sleep for me."

"Nor for me," groaned Maxwell.

"Man, you're shivering."

"I know. That laugh comes to me like a curse. A black laugh. Ugh!"

AS one of the logs in the fire began to crackle and blaze I could see the tense look in the face of Maxwell.

"Well, if you're going to be upset by a laughing Kaffir," I began jocularly, "the sooner you get out of Africa the better. These Kaffirs are always laughing. They're happy, even though they are carrying the white man's burden."

But Maxwell refused to come out of his serious mood. He stared into the fitful blaze.

"Ever trekked in the Drakensberg district?" he asked suddenly.

I shook my head.

"I know it only vaguely," I replied. "Somewhere on the borders of Natal, eh?"

"That's it," said Maxwell eagerly. He obviously wanted to talk. Men do become communicative round a camp fire, and this hour before the dawn invited confidences.

"I used to know the country round there very well five years ago. Five years ago! I've never been back there since."

There was such intensity in the tone of his voice that I looked up quickly from the filling of my pipe.

"Why?" I asked. "A girl?"

He shook his head, slowly.

"No. It was a laugh, a black laugh, that drove me out of the Drakensberg."

I think I must have chuckled.

"Really, Maxwell," I said, "are you serious?"

"Deadly serious."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I can't imagine--" I began.

"Have you ever seen that peculiar kind of kopje that slopes up like a gentle hill for about five hundred feet and then shoots up a straight wall of rock for another five hundred feet?"

"Of course," I nodded. "It's not really peculiar, that kind of kopje. You will find it in different parts of the veld. But I know the kind you mean--rather like a giant sarcophagus on a huge mound, eh?"

"A sarcophagus!" muttered Maxwell. "Yes, at sunset this looked like an enormous coffin. Horrible!"

"Had it a name?"

He turned his eyes towards me. They were lit up by the flicker of a flame.

"It was called--Spook Kopje."

THERE was silence for a moment. The breathing of our companions in their sleeping bags sounded regular and sonorous.

"I was staying in a Boer homestead, not half a mile from that kopje," went on Maxwell, hesitantly. "I was doing nothing in particular--not even prospecting. I rather enjoyed the quietness, the humdrum life of the farm, the unbounded hospitality of the Boer family with whom I stayed. A real rest."

I nodded.

"A colored girl from the Cape, Olivia, looked after me. Brought the morning tea, prepared my meals, mended my socks, and so on. A good girl, and quite attractive as far as colored girls go. Something of a beauty for the neighborhood, and courted by all the black farm boys in the vicinity. But she looked down upon them. 'Dis black trash not good enough for me,' she said decisively. And having said this she would go back to her pots and pans, humming an old missionary tune.

"She certainly seemed in no hurry to get herself a sweetheart. And a good thing, too, for the Boer, Oom Jannie, and his family. They depended more and more on Olivia. She was undoubtedly a household treasure. But when Johannes came into the district, she changed. Johannes was not the sort of man to let himself go unnoticed."

"And who was Johannes?" I asked, puffing away at my pipe, determined, now that Maxwell had launched upon his story, that I would hear all the details.

"Johannes was a young buck, a colored man, also from the Cape," explained Maxwell. "He arrived in the Drakensberg district in a checked suit, a red beret, and a monocle stuck in his eye. He lived in Cape Town where he owned three hansom cabs that did a flourishing business after midnight. And he knew how to talk about himself and his hansom cabs, too. He had drifted to these parts for a holiday, apparently.

"HE had not been in the district three hours before he discovered Olivia. And he began to court her. Needless to say, Olivia fell blindly for the red

beret, the monocle, and the three hansom cabs. At the end of the second day she possessed the red beret. It seemed certain that before another week had passed she would possess the three hansom cabs as well. The black farm boys of the district hated this successful interloper."

I smiled at Maxwell, but his face still had that serious, intent expression.

"But although Olivia was practically conquered from the beginning, she still had a lurking feminine desire to see her cavalier of the red beret perform some doughty deed. Three hansom cabs were worth having, but Olivia also wanted a man. In her days at the Cape she had regularly visited the cinema, and her hero of the screen was Douglas Fairbanks."

"I should think it would be Valentino," I murmured.

"Not with Olivia. She adored the leaping antics of her hero, she thrilled when he flung himself to the top of a wall and crashed down again upon his pursuers. This was a man, and the sort of man that Olivia had decided to marry. Johannes was hardly that. Probably he had never climbed higher than the driver's seat of one of his own hansom cabs. But his talk was dizzying enough, and Olivia's mention of her hero encouraged his boastfulness. 'I can jump, I can swim, I can climb,' he announced to her. 'Why, each Sunday on Table Mountain I have climbed where even der Europeans will not go. *Allemagtig*. I--'

"'Could you climb that?' asked Olivia carelessly. They were out on the veld, walking within a hundred yards of that sinister-looking kopje, Spook Kopje.

"Johannes gave it one glance, and laughed. 'Why, dat is nothing,' he said. 'I could climb dat in half an hour. Now, on Table Mountain, I once climbed and--'

"'You certain dat you could climb dat kopje?' persisted Olivia.

"AGAIN Johannes laughed. He was so certain that he did not even turn his head to look at the kopje again. Instead, he gazed boldly into the soft brown eyes of Olivia.

"'In half an hour,' he repeated.

"Olivia looked at him. 'No one has ever climbed dat kopje,' she said quietly. 'No one.'

"'No?' Johannes was not disturbed. 'When I take you back to Cape Town, I--'

"'Will you climb dat kopje for me?' asked Olivia, excitedly.

"Johannes looked at her, and then decided he had better look at this kopje again. He turned his head and regarded it. In the stark sunlight it looked forbidding enough--the gentle slope, and then the granite cliffs climbing straight for the blue silk of the sky.

"'Of course I will,' he said, carelessly. But he didn't mean it. Olivia did, however. She saw Johannes in a blaze of glory. She was quite right in her assertion that no one had ever climbed that kopje. In the memory of all in the district there had been only three attempts to climb Spook Kopje, and all had failed. One man had killed himself. Sheep had strayed up the slopes and failed to find their way back again. They had perished miserably from hunger. Since the last fatal attempt, Spook Kopje had been left severely alone.

"'Climb dat kopje, and when you come down I marry you,' said Olivia. And she meant it.

"Again Johannes regarded the kopje. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable about the affair. But somewhere deep down in him, beneath that boastfulness, there was a strain in his mixed blood that urged him to live up to the hero-worship of his sweetheart.

"'All right, I do it,' he said.

"'When?' persisted Olivia.

"'When you like.'

"'To-morrow morning, at ten?'

"'Yes.'

"AND so it was settled. Olivia told me the gist of this conversation, excitedly, as she served me my supper. Here was a hero worthy of the films--and of Olivia. 'My man is some man,' she told me definitely. Oom Jannie shook his head over this folly. 'Aach! Why do you want him to climb a kopje?' he asked testily. Olivia did not reply, but brought him his huge Bible that he read regularly each evening by candle-light."

Maxwell stopped talking. The night was still dark and soundless. He walked over to the fire and kicked another log into the blaze. Then he came back and sat on his sleeping bag again.

"Did Johannes climb the kopje?" I asked at last.

Maxwell nodded.

"Yes, he did. Incredible. But it took him more than half an hour. Five hours, in fact. One has to admire the achievement. The Lord knows how he did it. But there, in the late afternoon, we could see him on the top of that granite wall waving the red beret which Olivia had given him as a talisman. We grouped ourselves to watch him--Oom Jannie and his family, two neighboring farmers, three black farm hands, and myself. And among us strutted Olivia, proud of her hero, proud of his achievement, and not a little proud of herself. We waved back to the hero with the red beret."

Again silence.

"Well? Did they live happily ever after?" I asked.

Maxwell turned his brooding gaze upon me.

"Johannes never came back," he said briefly.

"But if he climbed to the top," I said, "surely he could--"

"He never came back," repeated Maxwell, monotonously. "Olivia waited for him, we all waited for him to give him the welcome he deserved. But he did not come."

"But you could see him," I persisted.

Maxwell nodded.

"We watched that red blob of a beret trying to find a way down those granite cliffs for the rest of the afternoon. We watched until a saffron glow in the sky silhouetted Spook Kopje and made it once again a long black coffin. The glow changed swiftly into night, and still Johannes had not returned. Obviously he had not found it as easy to descend as to climb. He may have missed his way or, what is more likely, lost his nerve. But he did not return that night although Olivia sat whimpering with a lighted candle, waiting for him until the dawn.

"IN the early morning we watched the mist smoking away from the kopje. Again the granite cliffs were lit up by the stark sunlight. We searched anxiously. It was Oom Jannie, old as he was, who saw him first. He pointed a gnarled forefinger at the kopje.

"*Daar is hij!*" he muttered.

"We followed his pointed finger. At last I saw him. The red blob of a beret. Johannes had clung to that throughout the night. He was still on the heights, still on the sinister summit of that kopje. But he had traversed the top from one end to the other. He was still seeking a route to descend.

"At this glimpse of him we shouted and waved. Olivia shrilled and screamed. 'My man, my hero!' she yelled. But the figure with the red beret took no notice. Not at first. But, as the sun climbed higher he saw us. He

waved in reply; waved the red beret. But it was a tired gesture; the last panache. He was dispirited and anxious. For the rest of the time he held the red beret limply in his hand.

"Olivia completely abandoned her pots and pans. She stood in the doorway of the farmhouse, staring into the sunshine at that restless red blob on the kopje. We tried to comfort her with assurances. 'He'll be down for dinner, the young fool,' grunted Oom Jannie in her hearing. It helped her a little, that remark. But she refused to leave her post in the doorway.

"All through the afternoon, with my field glasses, I watched Johannes trailing desperately about the kopje. Yes, I could see he had become desperate. The owner of the three hansom cabs at the Cape had to get down or he would die of hunger and exposure. At first, I let Olivia watch him through the field glasses, but as the man became more and more desperate in his efforts to find a way down to earth I kept them to myself. Olivia began to weep. But she was not weeping, she was crooning those missionary hymns to herself. 'Lord, bring him back to me,' I heard her saying, over and over again. There was no use trying to comfort her, and, disheartened, I went inside.

"LATE that afternoon, I went myself up the slopes of that cursed kopje in the hope that I might help Johannes in some way. I toiled with two farm boys to the foot of those granite cliffs that went sheer into the sky. I marveled that the colored youth from the Cape had found a foothold of any kind. I traversed those cliffs from end to end, on each side of the kopje, but retired baffled again and again to the slopes. I tried three crevices, but each led to more sheer rock. I nearly broke my neck twice on that expedition. I returned in the darkness to the farmhouse and the weeping Olivia."

A log fell noisily into the fire. Sparks shot upwards to the black sky.

"How long did this last?" I asked.

Maxwell shivered again.

"I think it must have been the third night that Johannes went crazy. I was awakened in the silence of the night by a horrible yelling laugh that resounded again and again across the empty veld. I never heard such a blood-curdling laugh, coming from the depths and ending in a scream. A black laugh! The laugh that wakened me half an hour ago. Ghastly!"

Maxwell covered his face with his hands. It was some moments before he could continue.

"When I first heard that mad laugh I rushed out of the house onto the veld. Instinctively I looked towards Spook Kopje. Moonlight bathed it, so that the granite cliffs looked black and slimy. But there, on the top, was a prancing figure, a figure that laughed and yelled, and danced. It was Johannes. He was mad, and half naked, but still clinging to the red beret. I heard a stifled scream at my side. It was Olivia. She also had heard that black laugh, and realized at once the full horror of it all.

"'My man! Johannes! I so sorry,' she whimpered, and then crumpled into a faint at my feet.

"Oom Jannie, too, looking like a stern ghost in his old nightshirt, had wandered out of the house.

"'This is terrible ... terrible!' he muttered. He stared at the kopje in the moonlight. 'Something must be done,' he muttered again.

Next day five of us, all white men, made a desperate assault on the kopje. We tried again and again to scale those damnable cliffs, and again and again we failed. Baffled and dispirited we returned to the plains in the evening. And the mad, naked figure on the kopje kept up its yelling and screaming and dancing throughout. We all hoped that, mercifully, in this mad state Johannes would pitch down the cliffs and kill himself. But the man seemed to be possessed of an amazing amount of endurance. He lived, and kept up his black laughter throughout the night.

"Of course, every farm in the vicinity was terrorized by that horrible laugh at night. It kept us all awake, and the women folk were hysterical. Olivia had not slept since Johannes climbed the kopje. We were all waiting for the

poor devil to die, and he refused to die. The madness seemed to have given him a new lease of life.

"At last, Oom Jannie called the other farmers to a conference in the *eetkamer* of his farmhouse. I will not weary you with the discussion that took place there. But a terrible decision was made. We all emerged from the *eetkamer* with rifles under our arms. All except Oom Jannie. He carried a Prayer Book. Outside the door of the *eetkamer* crouched Olivia. She gazed at us dumbly. Her sad dark eyes traveled from our faces to the guns under our arms. At once she understood the terrible thing we were about to do. With a shriek she flung herself at the feet of Oom Jannie. He gazed down at her with a stern face, but tears were in his rheumy eyes. 'God's will be done,' he muttered, and gently thrust her aside.

"We all proceeded to the foot of that kopje with its mad, naked figure in a red beret still shrieking defiance of death and dancing hysterically on the edge of those granite cliffs. Slowly and deliberately we toiled up the slope, and at last we came to the sheer granite. Oom Jannie sat himself on a boulder. The others took up their positions. I sprawled on the ground and rested my cheek against the stock of my rifle.

"'Sight. Three hundred yards!' I muttered mechanically to myself.

"The mad, prancing figure of Johannes was an easy mark. The red beret which still covered his head helped. I groped for cartridges in my pocket. I heard the 'click-click' as the others slipped the cartridges into the magazines of the rifles which were being trained on the mad, laughing man.

"SITTING on the boulder, Oom Jannie deliberately opened his Prayer Book. We had to wait while he adjusted his spectacles. He could never read without his spectacles. Then in a firm and reverent voice he began slowly to read the burial service in Dutch.

*"Daar het de almachtige God, de Heer van leven en dood, behaagd heeft de geest van onze ontslapen broeder te doen weder keren tot God. . . ."*

"You know how it goes in English: 'As it has pleased the almighty God, the Lord of living and dead, to let the spirit of our deceased brother return to God. . . .'"

"Crack!" The first rifle had spoken.

"*. . . die hem gegeven heeft, en die gesproken heeft. . .*" continued Oom Jannie deliberately.

"Crack! Crack!" Two more rifles spoke almost simultaneously.

"The naked figure in the red beret continued to dance and shriek madly.

"*Allemagtig!* My hand shakes," cursed one Boer.

"I sighted on the red beret. Crack! I had missed.

"*. . . stoft zyt gy, en tot zult gy wederken. . .*"

"Crack! Crack!"

"And so it continued in the stark sunlight. We must each have fired five rounds before the end came. We saw the figure in the red beret stagger, and then pitch down.

"*. . . bevonded moogt worden in vrede,*" concluded Oom Jannie, softly, and closed the Prayer Book.

"Half an hour later we were back in the homestead."

A long silence followed. The campfire blazed merrily. The sky was paling. Dawn had come. Maxwell sat hunched on his sleeping bag. Neither of us spoke for some time.

"And you never went back there again?" I asked.

Maxwell shook his head.

"Never. I left the next day."

"And Olivia?"

"I heard she went back to her pots and pans. She is now a silent, moody woman. She will never marry. Each evening she walks to that kopje and stares at the heights where lie the bones of the man she loved. And they do say," added Maxwell, "that a mad laugh is often heard coming from those strange heights of Spook Kopje. And that laugh portends evil."

I heard a deep chuckle behind me. Startled, I turned. The black face of my Kaffir servant grinned at me.

"Good morning, baas!" he said. "Coffee!"

The sleepers began to awake.

## **The Accusing Voice by Meredith Davis.**

"WE, THE JURY, find the defendant, Richard Bland, guilty of murder in the first degree, in manner and form as charged.

Allen Defoe, foreman of the twelve men, listened with impassive face as the judge read away the life of the prisoner in the dock--the man whose death warrant Defoe had signed only a few minutes before. As the judge finished, Defoe glanced warily toward the prisoner. Somehow, he preferred to avoid catching his eye.

Bland, a slight, rather uninteresting type of man, stood with bowed head; Defoe now turned his gaze full upon him.

"Has the prisoner anything to say why judgment should not be pronounced?"

The judge's voice, coming after the ebon pause, sent a strange dull into the heart of Allen Defoe, juror. He hoped the prisoner's counsel would make the customary motions for a new trial or for time in which to file an appeal. He did neither: evidently Bland believed the verdict inescapable--or else he was out of funds.

Now the judge arose in his place, donning with nervous gesture the black cap that accompanies the most tragic moment in the performance of a court's duties. The judge seemed ill at ease in the cap. It was the first time he had worn it. The grotesque thought flitted through Defoe's mind that perhaps the judge had borrowed the cap from one of his fellow jurists for the occasion.

The almost level rays of the western sun diffused a somber, aureate glow athwart the judge's bench, so that the dark figure of the standing man was in

mystic indistinctness beyond the shaft of light from the window. A fly now and then craved the spotlight for a moment and lazily floated from the growing dusk of the room to the avenue of ebbing day, streaming in from the west. And always there was a constant turmoil of dust particles, visible only when they moved into the bright relief of the sun-shaft.

The handful of spectators stirred restlessly while the judge was making his preparations. The droning noises of approaching summer evening in a rural county-seat were smothered by the buzz of ill-hushed voices. Perhaps that was why the judge, in the midst of adjusting his headgear, rapped sharply thrice with his gavel--or, it may have been only his excess of nervousness.

Defoe thought the judge never would stop fumbling with his cap. And finally the judge lost track of the jury's verdict and had to mess through the scattered papers before him until he found it. He didn't really require it to pronounce sentence of death upon the man in the dock. Hunting it, though, delayed the inevitable a few seconds; and Defoe wondered, since he himself was near to screaming out with impatience, how the prisoner could stand it without going suddenly mad.

"For God's sake, read the death sentence!" exclaimed Defoe under his breath, but loud enough to arouse a nod of approval from the two juror nearest him.

A moment later the judge found his voice:

"The prisoner will face the court."

Slowly, deliberately, the prisoner stepped forward in the dock, leaning slightly against the railing and letting one hand rest upon it. He looked squarely at the judge now, although he barely could distinguish his features in the dimness.

Again the judge spoke, and this time his voice was hurried and strained:

"The sentence of the court is that the prisoner be taken, between the hours of seven a.m. and six p.m. on Tuesday, in the week beginning October 22 next, from the place of confinement to the place of execution, and there be

handed by the neck until he is dead--dead-- dead! ... And may God, in His infinite wisdom, have mercy on your soul!"

The judge sank back heavily into the safety of his chair. His hand swept up to brush his forehead and with the same motion it whisked off the detestable little black cap.

The prisoner remained staring at the judge as one who is puzzled at a strange sight. Perhaps he would have stood there untold minutes if a woman's hysterical laugh, half-choked by a sudden upraised hand, had not broken the tension of the entire room. A bailiff tiptoed to the woman, and, as if revived to duty by the same cause, a prison guard strode forward to lead the condemned man away.

Defoe could have reached out and touched Bland as he passed the jury on his way to the cell across the street But Defoe had no desire even to look at Bland: indeed, he did not, until Bland's back was passing out of sight through the door on the other side of the jury box. Mechanically, then, Defoe filed out with the other jurors as the judge announced adjournment.

And the black cap lay forgotten on the rim of the judge's wastebasket, where the janitor found it that evening and crossed himself fervently as he timidly salvaged it from ignoble oblivion.

## II.

DEFOE awoke with a shudder.

There was a moment or two, as is always the case when one arouses from heavy, dream-burdened slumber, during which Defoe could not tell where his dream ended and realities began. He blinked experimentally into the smouldering fire in the open grate before him; yes, he was conscious. For

further verification of this he drew forth his watch and noted the hour. The glow from the fire was scarcely sufficient for reading the dial and Defoe leaned forward the better to see. He was still too drowsy even to reach around and turn on the electric lamp on the table behind him.

Still he was not certain whether he was yet dreaming, until--

"Don't budge, Defoe! I've got you covered!"

The Voice was close to his left ear. Its commanding acerbity quelled Defoe's impulse to spring to his feet; and as he gripped the arms of the chair tensely he managed to challenge his unseen intruder:

"Who are you? What do you want here?"

The Voice moved a little upward and back before it answered:

"You've just had a nasty dream, Defoe. Perhaps I--"

"How do you know I did!" interrupted Defoe.

"You did, though, didn't you?" the Voice insisted.

"Yes, but how did you know?" repeated Defoe.

"Never mind how," said the Voice. "I'll wager you've had the same dream pretty often in the last dozen years, too. It must be hell to have a scene like that forever before you mind, so that you're always in dread of dreaming about it--"

"What scene?" demanded Defoe. "Are you a mind reader--a wizard--what are you?"

The Voice chuckled. "None of those," it said. "As I was saying, you must be afraid, almost, to go to bed at night. I would be, if I thought I might dream of sending an innocent man to the gallows----"

"Stop!" Defoe fairly shouted. "Damn it all, come around here where I can see you!" and he made an instinctive move to turn about and confront his

tormentor.

The firm pressure of an automatic barrel against his temple halted him.

"Don't make the mistake of turning around!" again warned the Voice incisively.

Then, in a lighter tone, it went on: "If I were in your place, Mr. Defoe, do you know what I'd do?"

A pause. Defoe mumbled a faint, "No."

"Well, I either would confess my whole knowledge of the affair--or--I'd commit suicide!"

Defoe started. It was uncanny, eerie, the way this mysterious Voice put into words the one gnawing thought that had plagued him the last dozen years of his life.

"Of course, you probably have contemplated those alternatives very often," the Voice continued. "But have you ever considered doing both? That is, did you ever think that you might confess first, thereby clearing an innocent man's name of murder, and then cheat the law yourself by committing sui---  
-"

"For God's sake, stop that infernal suicide talk!" Defoe snapped. "In the first place. I don't know what 'affair' or what 'innocent man' you're talking about."

The Voice chuckled again. Defoe was beginning to hate that chuckle more than the feel of the automatic against his head. If the Voice kept on chuckling it might urge him to determination to grapple with his armed inquisitor, even though he would court certain death in doing it.

"Why, there's no need to explain the obvious," the Voice replied, its chuckle rippling through the words. "Your dream ought to tell you that. Speaking of your dream again, Mr. Defoe, reminds me of a question I often wished to ask you: Did you see Bland at all after his conviction?"

"No, of course--" Defoe's guard had been down. He was fairly tricked, so he tried to run to cover again. "What--who is this Bland you're talking about?"

"Come, come, Mr. Defoe," said the Voice. "Think over your dream a moment. Surely you remember the man in the prisoner's dock--the man who took his sentence with head up, facing the judge like a Spartan! Surely you remember Richard Bland. But did you happen to see him again after that day?"

"No," Defoe said. "Why should I have seen him after my connection with his case ended?"

"But didn't you even write him a note expressing your regret at having had to perform the duty of--"

"Certainly not!" interrupted Defoe "Who ever heard of a foreman of a jury doing such a thing? Besides, he deserved his punishment"

The Voice was silent a moment or two before it replied:

"We'll discuss the merits of the case later ... And you didn't even go to see him hanged?"

"What manner of man do you think I am?" exclaimed Defoe. "Of course I didn't! I wasn't even in Chicago when he was hanged"

"No?" said the Voice. "Where were you?"

"A few week after the trial I had to go to Europe on a long business trip. I was gone a year or so. When I returned to this country I made my home here in New York City."

"So you never even read in the newspapers about Bland--" the Voice persisted. "I don't suppose the European papers would bother with American news like that, though."

"No. I never read anything about the case after I left this country," said Defoe.

"That's odd. I'd have thought you would have followed the case through to the end," the Voice said, half-musingly. "But still, if you had, perhaps you would not be here tonight."

"Why not? What difference would it have made?"

"I don't know. That's merely my surmise," said the Voice.

A faint footstep padded through the hall outside the living-room.

"Is that you, Manuel?" Defoe asked, wondering what would happen when his Cuban valet encountered the intruder behind the chair.

The footstep halted.

"*Si, señor,*" answered the man-servant, at a respectful distance from his master's chair. "I come to see why you sit up so late, señor."

Defoe laughed mirthlessly. "Well, truth to tell, Manuel, I am detained on business," and he wondered again how Manuel had escaped noticing the other presence in the room.

"You mean you fell asleep, *señor?*" asked the valet.

"I did, but some friendly caller has kept me pretty well awake the last ten minutes."

"But he has gone? And you come to bed now?" inquired the Cuban.

Defoe, after a pause, said. "Yes; I might as well go to bed, I guess."

The Voice behind the chair broke in:

"Tell your valet you will smoke another cigar before you retire."

Defoe settled down again in the chair.

"You heard, Manuel?" he asked "You see, my visitor says he wishes me to smoke another cigar."

"But I see no visitor, *senor*," said the Cuban.

"You heard what he said, though," Defoe insisted.

"No, *senor*. I only hear you say he wish you to smoke another cigar," explained the valet.

"Well, you ought to have your ears examined. Manuel. Get my box from the table and hand it to my visitor."

Manuel fumbled in the darkness until he found the box, then handed it to Defoe. The latter waved it toward the Voice behind him.

"My guest first, Manuel." he corrected.

The Cuban stood motionless. "I see no one else." he insisted. The Voice interrupted: "Tell him I don't care to smoke, Mr. Defoe."

"I can see no one, *senor*," the Cuban repeated.

"But didn't you just hear him?" Defoe cried, leaning forward nervously.

"No, *senor*, I hear no one speak but you."

Defoe stared up at his valet, then half rose from his chair.

"Sit down, Defoe!" commanded the Voice sharply.

Defoe sank back once more. "There!" he exclaimed to his valet. "Now tell me you didn't hear any one order me to sit down just then!"

The Cuban shook his head. "No, *senor*, I hear no one talk but you since I come in."

His master swore helplessly. "Are you trying to make a fool of me, Manuel? Do you dare stand there and tell me no one spoke to me?"

"I don't know, *senor*. I only know I hear no one speak--" Again the Voice intruded: "It may be that Manuel thinks you are trying to make a fool of

him," it suggested.

"Do you?" Defoe asked the Cuban.

"Do I what, *senor*?" the valet asked, placidly.

"Do you think I'm trying to make a fool of you?"

"I do not say so, do I, *senor*?" the servant replied, deprecatingly.

"No, but you heard--or *did* you hear?--this visitor *say* it!"

The Cuban, almost tearfully, denied it, becoming verbose in his protestation.

Defoe flapped his arms on the wings of his easy chair and bade his valet hush.

"Get out of here, you brown-skinned dumbbell! One of us has gone crazy tonight!"

The Cuban moved off, keeping a suspicious eye upon his master. His retreating footstep presently was heard dying away in the hall outside.

"Well, what do you think of that damned little Cuban?" Defoe asked the Voice. "I wonder what made him lie so brazenly?"

There was no response. Defoe repeated his second question.

Still silence answered him.

"Have you gone, my friend?" Defoe asked, turning part way in his chair to test the other's watchfulness. This time no automatic punched his head and no command wilted him into the depths of his chair again.

Still doubtful of his good luck, Defoe called out once more:

"I say, stranger, have you gone?" The only sound that greeted his ears was the faint creaking of a window in the adjoining dining-room. Defoe rose

and darted to the connecting door, snapping on the electric light at the entrance to the dining-room.

The room was vacant of any soul but himself.

All he could see was the slight movement of the lace curtain at the dining-room window--and when he examined the window he found it latched.

### III

THE NEXT day Defoe went to his doctor. He wished to take stock of himself; perhaps he had been applying himself too closely to his business.

"You are badly run down, Allen," the physician said, almost before he had sat down with his patient. "You look mentally distressed."

"I am," admitted Defoe. "Working too hard, I guess."

The doctor eyed him keenly.

"Anything else troubling you?" he asked.

Defoe insisted there really was nothing at all beside his work that was affecting him. So the doctor gave the usual diagnosis: Too much nerve tension, not enough sleep, not the proper kinds of food. He ended by advising more rest and quiet.

"And avoid excitement, too," he warned. "That old heart-palpitation might crop up again, you know."

It was all very well for the doctor to advise more rest and more sleep, but how was a man to sleep beneath a Damocles sword of mystery, of weird Forebodings?

It was three weeks before Defoe felt that he was succeeding in obeying the doctor's instructions, partly, at least Then--.

It happened late one night. Defoe lay in bed, his back to the lighted electric lamp on the table: he had fallen asleep, reading. Suddenly he stirred at a touch on his shoulder.

"That you, Manuel?" he asked, drowsily. "All right, put out the li--"

"No, it is not Manuel--and don't bother to turn around. Defoe!" this last sharply, as Defoe made a movement to arise in bed.

"You again!" Defoe exclaimed. "What--how did you get in?"

"That's my problem, not yours," said the Voice. "'I merely dropped in again to inquire if you had thought any more of doing what I suggested."

Defoe checked an insane desire to leap out of bed and make a break for the door-- anything, to escape this tormentor at his back! But he remembered the automatic....

He got himself under a semblance of control before he answered:

"Your suggestions were ridiculous. Why should I have anything to confess about the Bland trial, or why should I commit suicide over it?" He even essayed a laugh meant to be derisive.

But the intruder chose to ignore Defoe's evasions. His next remark was as startling as it was illuminating:

"Did you know," said the Voice, "that of the other eleven jurors who convicted Bland, only seven are living----still?"

"No; I haven't kept track of the other eleven men," replied Defoe, annoyed subconsciously by the detachment that the Voice gave to the word "still."

"Well, I have," said the Voice. "Two of the surviving seven are in insane asylums; two of the four dead committed sui--"

Defoe could brook it no longer. He wrenched around in bed to grapple with his antagonist, forgetful, in his madness of the automatic. But before he could free himself from the bedclothes the lamp was snapped out, and Defoe was left ignominiously tumbled in the darkness on the floor.

A chuckle from the vicinity of the bedroom door told him of his guest's departure.....

When morning came, after the nerve-racking night, Defoe found it hard to realize that his two experiences with the Voice really had taken place. None the less, he knew they were preying on his vitality, on his brain-functions.

Repeatedly the thought came to him that it was all a dream like his recollection of the murder trial out of which he had awakened the night of the Voice's first visit. But always against the theory of the dream he placed his remembrance of the feel of the automatic revolver and, too, the fact that he had talked with Manuel and with the Voice at the same time argued against the dream explanation.

Left, then, was conscience--that is, if the visits of the Voice were simply hallucinations of a distracted mind. But why should conscience wait for twelve years to haunt and harass him?

The more he pondered it all, the greater became the dread of another visit from the Voice. The greater grew his fear, too, of losing his reason, as he sought to analyze the situation from every conceivable standpoint. With every new bit of theorizing, Defoe felt himself giving way more and more to melancholia such as he knew is frequently but the prelude to insanity. Was it possible, he wondered, for a man's conscience to drive him to imbecility?

Defoe finally accepted the inevitable.

"Manuel," he ordered, the second morning after the bedroom encounter with the Voice, "pack my thing;. We're going away."

"Away, *senor*? Where?"

Defoe's brain groped vainly for an instant, then seized upon the only chance.

"The sea--a sea voyage. My nerves...."

Manuel busied himself among Defoe's clothes. "Do you need many things, *senor*? Do you go far away-- Europe, perhaps?"

"No, no. Just down the coast--Old Point Comfort, I guess. Yes, that's it. A week or so of rest. Just my steamer trunk and a suitcase will do."

The day of the trip down the coast was as perfect as he could have wanted for his own satisfaction. All during the forenoon the Old Dominion steamer skirted the Jersey shore line, and Defoe sat out on deck basking in the sun and already feeling better for the salt-laden air that he breathed in deeply. In the afternoon he napped most of the time and when nightfall chilled the deck promenaders he descended with the rest to the dining-saloon.

It was while sitting in the smoking-saloon, after dinner, that Defoe first had the impression that he was being watched. A poker game was going on, lackadaisically, in one corner of the saloon; scattered in chairs and cushioned seats along the windows were perhaps a dozen or fifteen men. But, for the life of him, Defoe could not pick out any one in the room who might be watching him, now he gave his fleeting impression indulgence long enough to look about him.

Finishing a cigar. Defoe decided on a deck stroll before retiring. It was too cold and damp, with a fog beginning to gather, to permit of sitting on deck, so he paced to and fro briskly up near the fore deck beneath the pilot's tower. The nervousness of the few moments in the smoking-saloon, when he imagined himself being watched, transmuted itself into a shiver as the foggy dampness penetrated to his marrow. He lit a fresh cigar and puffed at it jerkily as if to generate bodily warmth. Presently the shiver developed into a veritable shudder such as precedes chills or certain forms of ague.

Defoe, thoroughly miserable and alarmed now at the fear of sickness on board ship, chafed his cheeks with his hands and on his way to the entrance to the stateroom, he flailed his arms about himself to stem the onrush of the

chill. Once inside the passageway of the staterooms, however, he felt warmer, and by the time he reached his state-room door the chill had subsided almost completely.

He was still uncomfortably cold, though, as he opened the door. With one hand he unbuttoned his overcoat and with the other he reached gropingly for the electric light button on the wall. He fumbled around for it a few seconds, then swore softly in vexation because he had not noticed by daylight just where it was located.

Groping with both hands, now, he stumbled around the none-too-commodious room, feeling for the push button on the wall. He paused once and took inventory of his pockets and cursed his luck for lack of another match.

Then he went to hunting in the dark again--until his hand came full against a living body....

#### IV.

THE BODY stirred, eluding Defoe's contact.

Defoe fell to quaking once more, but it was not the trembling of the chill this time. He opened his mouth to challenge the intruder, and all he could do was swallow and gag at the words that stuck in his throat.

A pressure against the pit of his stomach--a firm shove of a hand upon his shoulder--and Defoe found himself stepping backward until it seemed he must have walked the length of the ship. But of course he hadn't--he hadn't even left the stateroom--and suddenly he was tumbled on to the edge of the berth, the pressure against his abdomen increasing.

A vague nausea gripped him. He clutched at his abdomen and his fingers wrapped themselves around the barrel of an automatic pistol. The pressure against his body became unbearable, piercing.... Defoe crumpled back into the berth and the convulsive effort restored his speech.

"What the hell are you doing?" he exploded. "Get out of here! What are you trying to do--stab me with a pistol?"

The incongruity of his question aroused a titter of amusement from the invisible presence.

"No, I only wished to make sure you weren't trying to get away."

That Voice again!--*here!* Defoe cringed in a sort of abject fear.

"What are you--*who are you?*" Defoe struggled to keep his voice steady, struggled, indeed, to keep his reason from flying out of balance and shattering into a thousand pieces of driveling idiocy.

"Call me anything you care to," replied the Voice in the dark.

"I don't believe you are--anything at all! I think you are all a dream, a nightmare, a damnable hallucination that I can't get rid of! To hell with you! I'm going to go down to the smoking-room and--smoke you out of my mind! I'm going to stay in the light from now on, day and night, until I get over this morbid dreaming!"

Defoe really thought he meant it all, until the pressure against his stomach made him doubt his courage and defiance.

Perhaps it was the nausea--maybe seasickness; he never had thought of that!--that was griping at his vitals like the insistent pressure of a steel-barreled weapon.

"Sit down. Mr. Defoe!" commanded the Voice. "I've got something to say to you."

"To hell with you!" Defoe repeated, almost hysterically now. His hands clutched at the pressure again--and once more the pistol barrel sent him

squirring back into the recesses of the berth.

"I want to talk to you some more about the Bland case," went on the Voice, unperturbed by the other's outburst, "when are you going to confess?"

"Confess?" Defoe parried. "Confess what?"

"Confess that you knew Bland was innocent when you convicted him," said the Voice.

"But I didn't." It was like wrestling with one's conscience. Defoe thought, this interminable denying of Bland's innocence. He was wearying of it all; his mind was revoking at the repeated "third degree" of this mysterious Voice. Soon, he feared, his brain would refuse to function.

"But you've afraid you did," the Voice insisted.

"When? It's a lie!" exclaimed Defoe.

The Voice chuckled, sending a shudder through the man crouching in the corner of the berth.

"You probably don't know, Mr. Defoe, that for a number of years you have had the treacherous habit of talking in your sleep--talking volubly, excitedly, sometimes almost reconstructing entire incidents in your talk for the benefit of anyone who might happen to be listening."

"Well?" asked Defoe.

"Simply this: Manuel has overheard enough to--"

"Manuel?" broke in Defoe. "What's he got to do with it!"

"I forgot to tell you," the Voice apologized. "The Cuban is my confederate--former member of the Secret Police of Havana, you know. I saved his life during the Spanish war and--well, he's paying back an old debt as he calls it. He let me in and out of your house, and tipped me off about this trip. You see, Manuel had overheard you say, in your sleep, that you convicted an innocent man of murder. So I knew your conscience--"

"Are you trying to be my conscience? Are you trying to plague me into confessing? Are you--"

"No," answered the Voice, "unless you choose to call me your conscience. I'm willing. You seem to be in need of one. Do you know, Mr. Defoe," and the Voice took on a more affable tone, "you have been fearfully distracted the lost few weeks or months. You need a rest--a *long rest!*"

Defoe was silent, hunched in the retreat of the berth. He had no fight left in him. Presently he fell to whimpering quietly, as a child does when it is punished beyond endurance and is too frightened to cry. The Voice, it seemed, missed the old combativeness, gone so quickly after Defoe's late outburst, so it prodded the hunted man with its chief weapon--not its pistol, but its chuckle. This time it chuckled devilishly, aggravatingly, and it rasped against the tender sensibilities of the sniveling Defoe like salt in an open wound.

Then something broke what little bonds of restraint remained in Defoe. He sprang, catlike, to the outer edge of the berth and lunged for the arm that held the pistol. In the darkness his head struck the cross-support of the berth above and he slumped forward, half dazed by the blow.

Again the chuckle sounded in his ears, now ringing with the stunning impact; and again Defoe lurched forward, only to fall dizzily to the floor. He clambered clumsily to his feet, gripping the berth for a momentary prop.

Soon his head began to clear. He was assembling out of the maze of ache and buzzing in his ears and brain some sort of coherent idea of where he was and what had been happening.

"Now I know what it all means!" he burst forth presently. "You--you sneaking, cackling little conscience, get out of here! I'm going to cheat you if I have to become a drunkard or a dope fiend the rest of my life! I'm not going to let a conscience, or a voice or a chuckle, drive me to insanity--or to confessing--or to suicide!"

Defoe was steady enough now, supporting himself against the upper berth. His voice grew more strident.

"No. I'm not going to let my conscience get the best of me! You thought you could keep after me endlessly, but I'll get rid of you. I'm never going to be bothered with you or your voice again! Never! Now get out of here! Get out of here. I say!"

The chuckle--a croaking, sepulchral chuckle it was now--answered him out of the darkness.

"You might tell me, before I go, if you know who really did kill the man Bland was convicted of murdering," said the Voice. "I'm curious enough to wish to know his name." And the voice chuckled once more.

"Damn that cackle! I'll tell you, if you choke off that infernal cackling! I'll tell you--*yes!* I can tell you, because *I did it!* I committed that murder, you understand? *I did it!* Now cackle all you want to! And I convicted Bland of it! Cackle, you damned little shriveled conscience! *Ho, ho, ho-ho~ho!* I think it's my turn--to--cackle--now!"

The words of the hysterical man rose to a maudlin scream that reverberated piercingly in the little stateroom.

"Now get out of here for good!" the raving Defoe shouted, recovering coherence of speech after a time. "Get out--before--I--"

A blinding glare of light came as Defoe reached for the door. The intruder had found the push button.

Defoe stared--then toppled to the floor.

"Bland! *Bland!* You! *it's you....*"

And before the stranger that was Bland passed from the room he felt again of the heart of the craven hulk at his feet. The doctor had been right: The tumult in the breast of the twelfth juror had been too much.

If only Defoe had known that the Governor had pardoned Bland, his secret might have been safe forever.

## **The Tide on the Moaning Bar by Fannie Hodgson Burnett.**

I HAD never liked him. Much as I loved my lady, and long as I labored in her service, I cannot say that I ever knew the day when I had any affection for Mr. Jack, even the slightest. There was a hard look in his black eyes from the first, and the moment I saw him, as he lay, a day old baby, bundled up in lawn and laces, it seemed as if I saw into his future, and trembled. And as he grew older, the evil spirit grew with him.

He was cruel and selfish as a child, though his handsome face covered his faults, as handsome faces are apt to do; and even my lady, who was so gentle and kindly, could see no harm in him, and thought his wilful ways were only high spirit.

And perhaps she was the more blind to it, because his black eyes were so like his dead father's; and she had always clung to her husband's memory so tenderly. But Mr. Jack was not like his father, though my lady fancied he was. Mr. Lowther had never made an enemy in his life; and I am sure Mr. Jack never made a true friend.

People flattered and feared him, and pretended to admire his beauty and high handed ways, but no one ever liked him well enough to speak a good word for him behind his back. But, for my lady's sake, people bore with him, and for my lady's sake I bore with him among the rest; and when she lay upon her deathbed, it was me she gave the charge of caring for him, as I had cared for her.

"Don't leave Mr. Jack, Mallon," she said to me, when she could not say anything else. "Don't leave my boy. Take care of him, for my sake. I know he will always take care of you, Mallon. His father would have done it, if he had lived; and I know Jack will."

But though I promised, I knew better than to expect anything like gratitude from Mr. Jack. I had watched him all his life, and never knew him to show a thoroughly unselfish impulse.

But for my sweet, dead lady's sake, I stayed with him as housekeeper, at the Manse, as the country house was called, and I tried my best to please him; so we had no disagreement, for he never interfered, so long as things were to his liking; and I may add, never even thought to give me the thanks his father and my lady had never spared.

However, I stayed and attended to the servants, and kept the house accounts; and when he came down from London with his friends, he never had to complain. And so matters went on, until the month after my lady's death, when he suddenly took a fancy that he wanted me to go with him to a little seaside town, where he had been staying for some whim or other; for, as he condescended to say then for the first time, he "liked my ways, and liked to have me about him."

So, remembering my promise to his dying mother, I went, without any words; though I must admit it was rather a trial, at my time of life, to make such a change all at once; and, moreover, I could scarcely see how it was that he could require me.

I found his chambers very fine and handsomely furnished; for it was just like Mr. Jack to have everything of the handsomest and best. There was a large suite of them in a big house, in the principal square, and the rest of the establishment was let to an Irish officer, whose regiment was quartered in the town barracks.

Major Clangarthe, the gentleman's name was, and his family consisting of a wife and three or four children, was with him. His rooms were not so handsome as Mr. Jack's, I discovered; and even the best of them had a queer, untidy look. Mrs. Clangarthe had been a great beauty in her day, and came of a very fine, very poor Irish family; and on the strength of this she used to lie on the sofa, or sit in an easy chair all day, joking with the major, and letting the children run wild.

They had made away with plenty of money in their time, shabby as things seemed now; and they were as carelessly happy, good tempered a set as ever I saw in my life. When they had money, it flew right and left, and when they gave their gay little wine suppers, I am sure people never enjoyed themselves more than they did; and there was never more hearty laughing than I could hear among the officers, who crowded into their drawing rooms, as if they would rather be there than attend the finest entertainment in the West End. But they were queer people for all that.

The first I saw of them was two or three days after my arrival, when, as I was sitting at my work, there came a rap at my door, and in answer to my "come in," it opened and showed me a young lady standing there laughing.

"Do you mean 'come in' really?" she said, good naturedly. "If you don't, I can run away again."

She was a very pretty young lady, indeed, and very young; not more than seventeen; but to my mind she looked queer enough. She had big, round, lovely gray eyes, and crinkling, silky black hair, hanging to a bit of a waist; but the crinkling black hair looked as if it actually needed brushing; and it was tied back with a purple velvet ribbon, which was anything but clean.

I had never seen a lovelier, more supple little figure; it was so lithe and soft and round; but her crimson cashmere morning robe was soiled and frayed; and the seam on one of her shoulders had come unstitched and showed the white skin through plainly.

Even her feet--such pretty feet--were not tidy. One of her slippers had burst out, and the other had lost its rosette. But she did not seem to care about her appearance, and drew up the chair I offered her close to mine, and began to talk with a careless freedom that made me almost catch my breath.

"I am Lina," she said, as unceremoniously as if she had known me for years. "Lina Clangarthe, from the rooms up stairs; and I thought I would come to see you. Mamma said I might, because we know Mr. Lowther so well. You have been housekeeper in his family ever since he was born, he says."

I told her that I had, and answered all her questions as well as I could, though she asked a great many. The fact was, she asked questions all the time, and seemed so sweet tempered about it that I could not help liking the poor, neglected child.

And she was as ready to answer questions as she was to ask them, and to my bewilderment, told me all about the family affairs, speaking just as gaily about their family troubles as if the whole affair was a joke.

"And so it is a joke," she said, "and fine fun we have of it sometimes. If it wasn't for Lady Medora and her lectures, and the tracts she sticks in the boxes of old finery she sends us, we shouldn't mind it a bit."

Lady Medora was her father's sister, I found out, and a very rigid person. She sent them boxes of her cast off finery two or three times a year, and when they came, they were sure to herald a new lecture on family frivolity, and a new supply of tracts.

"I wore one in the toe of a slipper for a week," Lina said. "Her ladyship had stuffed it in, and I should never have seen it, but that Fergus' terrier was playing with the rosette and tore the kid and pulled it out."

I really thought I must be dreaming, it seemed so strange that the pretty, incomprehensible creature should be revealing the family secrets so frankly; but she rattled on as gaily as if there was nothing at all remarkable in her queer confidences.

"I am so glad you have come," she said. "I like old ladies, and you look so nice and good natured. I shall come in and see you often, if you don't mind. You won't mind, will you? Besides, I am glad for something else. As long as you are here, it won't be the least bit improper to talk to Mr. Jack when I come in to borrow things. I often come in to borrow things, and I can't help talking when he begins, though I suppose it is a tiny mite improper. And mamma says I must be discreet; but the fact is, my darling Mrs. Mallon, we are not a discreet family. I often think there must be the least taste of vagabond blood in our veins, if we are Clangarthes."

I was so sorry for her, so fearful of the danger her beauty and ignorance and high spirits might throw her into, that, even while she laughed, I felt heavy hearted.

What sort of a woman could she be, this mother, who let the pretty creature run in and out of a gentleman's private rooms to borrow things and listen to whatever flattering nonsense he chose to talk to her? In the liking I had taken to her I couldn't help speaking a word or two, which I thought might serve as a motherly hint.

"I am glad I have come, too, my dear," I said to her. "And I hope you won't take it hardly if I say I am glad for your sake. I hope you will come and see me often; and if you want to borrow anything, just run in here, right to me, because you are quite right in thinking it is not quite proper to apply to Mr. Jack. You are too young and pretty for such things to be quite discreet, my love."

From the bottom of my old woman's heart I felt that she was too good and innocent to be trifled with, and I knew Mr. Jack too well to hope that he meant to act honorably by her. But I did not think of the worst then. God knows, I never believed his heart could be as black as it proved itself.

I thought it quite likely that he might talk nonsense, and flatter her with hopes he never meant to realize; but I never went so far as to think he could mean to bring misery and despair on this pretty, ignorant young thing, whose heart was so fresh and childish.

She sat and talked to me for more than an hour, and the more she talked, the more I liked her light hearted, affectionate ways, and the more I wished she had a better mother to guide her. It seemed a trifle curious, too, that I, with all my staid, old womanish notions, should have taken such a fancy; but somehow my heart warmed toward her, and she seemed to see it.

I knew that at first the innocent rattlebrain had only come to coax her way into my heart for Mr. Jack's sake, but I could see plainly enough in the end that she was quite honest in her liking for me, and would take any motherly counsel I gave her.

I could not help thinking about her when she was gone, and wishing that she was not so ready to admire Mr. Jack's fine ways and handsome face. He was handsome enough, it cannot be denied, and he was the very style of beauty to take a girl's fancy. He was slight and lithe limbed, and dark as a Spaniard.

Indeed, there had been, two or three centuries ago, a touch of Spanish blood in the Lowther family, and now and then it broke out again in a pair of dense black eyes, a slow, sweet smile, and a graceful languor of motion.

My lady's husband had possessed the dark eyes, but the rest had come to Mr. Jack, and it was easy enough to see how a girl like Lina Clangarthe would passionately admire his beauty and careless haughtiness.

That night, for the first time since my arrival, Mr. Jack paid me a visit, and the moment I saw him I knew why he had come. And, after he had talked, about other things for a while, he spoke out, carelessly enough.

"You had a visitor this morning, Gorish tells me," he said.

The words were quiet sounding, to be sure, but I did not trust them, for bold and devil may care as he was by nature, he did not look me in the face when he spoke. He looked down at the half smoked cigar in his hand, so that his black lashes cast a curious shadow over his dark, half closed eyes.

"Yes, I had a visitor," I answered, as brief as possible.

He smiled languidly, as he smoothed a loose leaf round the cigar with his strong white fingers.

"A pretty one, too," he said. "However scandalized you may be with your recollection of lovely, untidy hair, and lovely, untidy figure, you will agree with me there, I am sure."

"Yes, sir," I replied gravely again. "A pretty one and a bright one. A bright, affectionate, loving one, with a fresh, true heart, I think."

He smiled again lightly, touching the ash of his cigar.

"Ah!" he said, in a low, half indifferent sort of tone; and then he put the cigar in his mouth again and went on smoking, as if he had forgotten all about what we had been saying. It was a way of his to pass things by and become indifferent to them in a moment. It had been so with his toys and pets as a child; and it was so even with his friends and his extravagant fancies.

He said nothing more to me about Miss Lina, and I was glad to find he didn't. It gave me some hope that he had not taken any great fancy to her, as I had at first imagined he had. His fancies were not pleasant things to cope with; and I knew such a fancy as this could come to no good.

But before I had been in the house many days, I found that the major and he were great friends, and that Mrs. Clangarthe admired him as much as her daughter did. She had a great weakness for beauty, and Mr. Jack's dark eyes won her from the first.

He spent hours in their apartments, passing in and out in the queer, informal way everybody who had dealings with them seemed to adopt; and it was plain that he was always welcome, for the major made a great deal out of him, and Mrs. Clangarthe would laugh and talk to him in the good natured, light headed fashion which seemed natural to her.

The major was pretty deeply in his debt, Mr. Jack's valet, Gorish, told me, and was continually borrowing fresh supplies; but for the matter of that, Gorish added, he was in debt over head and ears, and borrowed right and left wherever there was a chance.

As I have said before, there were plenty of visitors constantly coming to the house, most of them military men like the major, and all of them appeared to be of one opinion regarding Miss Lina. They all admired her, and all made love to her, and I must say that I believe some of the younger ones were really in earnest.

And no wonder. When she was dressed, as she was always of an evening, with her lovely figure, lovely face, lovely hair, and reckless high spirits, I am sure there was not a more beautiful creature in London. In spite of their untidy ways, the Clangarthes had a wonderful taste in dress; and what with

Lady Medora's presents, and going into debt, they kept up in a way that was astonishing.

But with all the attention she received, and all the fine speeches that were poured into her pretty, ready ears, it was easy to see that Miss Lina cared for none of them but Mr. Jack. She gave way to him in an innocent, open, girlish way, and she tried to amuse him.

She was just the generous young creature to be a tender, willing slave through bitter and sweet. If she loved her husband, he might be her tyrant, if he had the will; and the more I saw, the less I fancied Mr. Jack's winning her warm, loving heart to play the tyrant over.

I saw a great deal of the family, and had the chance to watch, because in a short time I found that I might be of service in several little ways, and finally, partly through my liking for the girl, and partly at Mr. Jack's request, I fell into the habit of superintending things here and there and helping the servants when they had company.

And so the friendship between Miss Lina and myself was strengthened. She began to make a confidante of me in more ways than one. She told me about her admirers, and laughed at them in a hearty, enjoyable way which had not a bit of deceit about it.

She showed me her dresses and came to me for help when they wanted mending or altering, and when I did anything for her she would kneel on the carpet at my side, with her big gray eyes all alight with wonder and gratitude.

I never helped her in the least without getting an affectionate burst of thanks and an impulsive caress. It was her nature to overflow with gratitude and pleasure about small things and I was the last person in the world to try to restrain her.

They were having one of their free and easy little suppers one night and I had noted among the guests a gentleman I had not seen before.

He was not an officer, but a civilian, and though he was well looking enough, there was a stiffness about his manner and a haughty, pretentiousness in his blond face that rendered him by no means as prepossessing as the genial, finely made, epauletted men, who were so fond of thronging the rooms. "Sir Denis," I heard them call him, and I noticed that he seemed very much pleased with Miss Lina, and showed it pretty plainly in a certain stiffly polite fashion.

It appeared, too, that he was a favorite of Mrs. Clangarthe, for she took a great deal of trouble to draw him out, and evidently wished that Lina would be attentive. But I understood Miss Lina very well by this time and saw that she was rather uneasy. She was trying very hard to be obediently entertaining, but she was not getting along very well, and was not enjoying herself as she usually did. I had promised Mr. Jack to undertake the management of things that night, and in passing to and fro before the opened doors. I saw that as she danced with Sir Denis and talked to him, there was a restless look in her eyes and a queer, little eager color on her cheeks.

She looked uncomfortable, and I guessed the reason why. Sir Denis had taken Mr. Jack's place so completely that the two had hardly spoken a word to each other, and the poor child was troubling herself about it and fancying that he was troubled, too. But he was bearing it very well, I thought. He was making himself agreeable to a tall young lady with a fine figure and an amber satin dress, and seemed to be enjoying himself pretty well, to judge from his face and the young lady's rather loud laughs.

He did not take much notice of Miss Lina, and after a while, I think, she began to notice it, for the color in her cheeks died out and the uneasy look in her eyes deepened. For my part I felt almost angry. I knew what his indifference meant.

He knew his power over her, and meant to exercise it. He took the tall young lady in amber satin down to supper, and he hung over her and talked nonsense in a half joking way that was torture to the poor child who sat opposite by the side of her ceremonious admirer, the uneasy color coming and going as she listened to the bursts of laughter from their side of the table.

But at last Mr. Jack got tired of the talkative young woman in amber, and handing her over to somebody else, made his way across the room as if he was going to leave it.

I was in a room on the other side of the hall and could see everything, and the hidden misery in Miss Lina's eyes told me that if she could not break from Sir Denis in one way she would in another.

And so she did, for in a minute more she was out in the hall and half way down the stair case after Mr. Jack, and was speaking to him all in a wild flutter, half frightened, half daring.

"Mr. Lowther!" she said. "Jack! Don't go."

I shall never forget how she looked just as she stood there at that minute, the troubled red on her cheeks, the eager girl's desperateness in her big eyes.

It is such girls as Lina Clangarthe who bear misery and shame because their hearts are tender and the chances are against them; it is such girls who need the world's pity and God's help when the worst comes to the worst. A woman less ignorant of the world's ways would have known better than to let Mr. Jack see she could not bear a shadow of neglect.

"Jack! Don't go!"

A little shiver ran over me as I heard her say it. I did not know before that they had gone so far as that, and my heart quickened forebodingly as he stopped and turned to look up at her. Cruel as it may seem, I was almost ready to pray that he might not hear her and would go on without answering.

She was so pretty--so pretty! The dazzling light seemed all to shine upon her full, soft, white shoulders and arms; even the shining white billows of her silk train could not make her look; anything but a child. The light was so bright that the roses that drooped in her bosom and clung to her loose, soft hair, were as red as blood.

She was pretty enough to bring him back whether he cared for her or not, and he came, smiling, as if nothing had happened, and stood a few steps below her as she slipped into a sitting posture on the stairs, looking down at him with her soul in her eyes and her heart's blood in her cheeks, all in a flutter of joy at his coming and wonder at her own daring.

"Ah, Jack," she said, "you are not vexed, are you? Not vexed with me?"

They were so near me that I could hear every word they said and see every change in either face, and I saw the slow gleam of triumph grow into Mr. Jack's black eyes; the evil, handsome eyes he had inherited from that Spanish ancestor. It was only a small triumph, but it was one, and the least of triumphs pleased him. So he stood looking up at her and smiling a little, as he leaned on the balustrade.

"You seemed to be fully occupied," he said. "I thought perhaps Sir Denis could fill my place, but, of course, I am not vexed. A man's not apt to be when he sees himself thrown over for another--is he?"

All the color fell away from her face and she broke out upon him almost piteously.

"Oh, Jack! oh, Jack, don't! You know--you do know it wasn't my fault. I have been miserable all night. And, besides," turning on him with a swift little touch of pathetic reproach, "weren't you talking to Norah Delamore?"

Perhaps her prettiness and the eager appeal in her lovely eyes touched him. At all events, after an odd little pause, he spoke to her in another tone.

"Where is your cloak?" he said. "Go and put it on, Lina, and come here to me again. I want you."

She sprang up in a minute as bright as could be and went without a word, and in less time than it takes me to write it she was back again with a bright rose pink opera cloak on, her eyes shining from under its hood like diamonds.

"Is it the garden? " she said to him, slipping her hand into his arm and laughing a happy little laugh. "Is it into the garden, Jack ?"

"It is where we shall be out of the way," he answered, softening his cruel voice. "Out of the way and together and happy." And he slipped his treacherous arm about her little waist, and drawing her to his side, bent over and kissed her full on her blooming lips.

I knew there was little room for hope after that. Having gone so far, he would go farther, if the fancy held him, and as soon as he was tired he would fling her away without a pang of remorse. I could not help feeling a thought bitter against the heedless woman in the bright room near them.

I could hear her laughing and I could hear the Major laughing, too, and I could not resist an impulse of impatience at their blindness.

I never had children of my own, but I felt sure that no daughter of mine, if I had ever had one, would have been left thus helplessly to herself as Lina Clangarthe was.

And this was only one occasion out of a thousand such. Every day I saw more of an imprudence, which, to my mind, seemed actually terrible. The people who visited the house were as careless and easy going as the Clangarthes themselves, and Lina was wonderfully popular among both men and women.

She was pretty enough to have drawn the world after her, and her queer, bright, high spirits and reckless inclination for fun were the very things to please people who thought of nothing but how to enjoy life and amuse themselves.

"We take life easy," said Lina to me one day. "Where's the use of taking it hard and fretting like Lady Medora. It only makes people ill natured. We can't help being poor and in debt, but we can help fretting about it, can't we. Mrs. Mallon?"

There never was a lighter hearted creature on earth than she was then. It appeared as though she was overrunning with fun and life. There was never

a dull look on her bright face or a hard word on her lip.

She had a laugh and a jest for every one, and there was not a servant in the house among all the ill paid lot who was not ready to do anything for Miss Lina. It is my opinion that but for her there would scarcely have been a servant on the place. When there was money in the house she always remembered them, and when there was none she coaxed them into a good humor.

Her maid got her dresses before they were half worn and the cook borrowed her jewelry, quite secure in her good nature, even if she was found out. Ill regulated as everything was, there was something half comical about it all. They were so good natured and easy and life seemed such an enjoyable affair.

Even the ill used tradesmen, who dunned them from morning till night, went away somewhat pacified after an interview with Lina or the Major, though there is no doubt they afterward wondered at their own indiscretion in allowing themselves to be so soothed.

It is my impression that Lady Medora herself had a sense of her own unfitness to cope with them, for though she sent box after box of old finery and tracts enough to have converted a whole Fiji island, she never visited them.

"And all the better," said Lina, tossing over the contents of one of said boxes on its arrival. "It would only make her uncomfortable, poor soul. She wouldn't understand us, you know, and we shouldn't understand her. It's all the better, and we are very grateful to her, I am sure. It's a blessed thing for us, though, that there's one saint in the family to pray us all out of Purgatory. Lady Medora is a very good woman, Mrs. Mallon. Dear me! I wonder where she wore this rose colored satin dress. I am going to shake the tracts out of the trimmings and try it on."

I often thought that with a good mother she would have been far better than most girls. My pretty Miss Lina, she was better as it was, in spite of her wild ways. I never heard an ill natured word from her lips, queer as some of her speeches were, and she was generous and affectionate beyond measure.

The tribe of neglected children who tumbled about the rooms were fonder of her than they were of any living thing, and she would give up her own pleasure any day to romp with them when they asked her, which they were by no means chary of doing.

And through watching her and noticing little things, I saw that her feeling for Mr. Jack was love of the intensest kind, and I saw, too, that it grew stronger every day, and that he led her on. And just as far as he chose to lead, she followed and was ignorantly happy. He spent his evenings with her and the Major and Mrs. Clangarthe looked on in their usual amiable, irresponsible way. He rode out with her and the Major admired Lina's fine figure complacently as the two cantered away, while Mrs. Clangarthe nodded them a farewell from the drawing room window.

"Lina is like Lady Anastasia Derry, my dear. Don't you think so?" Mrs. Clangarthe was fond of saying. "You remember Lady Anastasia Derry, Major, and she was Col. Enniskillen's daughter and her mother was a Wexford?"

The memory of her aristocratic antecedents was a great source of pleasure to Mrs. Clangarthe and she clung to it with whimsical pertinacity.

She was anxious that Lina should make a good marriage, though I often thought she went about managing the matter in a queer way. She forgot that gentlemen of position and title don't always choose their wives for a pretty face. They are a trifle more particular in these days than they were or else the old romantic stories have very little foundation.

But it was Mrs. Clangarthe's plans that cast the first shadow over Miss Lina's life. I do not think the girl had ever known a shadow before, but a cloud came at last and its darkness was too heavy for her.

It had first showed itself the night when the tall, stiff, young man they called Sir Denis followed her about and roused Mr. Jack to making love to the young woman in amber satin, and in the course of time this same shadow became the cloud.

The stiff young gentleman came to the house pretty often after the supper party and when he came he always fastened himself to Miss Lina and kept Mr. Jack in the shade. She bore it at first good humoredly, as she always bore disagreeable things, but after a while it began to trouble her.

Whether he cared for her or not, Mr. Jack did not care to have a rival, and when Sir Denis made himself unpleasant Lina always suffered for it. Mr. Jack did not quarrel with her, he was too wary for that; he simply let her alone and played indifference until the poor, warm hearted, impulsive girl was wretched and reckless enough for anything.

She was afraid of vexing him and afraid of vexing her mother, so between the two she grew desperate. She began to fret in secret and lost her reckless high spirits and was only gay by fits and starts.

Mr. Jack made it worse than it was. He knew how to manage her, and by a word dropped here and there, put it into her mind that her mother's foolish, blind persistence was unnatural cruelty and that she would be forced to make a sacrifice which would render her wretched for life. The fact was, Mrs. Clangarthe's persistence was only weak ambition, and if Lina had been left alone, the matter would have come to its natural termination smoothly enough.

But just as Mr. Jack had tortured his pets in his childhood, he tortured this poor child now and the trouble was too much for her. She was not used to heart pain and at last it broke her down and made her desperate.

She came to my room almost wild one day after Sir Denis had left the house. He had been more than usually pretentiously officious and Mrs. Clangarthe had encouraged him.

"I think he will propose to you soon, Lina," she had said after he was gone. "You are so lucky. Now, if Annette and Lucia only marry as well when they grow up I shall be perfectly satisfied." And when, a few minutes later, Mr. Jack came in, she poured out to him her delight at Lina's success, considering that as the friend of the family he was the person most likely to sympathize with her.

There was a spot of flaming scarlet on Lina's cheek and a dangerous, wild look in her eyes when she came to me, and she had not been with me five minutes before she broke out, tortured with humiliation and pain and fear, telling me the whole story.

"She must be mad," she ended. "She is mad, and she is driving me mad, too. I shall do something desperate and wicked if they don't leave me alone. They cannot see that--that nothing on earth could buy me from my love."

She was sitting on a low stool at my feet and her long hair almost hid her face, but when she said that she tossed the hair back and looked up at me with an almost defiant daring in her eyes.

"It is not right to say that I suppose," she said. "It's not right to acknowledge that I have a true love. Women are not allowed to tell the truth about such things. But you are not blind, if all the rest are. You can see how the truth stands." And then she broke down all in a sudden shame at herself and sobbed like a wronged child.

A strange alteration in her manner came about after this. She was not so frank, and even over her brightest moods there was a shadow. But her trouble only made her fonder of Mr. Jack than ever, and I noticed that she was feverishly anxious to please him.

I was sorry to see, too, that she put herself into his way a great deal more than was quite prudent, but she was too miserable and too ignorant of the ways of the world to be discreet, and so I could not blame her, though I knew she was working against herself.

She met him upon the stairs half a dozen times in a day and I knew very well that the solitary walks she took were taken only in the desperate hope of seeing or speaking to him.

"I should die if I didn't see him," she broke out once to me. "Don't tell me he'll like me the less for it, Mrs. Mallon; men can't be so cruel as that."

She had always been fond of walking on the beach, and from my window I had often watched, her strolling on the waste of sands that the fishermen

called the Moaning Bar with the children and letting them pull her about as not one girl in a dozen would have done.

But she never took the children with her now. She walked out alone, though my old eyes were quite sharp enough to see she was not often alone long.

Day after day Mr. Jack would follow her down to their trysting place on the Bar and for hours I could see them as they sat sheltered by the rocks, Miss Lina's scarlet jacket, a bright bit of color, contrasted with sea and sand and sky.

And in her room up stairs Mrs. Clangarthe made herself comfortable over the success of her plans. She was fond of Lina, as every one else was; she was proud of her beauty and wished to see her happy; and fancying a good marriage the boon most to be desired, she worked industriously in her behalf in her own easy natured, shiftless style.

Mr. Lowther was the Major's friend and had lent the Major money; accordingly, nothing could be more pleasantly desirable than that he should amuse Lina and Lina should amuse him.

"I like to see young people enjoy themselves, Mrs. Mallon," she said, sweetly, to me. "And Lina always enjoys herself when she is with Mr. Lowther. She wants brightening a little, too, now, though I am sure I don't see why she should when her prospects are so good, but she has not been in good spirits lately."

That evening Lina came in from her walk later than usual. It was so late, indeed, that the yellow fog curtained both sea and shore and the street lamps were beginning to twinkle here and there.

She did not go up stairs, but came into my room, and the moment she entered I saw that something was wrong. Her face was pale and haggard, but there was a spot on each cheek as bright as her scarlet jacket and in her hand she held a letter.

She sat down on a footstool as she always did. For a minute or so she did not speak, but all at once she began to tremble and cry and pull at the collar

of her sacque as if it was hurting her.

"Oh, Mrs. Mallon," she cried. "Oh, Mrs. Mallon, just look here! What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" And then she tossed the letter into my lap and hid her face in her hands under her loose, fog damped hair.

"Do you mean that I must read it, my dear?" I asked, feeling faint at heart, for just at that moment a horrible thought flashed across my mind--a thought I had never even approached before.

She nodded her head without speaking, and so I opened it, and it was from no less a person than Lady Medora Darrel herself.

Lady Medora had heard rumors of Sir Denis's attention to her niece, and was so far pleased as to wish to encourage them. Sir Denis was the son of a friend of hers, and, of course, unexceptionable; and she discussed the whole matter with a queer frankness, which somehow reminded me of the Clangarthes themselves.

"A marriage like this is more than I ever looked for," she wrote. "Living as you do, you could hardly expect to make such a match. I shall write to your mother at once, and in the meantime you may tell her that I will extend to her all the assistance in my power as regards your bridal trousseau when you need it. After your marriage, I shall be glad to receive you at my house, and hope that a change will be effected in your hitherto frivolous life."

A strange sound, half a choked sob, and half a bitter laugh startled me as I finished reading, and I looked up to find Lina in a white heat of scornful wrath.

"When I need it?" she said. "Good, that, isn't it, Mrs. Mallon? She forgets the old adage, 'first catch your hare.' Sir Denis isn't caught yet, and beside---" She stopped, and shut her white teeth together hard.

Then she broke out fiercely:

"Do you know what that letter will do?" she said. "It will drive me to despair. It was bad enough before, and now they will take that up, as if it

was the best luck in the world. They laugh at her, all of them, but they are afraid of her, for all that."

I comforted her to the best of my ability, and she tried to listen, but I saw it was of no use. Before she went away I was in an agony of such doubt and fear as I had never known before in my life.

And this was not all. Just as she rose from her seat, I heard the hall door open and the sound of Mr. Jack's footstep, and from the flash that leaped into her eye, I knew that as she brushed out she was only hurrying to meet him. She was so excited and hurried that she forgot to close the door after her, and as it stood open, I saw her meet him at the foot of the staircase, with the letter in her hand.

"What is it, Lina?" I heard him say, half tenderly, half impatiently, as he caught sight of her standing in the bright light.

She glanced up at him with a troubled face, and then all at once the fire died out of it and left her as pale as death.

"Jack," she whispered, almost breathlessly, "if you are going to save me, you must save me now." And she dropped her head upon the hand she had laid on the balustrade without another word.

I shall never understand how it was possible that, through the long weeks that followed, a mother could be so carelessly blind as Mrs. Clangarthe showed herself. She seemed to enjoy life as much as ever; she was as sweet tempered and ready to be amused with trifles; she played hostess at the gay little suppers, and angled for Sir Denis in seeming unconsciousness of the change in the pretty, young face, hitherto so cloudlessly bright.

It made my heart ache to watch this change as it grew. It was no longer the face that had smiled down on Mr. Jack from the stair case. There was a feverish trouble in its eyes; its very smiles were feverish. I cannot describe the dumb pain and look of inward misery that took the place of the old light heartedness.

But the girl said very little, though she grew paler every day. She bore up against her trouble, almost defiantly, trying to make herself pretty in her lover's eyes, pretending to be gay, and even trying to tolerate Sir Denis. But she could not deceive me.

My love for her had made my old eyes too quick. I think, too, that she understood this, for it was only before me that she ever gave in, and sometimes, when she was with me, she seemed to break down, though she tried hard to make light of it, and always did it with a wretched ghost of a smile on her pale lips.

"Sir Denis was too much for me, tonight," she would say sometimes. "And-and I have a headache. It makes me look pale, I dare say. Do I look pale, Mrs. Mallon?" trying to laugh. "I feel pale."

But the time came when she ceased even trying to laugh, and would come to me looking as white as death, trembling and crying.

"Don't tell," she would say. "Don't tell. I am not well, you know; and Lady Medora has been bothering again. Let me have my cry out and then I shall be better."

I cannot put into words the horror of slow fear which grew upon me. I could not bear to think of it, and fought against it bitterly, trying to think it quite natural that her girlish troubles should make her hysterical and nervous; but at last I began to see a change in Mr. Jack, and this change crushed all my hopes.

I began to see that he was getting tired of his amusement; and I knew him so well that I recognized the alteration as soon as it came about; as soon as Miss Lina herself did. He began to try to avoid her, as if by accident at first, but more openly in the course of time. In the end, day after day passed by, in which he never entered their rooms.

I wakened earlier than usual one morning, and, after dressing, went to my window to look out, as I had a habit of doing. The fog was just clearing away, and, as my eyes became accustomed to the then floating mist, I glanced accidentally toward the Moaning Bar.

Two figures were standing near the rocks together. It did not need a second glance to tell me whose they were. I knew them in an instant; one by its attitude, the other by the scarlet jacket and long, falling hair. It was Lina Clangarthe and Mr. Jack!

He was lounging carelessly against a rock when I looked and she seemed to be speaking to him passionately, wildly, desperately. She was holding out her hands and clasping and wringing them as she talked, and he was listening without a gesture, simply listening and watching her.

My heart gave one fierce bound and fairly stood still. For a moment it seemed that I scarcely breathed, and then I drew back behind the curtain, praying aloud:

"Lord, have mercy upon her! Oh, Lord, have mercy upon her!" I cried.

It was all over when I looked again. Mr. Jack had sauntered away and Lina was walking rapidly along the beach toward the street. She was walking hurriedly and seemed to steady her slight, girlish figure with some difficulty. But she was not crying, and there was not a tear in her eyes, when, a few moments later, she came into the room.

"I have been out walking with Mr. Lowther," she said, in a strange, steady voice. "And we have had a bit of a quarrel, Mrs. Mallon. Lovers always have their little quarrels, don't they?"

She had seated herself at the window when she entered, and she was sitting there as she spoke, and the minute the words were out of her mouth, she turned suddenly and looked at me.

"If you had been at the window you might have seen us," she said, watching me keenly. "I did not know before that any of these windows fronted the Moaning Bar so directly."

"I think I did see you," I answered, as calmly as possible. "But my old eyes are not as young as they used to be and I might be mistaken."

That seemed to satisfy her, and for a while she sat silent, but at last she spoke again.

"I am rather low spirited this morning," she said. "Quarrels always make me miserable. I don't think I am as strong as I used to be. I wish life wasn't so long. I was thinking this morning it would be an easy sort of a way to end it out there on the Moaning Bar when the tide comes-in."

She spoke so deliberately and meditatively that I was startled into making a slight exclamation:

"Why, Miss Lina!" I cried out.

She started a little, looked up at me, and laughed faintly.

"Why not?" she said. "It would be easy enough if one had the courage, and it wouldn't need much. The tide sweeps round the Bar so suddenly. And then there is no help, and one wouldn't need courage. Don't be frightened, though, Mrs. Mallon! I am not going to drown myself. I am too fond of life for that; besides, I want to make up with Jack." And she laughed again.

I was blind enough then to be deceived by her light manner, but I thought of her words afterward and remembered, too, her little shudder when she said: "And then there would be no help."

After that came a change again, stranger and more deceptive than the last. She regained her spirits too rapidly to seem natural; she never said anything against Sir Denis, and was even extravagantly gay in his presence. Her mother was fairly delighted and exerted herself to her utmost in the matter of dressing her and making her appear to advantage.

They gave the little suppers two or three times a week, and at such times, from my room, I could hear Lina's feverish laugh ringing out above everything. She had never seemed so reckless and light hearted, and as the guests passed out of the house I often caught snatches of conversation among the men, which showed me that even those who had known her the longest were dazzled afresh and puzzled a little.

But Mr. Jack's attentions were gradually falling off. His unceremonious visits were growing fewer and farther between. I was astonished to find that this did not seem to trouble Lina much, and was so far bewildered that I began to falter again.

She did not contrive plans to meet him any longer, and when by accident they encountered each other on the stairs, or in the hall, she would give him a careless little nod or a careless speech and pass on as coolly as she might have done in the first days of their acquaintance.

But one evening after she had passed him so and the hall door had closed upon him as he went out, I heard her feet flag somewhat in their passage up the stair case, and in a moment more there came to my listening ears the dull, dead thud of a heavy fall.

There was no other sound, nothing but the fall, and, strange to say, no one seemed to hear it but myself; and hurrying out, I found lying on the mat at the foot of the stairs, Lina Clangarthe in a dead faint, her white face like a stone.

I went to the kitchen door, and, calling one of the servants as quietly as possible, made her help me to carry the prostrate figure into my room and lay it on my sofa.

"Don't say anything to the others," I commanded the girl. "It is nothing but a faint and would only alarm Mrs. Clangarthe unnecessarily."

I sent her away before the poor child's eyes were open, and then I set myself to work to restore her alone. But before I began I closed the door. I think it must have been half an hour before she knew me, and when the great, speechful, gray eyes unclosed, they turned upon me in an agony, needing not a word to express itself. It seemed to me as if I could not bear it. I thought my heart would burst.

"You fell down stairs and fainted, my dear," I said, as cheerfully as I could. "I suppose your foot slipped."

She did not utter a sound, only looked at me and then all at once at the door as if she was frightened.

"Yes, my dear," I answered, for I guessed what she was thinking of. "Yes, my dear, it's locked. You see I thought there was no need to alarm the household and frighten your mamma. It was only a faint and you will be over it soon. You are almost over it now only, of course, you feel weak and tired and don't want to talk. Take a little of this wine and then I will sit down beside you and you shall try to sleep."

She took the wine, but her poor hands trembled so that I had to hold the glass to her lips. She did not speak even then, and, after she had swallowed it she slipped down on to the sofa cushion with her white, young face upon her arm and her long hair half hiding it as she lay.

As for me I set the wineglass aside and went back to my seat at the window, which faced the Moaning Bar.

For two long hours I sat there with my work looking out at the sea and now and then glancing round at the helpless young face on the sofa. During those two hours this figure never stirred, but lay there without a movement, the white face half hidden by the heavy, loose hair. The silence was so heavy and terrible and the time so long in its dull, dragging by that I could scarcely bear it.

If I could only have helped her; if I could only have said one word of motherly comfort to her I should have thanked God for it to the last day of my life. If this was only a girl's heartache it was a bitter one indeed and one that called for tender words and comfort, but if it was worse there were no words that human tongue could utter that could be too full of pity and prayer for this young creature in her desolate strait.

I got up from my chair at last and went to her, kneeling down by her side and touching her hair softly.

"Are you asleep, Miss Lina?" I asked.

She stirred a little, but she did not look up as she answered:

"No."

"Do you feel better?" I said, falteringly. "Fainting fits are troublesome things, my dear; but there is not much danger in them, you know. I hope--"

I stopped there because I could say no more. It seemed as if the spell upon her was broken, for she was beginning to shiver and tremble and in a minute she was clinging to the cushion with both her little hands, sobbing in a wild, gasping, choking way.

"Oh, Mrs. Mallon!" she cried out again and again, "if you only knew what is in my heart tonight; if you only knew what is in my heart tonight! If you only--only--knew!"

I was trembling all over myself and crying, too, though I tried hard to speak quietly as I stroked her hair and patted her shoulder to soothe her.

"Tell me, my love." I said. "Tell me, if you can, and I will try to help you. I am an old woman, my dear, and the Lord may show me how I might help you best. The Lord never fails us, you know, my dear."

But she had lost all hope of controlling herself. She only sobbed and gasped and panted with her hand clenched hard against her heart.

"There is no help for me," she cried out. "There is no help. There is nothing but death! Nothing but death! Nothing but death and despair."

The tide had come in and gone down again into the darkness long before she was still, and then it was time for her to go up stairs, for Mrs. Clangarthe was inquiring for her. She got up from the sofa pale as death and with a strange, hollow look about her eyes. She had worn her wild grief out, but she had not uttered a word that might tell me surely whether my terrible fear had any foundation or not.

She gave a glance at herself as she passed the mirror and when she reached the door she turned all of a sudden in a wild, nervous way.

"You are not like other people," she said. "You are better some way. I wish you were my mother."

I wonder if the people who are used to reading stories can guess how this one of mine is going to end. I wonder, too, if the most experienced of them would not have started as I did that night on hearing Lina Clangarthe's laugh ring out among the voices in the room above.

I think they would, and yet I did hear it. I heard it threading through the bursts of merriment that came from the two or three of her father's fellow officers who were his guests for the evening, and as I heard it I trembled.

She was talking to them, and even rattling off gay little French songs for them, one after the other. She was filling the whole drawing-room with her mirth.

Sir Denis was there, too, one of the servants told me. and she was drawing him on and dazzling him with her daring flashes of wit. And toward the end of the evening Mr. Jack came in and went up stairs to join the party, and a few minutes later, to my bewilderment, I heard her laughing and jesting with him, too.

They were always gay enough and sometimes a trifle boisterous in that light hearted way of theirs, but I had never heard them so merry as they seemed to be this night. Peal after peal of laughter came down the stair case to my room.

"It's Miss Lina is making them laugh so," explained the major's man. "Sure it's in high spur'ts she is in this evenin'. The ould fell'ys is houldin' their sides wid the fun in her. It's beyutiful she looks, too, Misthress Mallon, wid a color like a rose and a light in her eye like foire, an' me Lady Medora's ould dress lookin' new on her. Ah, but it's Sir Dinnis is the lost boy intirely."

Barregan was just like the rest of the servants; he fairly adored Miss Lina and noticed her every mood with as great an interest as if she had been a child of his own. The queer, careless ways of the family extended even to their free and easy intercourse with their servants.

It was later than usual when the company dispersed, perhaps because they had enjoyed themselves so well. I had sat in my room for hours listening and wondering and fearing by turns, and was just setting Mr. Jack's parlor to rights and bolting the shutters before going to bed, when I heard Sir Denis and Mr. Jack himself come out, Miss Lina following them on to the landing to have a last word. The parlor was quite dark and they could not see me, but I could see them plain enough, and you may be sure my first look was at Miss Lina.

She was standing on the stairs, just as she had stood the night Mr. Jack kissed her. Her soft hair was floating over her wide, white shoulders, down to her bit of a waist, as she had a girl's fashion of wearing it all loose and curly, and she had on the very dress Lady Medora had given her, the rose colored satin.

It was as Barregan had said, her eyes were like fire, but just at this moment as she looked down at the two men there was scarcely a bit of color in her face in spite of the light words she was speaking.

"And as you are going away," she was saying to Mr. Jack, "I suppose I may as well say good by to you and ask you to give my love to Lady Medora if you see her when you are in London. Don't tell any tales out of school though, or else she won't send me any more of her old dresses and what would I do without them."

"And you will try the sorrel mare with me tomorrow, Miss Clangarthe?" Sir Denis said, a sort of stiff confusion mixed with his admiration of her. "She paces well, I can vouch, and we can ride past the Moaning Bar and on to the Shingle Road after the tide goes down."

I saw her look down at his face for one second with a strange expression just as if she had forgotten herself, but it was only for one moment; the next she answered him as gayly as ever, only with an odd, feverish, short laugh. "Yes," she said, "I'll remember. When the tide goes down--if nothing happens from now till then. And what could happen? After the tide goes down then. Good night." And she gave him a bright little nod.

"Good night, Miss Clangarthe," he answered and went down stairs with his thin face all in a glow of pleasure.

In his momentary excitement he had almost forgotten his companion, but Mr. Jack called after him the next minute.

"Wait a minute, Dermot," he said. Then he turned to the bright robed young figure on the stair above him, and as he looked into the white young face held out his hand.

"Good night, Lina," he said.

She never stirred. Just stood there, white and still, looking right into his evil, handsome black eyes without a word. She did not take his hand or even notice it.

"Good by," she said at last.

That was all. Not another word, and after taking another look at her he turned away as if she had puzzled him a little and he was too indifferent to care about translating her.

She watched him down the stair case, through the hall, out into the street, without stirring, and then she turned round and walked slowly up to her own room and the last glimpse I had of her in life showed me that queer, calm look in her girl's eyes and that queer steadiness on her white face.

I have often thought since then of the wild desperateness that must have been in that poor wronged young thing's mad heart that dreadful night. I have shuddered and cried like a child over the picture that will sometimes force itself upon my mind--the picture of that steadfast face as it must have looked during the long hours that passed before daylight came.

I have fancied that I could see and understand the depth of despair and misery which this girl of seventeen years old must have struggled with in the silence of midnight.

There had never been a shadow on her life before and the blackness of death had fallen upon her almost in an hour. Did she pray one short, desperate prayer, or did she face her fate, remembering nothing but what she left behind and what life might have held for her?

I was sitting at my little parlor window just as I always did and the tide was sweeping back wave by wave over the sand and over the rocks and over the Moaning Bar. It had been a dull, gray morning and even now the sun was scarcely to be seen at all as it struggled through the banks of leaden clouds. I was feeling troubled and not very well.

I had not slept much during the night and losing rest always hurts me. But somehow this morning it was my mind that felt heavy and it was so heavy that I forgot my tired old limbs altogether. I was thinking of Miss Lina and had been thinking of her all night. I was beginning to fear something I had not thought of before, and the thought of it chilled me to the heart.

When first it struck me I turned to the sea with a quick, cold pulse beat and my eyes fell on the Moaning Bar in shrinking terror. The slow, creeping waves tossing over it now had such a cruel, hungry look in the gray light. The tide always crept round the low, barren stretch of sand just in a stealthy sort of way and no human being who chanced to linger there a moment too late need turn his face to the higher shore again, for he had met his doom.

It was a cruel place and I had always felt a dread of it even when the tide was down. The coast people feared it with something like superstitious horror and told fearful stories of the maddened wails they had heard--and the stony, rigid forms that had been swept back to the shore once or twice at ebb of tide.

I could not bear to look at it this morning, but somehow it had a strange fascination for me, and I sat watching it until the tops of the rocks were bare.

The sea was not long in creeping backward then and before many minutes the water was falling rapidly and the rocks stood out bold and black in a little cluster that made a sheltered nook where the seaweed always lay in heaps tangled with white seashells.

There was a heap of such seaweed lying half out of the low water now. I could see it quite plainly as it lay caught among the rocks. After my first glance I found myself staring at it, fascinated--I could not say why--curiously. The little running waves were playing with it and lifting it lightly as they retreated.

A sound in the hall and a summons from outside roused me. I got up from my seat restlessly, opened the door and confronted the major's man, who stood upon the threshold making his stiff, military salute.

"It's Miss Lina I was ordhered to ax about, Misthress Mallon," he said, a trifle uneasily. "The misthress sent me saa if she was here. Sir Dinnis is waitin' for her and the misthress thought mebbe she had stepped into your room whin she kem in."

I stared at him blankly for a moment. Then my startled mind began to take in vaguely the strange expression on the poor fellow's face. There was actually a shade of pallor on his sunburnt skin and his eye met mine restlessly. Something was the matter I knew and he was afraid to speak of it.

"Barregan," I broke out all in a tremble, "what is the matter? You are trying to hide something from me. What is it you are trying to hide?"

I saw him turn pale then in actual earnest, and when he answered me his voice shook.

"Might I step insoide, Misthress Mallon?" he said. "I'd like to have a wurred wid yez."

I motioned him in and shut the door.

"What is it?" I cried out sharply. "You are not afraid that----" And then I stopped short in spite of the terrible fear that rushed upon me.

"She--she went out early," he said, hoarsely, "an' she's not come in yet, though she promised to try Sir Dinnis' sorrel. There's a nasty bit of sand down on the Bar, ye know, and she always wint there. She was goin' there

whin I met her, and someways she looked white and poorly, but she turned her purty, pale face to me and says: 'Good mornin' to ye, Barregan. I'm goin' for a little walk on the sands,' and then she looks over her shoulder at me two or three times before she was out of sight. I darn't say a wurred to the misthress. I darn't; I thought I'd come here first."

The sun had struggled through the clouds at last and as I turned to the window, shaken and strengthless, it burst forth in such sudden brightness that I could see nothing plainly. But little as I could distinguish my blinded eyes caught a glimpse of something--that made me drop into my chair with hardly voice to speak.

"Look out there," I said to the poor stricken fellow. "There is a heap of--of seaweed, I think, caught on the rocks on the Moaning Bar. There is not a bit of color caught among it, is there? The sun blinds me so that I cannot see. There isn't a bit of scarlet there, is there? Look well before you speak, for God's sake!"

He did not need to look a second time. Just one glance and he broke away with a cry of horror that roused the whole household and brought servants and master and mistress hurrying out of the rooms with white, scared faces.

Just that one cry and a few wild terror stricken words and the cry was echoed again until the roof rang with its shrill horror as Mrs. Clangarthe fell prostrate upon the stair case landing with a face like the dead.

We raised her and carried her to her room, scarcely any one of us knew how, for the whole house was full of the cries of wailing, hurrying servants and wailing, terrified children. There was not one of them but had loved her; there was not one of them, from the best to the worst, who was not stricken as with the hand of death.

They were all crowded about the windows, weeping aloud as they watched the hurrying figures flying across the sands toward the bit of scarlet color caught in the nook of rocks.

Dozens of the coast people, men, women and children, catching a hint of the truth, left their work in boats and huts and ran, as it were, for dear life,

through the shallow water the tide had left on the low beach, joining one another by twos and threes until a great crowd of strange figures stood about the rocks around Sir Denis and around the man who had first bent over the something which was not seaweed, but a dead girl's body.

Perhaps among all the crowd of rough watchers there was not one who had not a kindly remembrance of the bright, girlish face and light hearted ways; perhaps there was scarcely one of them to whom she had not at some time spoken a careless, sweet tempered word of greeting. She had been used to speak to the roughest of them when she met them, and in the most unresponsive of their half savage moods they had felt an odd sort of liking for her and her bright beauty.

It seemed almost like Fate that they should bring her into my little room and lay her upon the sofa, where she had lain through the long, silent, wretched hours only so few days before.

But her face was not hidden now upon the cushion; it lay still and white, upturned to every eye, and the long hair that had veiled it was wet and dank with the salt sea and tangled with sea and sand and shells.

If she had died to keep a secret she had not died in vain, for no one but myself guessed that any secret existed. She must have forgotten the tide, until it had crept around the Bar, and it was too late to turn back, they said among themselves, and as they spoke I bent over her and smoothed her pretty, tangled hair, so that they could not see my face and guess that I had anything to hide from them.

But as I listened I understood quite plainly what the poor, desperate child had meant when she cried out to me: "Oh, if you only knew what is in my heart tonight!" I knew then, for her own dead lips told me, and I knew, too, what a terrible strength of resolution had kept the fire in her eye and the color in her cheek as she jested and laughed with the rest within the very sound of the waves which she knew would sweep over her dead body on the morrow.

"It would not take much courage when the tide came up," she had said, and I remembered the words, shuddering at the thought of how the waves must

have looked as she watched them running up nearer and nearer until the gray, white line was all around her and it was too late to look back or repent.

But it was over now and it could not have taken long to hush her cries if she had uttered any; it could not have been many minutes at the most after the first gasp in the rush of surf before she was as quiet as she looked now lying on my sofa with the strange rest on her pretty face.

"She looks so calm, some way," poor Mrs. Clangarthe wailed. "And she was so pretty, too, and I was so proud of her. Oh, my poor, poor Lina! I don't think Sir Denis will ever get over it, Mrs. Mallon. He was going to propose to her this morning and Lina had promised me she would accept him if he did."

When the dreadful day was over and the house was dark and quiet I sat in my little room again thinking sadly of the still chamber up stairs, where the slender, quiet figure lay on the bed. As I sat brooding over the fire I heard the door open and Mr. Jack came in and stood on the hearth with the stealthy, evil look in his handsome, bold, black eyes.

Whether he suspected me or not he did not care to meet my glance, and as he spoke he carelessly struck a match on the mantel to light a cigar he held.

"I am going to London tomorrow," he said, "and shall not need you any longer. You can go back to Marshlands as soon as you wish. I shall not return here again."

I looked at his wicked, handsome face steadily, and for the moment hated it as I had never hated anything human before.

"Sir," I said, "have you been up stairs?"

He nodded carelessly, but changed color a little, nevertheless.

"Yes," he answered.

"And you have seen--her?"

He nodded again, flinching, I could see.

I do not know what held me up, but I felt that I must speak now or die.

"Do you remember what we said about that dead girl once before in this very room?" I asked. "About her face? Do you remember what I said about its being a tender, innocent face which knew no wrong and held none? Do you remember?"

He started slightly and turned, staring wildly at me.

"What the deuce----" he began.

But I stopped him. I rose up from my chair and faced him, trembling in every limb and sobbing in a grief that was too much for me. I remembered the pretty young face as I saw it first, with the innocent light in its eye, and then I thought of how the tide had gone down on the Moaning Bar, leaving the bit of bright color lying in the nook of rocks.

"Man!" I said, "you are a villain and God will never forgive you. The curse of a lost life will be upon you forever."

He did not say a word, fierce as was the anger that flashed into his cruel face. He had not a word to say. He knew that his sin had found him out and that there was no defense for him if he cared to make one. For one moment he stood and tried to brave me with a sneer, the blood flushing his dark skin and the flare of passion in his eyes. The next he faltered and turned upon his heel and so left me forever.

I did not see him again and was thankful that I did not. I knew that if my lady had been living she would have absolved me from my promise, and knowing this, I was not ashamed to break it myself. I had been his faithful servant and he had used me for an innocent creature's wrong, and so I could be faithful no longer. He went away, as he said he would, and I, returning to my home, carried in my own heart the secret which had been swept away and lost in the waves that went down with the tide on the Moaning Bar.

## Man Who Paid By Jim Preston as told to Will Whitmore.



"JIM," said Professor William Arnold to me, "I am the only man in the world, I believe, who knows the truth about the murder of Bob Clark; and I would be hooted out of my office at the University if I told the truth. I don't know what to do, Jim. I am sorely troubled."

Whenever I went through Austin, Texas, I always had dinner with Processor Arnold. He is a professor of Physics at the University there, and we were college pals for three years at Princeton before he went West. It was there that I came to love and admire him for his brilliant scientific work.

On this particular night we were dining in a Chinese restaurant on Congress avenue. A newsboy came through the restaurant selling the Austin daily paper, and Arnold bought one of the papers. When he glanced at the first page, his face turned white, and his hands trembled. I asked him what troubled him.

"Jim," he said, "Bob was killed three days ago and the police are no nearer a solution now than they were then." He pointed to a large headline on the page. It read:

### POLICE STILL BAFFLED OVER MYSTERY MURDER.

I looked at Arnold and I noticed the darkness under his eyes. They lacked the luster that I had known for years, and the old assurance that I had always admired in him was gone.

"Why should this particular crime affect you so?" I asked. "Tell me about it."

"I was glad when you called me today," he replied, "for I had to tell someone what I know about this murder and I knew I could trust you. I have known no sleep since it occurred. I cannot face my classes and lecture on the laws of science. I always have believed that every phenomenon can be explained by hard and fast scientific laws. I have always laughed at the so-called manifestations of the spirit world. And yet, this murder cannot be explained by any natural laws. I feel as though the scientific platform upon which I have built my life is about to crumble away beneath my feet. I still refuse to accept the supernatural--God, how I hate the word! Yet I see no other explanation for the murder."

ARNOLD paused to moisten his dry lips and throat. He ran his fingers through his long hair, and his fingers trembled. Then he continued.

"Here is what I know about it. Bob Clark, the man who was murdered, was the best student I ever had. He was in my Physics course three years ago.

Since then we have been intimate friends. He often consulted me about his work and I was always glad to give him help and advice.

"Two weeks ago he came to me and he was in a terrible condition. It hurt me to see him, a man over six feet in height, so shaken with fear. His fine face was drawn and there was an uncanny stare out of his eyes. I could not understand it, for he had always been a very substantial person, unemotional, and with a strong will.

"'Doctor Arnold,' he said, before we had time to be seated in my study, 'I have been visited by the dead. My God, I am frightened. It is driving me mad, and I am afraid my wife will see this fear in me. She is in no condition to be troubled, for as you know, her baby was born yesterday.'

"I gave Bob a drink and managed to calm him, and he told me of the vision he had seen. Three summers ago he worked with a bridge construction gang about forty miles from Houston in the little town of East Benard. It is composed almost altogether of ignorant foreign people who live in a very squalid condition.

"Most of the women are ugly and fat; sometimes even the young girls are homely and unattractive. They work in the fields along with the men. They go barefooted and wear few clothes in the cotton fields. Quite often, according to Bob's story, you will find girls at the age of twenty, picking cotton, dressed in a calico dress and nothing more. It is nothing uncommon to see their bodies exposed by a chance wind. Some of the girls have a youthful charm in spite of their coarseness. Their bodies have soft curving lines even though they do hard work, because they eat a great deal of fatty food.

"Bob met one of these girls returning from work one evening. She was pretty, and her comely face and lithe young figure beneath her loose-fitting cotton dress fascinated him. Ordinarily, he would not have been attracted by such a girl, but he had missed the companionship of the girls of his set, and of his women companions at school.

"By some pretext he contrived to walk home with her, and thereafter he met this girl every evening. No one knew of their meetings. He continued to

meet the girl secretly until fall when he returned to the University.

"BOB told me that the girl loved him fiercely, and that he had a sort of love for her, even though he was engaged to the woman who is now his widow. He never told the foreign girl his true name, and he soon forgot her after he returned to school. He was married the next spring.

"But on the night before his marriage, he was visited by this girl, Bob declared. He was awakened just before dawn by the cry of a baby in his room. The room was dark except for a diffused, glowing, blue light and in the midst of this blue light was the girl of his past holding a new born baby in her arms. The vision was indistinct, and before Bob was able to see more, the vision disappeared into the blue light and the light itself slowly faded away. Bob was terrified, and turned on his light.

"The floor was wet as if wet clothing had dripped upon it and there were smears of yellow clay upon it.

"In the afternoon paper Bob read the account of the suicide of the young girl. Three months before, her family had learned her secret, and had driven her away from home. A clergyman's family at East Benard had taken her in. The child was born three days before her suicide. She was found in a large, clay, water pool behind the clergyman's home. Her child was clasped to her bosom, drowned, as was the mother.

"Bob was frantic, but he had to go through with his wedding. The vision did not appear again, and Bob soon forgot it in joy of his wife.

"The vision never returned until two weeks ago, which was the night after the day his child was born. Bob said that it appeared in exactly the same manner as upon the first occasion, except that it stayed longer and was more distinct. The baby seemed months older at this second appearance. The girl stood there, in one arm her baby and in her hand--a murderous Bohemian knife, similar to those used by the Bohemian farmers to kill pigs. She slowly advanced toward Bob with the knife gripped hard in her hand. When

she was a few feet from him, Bob screamed. The baby in the girl's arm moved and a low wail escaped from its lips. The girl stopped and slowly disappeared into the blue light surrounding her, and it slowly faded away also. This time the floor was dry and unmarked by clay.

"When Bob finished the story, he was trembling again from head to foot. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, and he reached for the whiskey. I was in a great quandary as to what to do. Of course, I thought Bob was sick and suffering from strain due to the birth of his wife's child. I told him so. I refused to believe in the thing at all and told him to forget it. He became furiously angry and left me. Three days later I talked to his wife's nurse over the phone and learned that Bob had locked himself in his room and was refusing to see everyone. I went to his home, but he would not see me.

"Three days ago I was summoned to Bob's house, just after dawn, by the nurse. She said that Bob had been murdered and that his wife wanted me. I went immediately.

"WHEN I was admitted to the room, the body had not yet been moved. It lay across the bed in a crimson pool. Stuck in Bob's chest up to the hilt, was a knife. I am sure it was the one Bob had described to me.

"The nurse slept in the room adjoining Bob's and the only door in Bob's room opened into the nurse's room. She was awakened by a terrible scream in Bob's room. She tried the door but it was locked.

"Neighbors were summoned and the door was battered open. It was locked and bolted from within. There were only two windows in the room and both of them had iron bars across them, as you will find in some old Texas homes.

"The nurse declared that immediately following the scream, she heard the wail of a baby and the voice of a woman in the room."

## Fulfillment by Will Garth

IT WAS not a dream. Despite the fact that she had distinctly remembered going to bed as a last conscious effort after the stormy interview with Artemus Russo, Marjorie Westbrook knew, as she had known about other weird instances in her life, that this was stark and cold reality.

There was no state of transition between the pleasant business of retiring and this instinct awareness of an incredible situation. Simply, she had gone to bed in her lovely chamber at home in Forest Hills as Marjorie Westbrook, heiress to the Westbrook Motor millions, her mind filled with business details over the present policies of the late George Westbrook's automobile factories.

And here she was, wide awake and standing before an altar in front of her, an altar of ancient Egyptian motif with the sacred ibis projecting in relief at the ends like figureheads of ships.

She stood in her bare feet upon a cold floor of tessellated marble. Moreover, the satin nightdress, the last item of dress she remembered donning, was gone. She stood there in complete nudity, but she was conscious of no sense of shame or modesty.

Without seeing it, for she was powerless to turn--she was aware of an immensity of space which extended in all directions behind her, a space blocked out with intangible green mist that was almost black and almost of the density of velvet drapes

At her right hand was an upright sarcophagus with the lid removed. Within the musty and spicily pungent interior was the wrapped figure of a mummy--a mummy which, queerly enough, was headless.

It was all like closing her eyes upon a scene in a cinema for an instant, to open them upon a sudden change of locale. With this significant difference: there was no continuity, no relevance, no congruity, no connection between her life and this grotesque pattern.

None? There were, of course, her previous experiences--those strange, uncanny interludes in her otherwise prosaic life. But there was no tangible connection unless you considered the sarcophagus-- which looked exactly like the one she had purchased some months before, even to the headless mummy in the musty interior.

Somehow, and Marjorie could not explain it, that sarcophagus which should have been in her boudoir, was here with her in this other world. That Egyptian sarcophagus--as soon as she had seen it, she had been resolved to possess it. Its fascination for her had been but the apex of an amazing sequence of bizarre occurrences, and it blended as a perfect complement with those experiences....

Marjorie now became aware that just beyond the altar before which she stood was the figure of a man in a cowed crimson robe, his hands busy at a set of dials and buttons before him. And the craziest and most outre part of it all was the monk's face. He was Artemus Russo, general manager of Westbrook Motors. Yet there was a strangeness about him that was not Russo.

Before she had time to cry out, to question him, to demand an explanation, Marjorie noticed the light. She was outlined in a glow of light like a psychic aura, of unbelievable intensity, shading from pure white to garish green, mantling her in a bath of living light. As she stared down at her lovely form, to her horror, she saw the flesh become translucent, transparent, and finally invisible--and the skeletal structure of her body from neck to toe became hideously revealed in glowing pink.

Still bound by invisible chains which kept her motionless but without pain, Marjorie heard the cowed figure speak, and the tones of his voice awakened a thousand memories in her mind, memories which were not of the well-tailored Artemus Russo who shouted so irately about proxies and assets and common stock of Westbrook Motors, Inc.

"The hour has come, Princess," he said, "to fulfill your destiny."

"Ankhtares!" she gasped, giving him a name which came easily from her lips. "No! No! I am not ready!"

Her own answer startled her profoundly, shook her to the depths of her soul.

That was what made these bizarre occurrences in her life so distressing. It implied knowledge on her part of monstrous things from the womb of time about which she, as Marjorie Westbrook, should have known nothing. But she did know. Even now, answering so easily to the title of "princess," yet aware of herself as Marjorie Westbrook, she remembered similar experiences.

THE first had happened when she was a child of ten. Without warning she had passed from a safely mundane world to a shadowy temple of vast halls and towering pillars. Going to bed, all tired out from a day of happy play--falling quickly asleep--suddenly she was standing before a high altar whose sides were a frieze of jackal-headed dolls of angular lines. Or were they dolls? How was a little girl of ten to know?

Yet they were not strange to her. Without knowing how she knew, she was as familiar with the symbol of Anubis as she was with her own sister, the twin who had always walked beside her. Sister? With a start, she realized that another little girl was standing with her before that forbidding altar with its plume of curling incense. The little companion was an exact duplicate of herself, dressed in archaic headdress and queerly draped robe of costly silk with beaten gold design in the hem. On her ankles and arms bracelets glittered, one in the form of a coiled serpent with eyes of emerald green.

This was Isames. Without being told, Marjorie knew that her own name was Isira. It had always been Isira--for ten years of Egyptian childhood as a princess of the royal blood. There was no Marjorie Westbrook in this consciousness, and yet she knew she was Marjorie Westbrook and that Sir

Gerwain was waiting for her out in her father's kennels. In a way it was terrifying, and Marjorie (Isira) whimpered.

"Be brave, Isira," whispered Isames. "It is our heritage."

Before Marjorie could reply there was movement behind the altar, and Ankhtares, high priest of Ammon, a cold and stern man with the features of Artemus Russo, her father's secretary, swam into view. There was a strange light in his piercing black eyes as he looked out and down upon the two little girls who stood before the altar to the dead, tightly clasping each other's hands.

"Princess Isira and Princess Isames," he spoke in a sonorous voice which echoed hollowly through the great hall of the temple, "in accordance with the rule of your house, blessed under the sign of the *crux ansata* and dedicated to the service of Ra, you are here to choose your destiny. Are you prepared?"

"We are prepared, O Ankhtares," Marjorie heard herself and her sister reply. That the language was not modern English, she did not even note.

The high priest passed his hand above the curling incense rising from the altar in a cabalistic sign, and blue smoke fairly boiled up in writhing convolutions that had sparks of incandescent red. The figure of the high priest was obscured for a moment, and both little girls trembled. Then he came back into view.

"In this, the third era in the second dynasty of Ptolemy," his compelling voice rolled out, "it is written in the Seventh Book of Anubis that of twin princes or princesses of the direct line of Pharaoh only one can ascend to the throne. Herein lies the parting paths of destiny. For one there is the scepter of a queen, wealth and glory and power--and death before her youth has faded. For the other there is a timeless void until her spirit shall find life and happiness in a future existence and then she shall grow old before her time. And in the end the twain shall be reunited by a bond far stronger than that of natal ties. It is so written. Choose well, ye little princesses. Behold, the sacred ibis awaits to carry the word to Ammon, Giver of all."

Both little girls clung together and quivered in wide-eyed fright as they saw the blue smoke take the form of the sacred bird. The words of the high priest were incomprehensible to them, but they stared at the shadowy bird of Ra and spoke bravely.

"I want to be a queen," said Isames.

"I want to be happy," said Isira.

With a puff of smoke the nebulous ibis disappeared.

"So be it!" said the voice of Ankhtares.

There was a flash of blinding light, and little Marjorie Westbrook opened her eyes to find the looming sun streaming in at the window and to hear the excited yelping of Sir Gerwain, her wolfhound, outside.

That had happened when she was ten. Now, at twenty-five, in the very midst of undergoing a similar experience, she was able to recall that earlier one.

SHE stared down in a mounting sort of mental fear as she watched her body entirely disappear from beneath her, leaving only the faintly glowing frame of her bony structure. And as she watched, even that began to fade away in the bath of terrible light, the source of which she could not determine. Soon she would be a disembodied head floating above the strange floor.

"The hour is at hand, Princess Isira," said the cowled priest, "for the fulfillment of your destiny. The sands of time have run their interminable course. Beyond human comprehension is the working of the Infinite. You behold, on your right, the sarcophagus of Isames, queen of the Nile, taken unto the arms of Anubis and Thoth in her twenty-sixth year. Alas, only her chu (preserved body) remains. Her ka (soul bird with human head) has departed for the sun temple of Ammon. Her sacred crypt was violated by

vandals and desecrators of the dead, but you can behold her likeness on the lid of the sarcophagus in beaten gold."

Marjorie Westbrook, or the consciousness that was Marjorie Westbrook, stared at the cover of the ornate case and nearly swooned in astonishment. She recalled the face on the lid of her own sarcophagus, the one in her boudoir, and how its haunting familiarity had puzzled and intrigued her. But always it had remained vague and dim. Now, like the sensitized image on a print that has just been withdrawn from developing fluid, the golden features, bathed in that eerie glow, were exact duplicates of her own! It was as though she stared into a burnished mirror of gold. Even the wide, staring eyes seemed alive with the color and expression of her own eyes.

And still this fantastic, this outre and bizarre experience was no dream. Marjorie Westbrook was as thoroughly awake as she would ever be. Never, since that soul-shaking and impossible thing which had happened to her at the age of ten, had she experienced, awake or asleep, any further manifestation which included so much as a mention of the lost Isames. In her nocturnal materializations-- and there had been at least one for every year of her life--she had never again seen this strange twin sister or heard of her until now. It came to Marjorie with a dreadful thrill that she was in her own twenty-sixth year right now.

Not once during her entire life had she ever mentioned these weird adventures to anyone, not even to her doctor. It was a closed and sealed book from the world, from even Marjorie herself--except in the throes of the fantastic episodes. But it was not a dream life; she knew that. It was some horrible destiny, an actual and solid fate of terrific force and dim, unguessed purpose that stalked her.

And it did not feed solely upon the hours of night, a mere figment of her imagination. There was that day when she was seventeen, and her father had taken her to the county fair. Normal, happy, light-hearted girl of a modern age, she had clapped her hands in delight when the old Gipsy hag in the gay-colored booth wanted to tell her fortune.

But no sooner had Marjorie seated herself across the table of sand from the woman than the crystal ball thereon turned inky black. The woman started

in utter dismay and quickly flung a cloth over the ball. She blanched almost white as she stared with her sharp, black eyes into Marjorie's blue ones.

"Let me see your right hand," she said in a tense whisper.

Obligingly Marjorie stretched out her slim and girlish hand, palm up. Without touching her, the Gipsy stared with bulging eyes, her golden earrings advance with violent agitation.

"No," she whispered. "No, no--I cannot read your destiny, child."

"But that isn't fair," pouted Marjorie. "I've paid you a silver dollar. You must read my fortune."

"Here is your money," said the old woman, beginning to shake all over.

"I won't have it back," declared Marjorie defiantly. "Keep it, and read my fortune."

THE Gipsy groaned.

"I--I cannot," she articulated with difficulty. "I dare not! I see only that you have a double existence. You will grow old before your time--incredibly old."

"How old?" demanded Marjorie, thinking the Gipsy was putting on a very good act.

"Perhaps--perhaps six thousand years," choked out the other, and then, with a wild cry, the woman fled from the booth.

That experience had taken place in broad daylight; had occurred to Marjorie Westbrook without any transition into another entity, another sphere of life. So she knew she was not crazy. And she knew she did not dream these yearly episodes which wove that strange, irrelevant, and inexplicable pattern through her otherwise normal and sane existence.

"No! No!" she cried out in horror now against a dread of she knew not what as her skeleton completely disappeared.

But her protests were as naught to this high priest of Ammon who was the counterpart of Artemus Russo. And Marjorie became aware of a pair of hands, cold and clammy as early morning fog off the Sound, which gripped her head. She rolled her eyes to see a green-gray figure that had materialized behind her, a disembodied spirit that was human only in outline--an elemental, even an ectoplasmic projection of Ankhtares.

She opened her mouth to scream in terror, but no sound came. She thought she was in a silent world of chimeras. And the creature carried her bodyless head like a football across the intervening space and set it firmly on the shoulders of the linen-wrapped mummy within the sarcophagus!

"Thy destiny has been fulfilled," came the voice of Ankhtares. "At last we shall both have peace."

There was that blinding flash of light which Marjorie Westbrook had come to know so well, and everything went into the oblivion of nothingness....

MARJORIE opened her eyes. The maid was letting in the sunshine. She was safe at home in her own bed in Forest Hills, the covers drawn snugly up to her chin.

"Miss Westbrook," said the maid softly, "it is eleven o'clock. Mr. Russo is waiting to see you in the sitting room. He insisted that I wake you as he has to attend that board meeting. He said he must have your final word."

Marjorie smiled. Her personal relief was so great that she felt in a most melting mood toward the manager of her affairs.

"Very well," she said. "Tell him I am ready to sign those proxies for him and wind things up. Wait, help me up first." She threw back the silken coverlet, preparatory to sitting up. "Bring over the--"

She broke off in stunned horror. As she moved it sounded like the rattling of parchment and dried bones. As she tossed back the cover, instead of a satin night negligee from Paris upon the lovely body of a twenty-five-year-old beauty, she exposed the gray-brown and dried skin of an Egyptian mummy. Her hands were two shrunken claws, the outline of the bones showing plainly from elbow to fingers.

One terrible shriek Marjorie Westbrook gave ere death overtook her. The horrible episodes of her nocturnal life had finally broken through the barrier that had always surrounded and protected her--had overtaken her at last. The six thousand years were up!

The maid stared, petrified, at the lovely head perfectly joined to that of the six- thousand- year- old mummy of an Egyptian woman. Her eyes rolled wildly to a corner of the room where her mistress' prized sarcophagus stood, and she screamed. The lid was off, and the headless mummy that should have reposed in the case was gone!

"Mr. Russo! Mr. Russo!" she cried as she fled to the outer room. Her voice choked, cut off abruptly as she stared at the couch where she had left the general manager sitting. Lying full-length on the couch was Artemus Russo, his body as still as death and his face parchment yellow and amazingly, horribly wrinkled with lines that told of the passage of centuries.

## **The Volcanologist by Philip M. Fisher, jr.**

### CHAPTER I - GODDESS OF DAMNED SOULS.

I SAW the whole thing. I saw it from the rather commonplace, though I admit unusually situated, beginning, to the appalling catastrophe at the end. I saw it. I beheld the slow change that Kilauea wrought. I observed the break, the physical and mental collapse, that Mme. Pele, that volcano goddess of damned souls, forced up on my good friend Harrison Rhodes--forced upon my practical-minded, hard-headed, only fact-believing friend and man of exact science, Professor Harrison Rhodes, volcanologist.

And yet, seeing that change, I did not foresee the inevitable end of it all. Seeing the approach of the breakdown, I did naught to avert it. Seeing that final pitifully horrible climax--I simply stood stupefied, and, with unseeing, or perhaps benumbed mind, saw with my eyes--and yet did nothing.

I see now that nothing could have been done. The thing was inevitable.

I did not cross to the islands with him. He took the *Lurline*, which landed him directly at Hilo, so that he had only thirty miles by automobile to land him at the very crater itself. So had he always been--eager, direct, ever quick scented and on the job.

I took the sugar boat *Manoa*, landed at Honolulu for a fortnight or more with friends--and thence, on the little Mauna Kea, leisurely traveled through

the islands, the two hundred odd miles that separate these main cities of the Hawaiians.

Every minute of that passage was full of grace and color and strange interest to me--the pure sapphire of the snow-flecked water and the skimming dash of the flying fish on either side, the tawny browns of the smooth sloping flanks of algaroba skirted Molokai and Lanai, the vari-green checkered cane fields on swiftly rising Maui; at Lahaina the slender leaning coconut palms and low lying habitations crowding so eagerly about the gleaming white staff from which glowed in the setting sun the good old "homy" stars and stripes; a night of crystal clearness and constellations that hurt my eyes, then morning and Hilo; and the drive through cane, bananas, guaves, tree ferns--to the suddenly opened vista at the very edge of the volcano itself.

No wonder I forgot for those overflowing hours the errand on which I had come. No wonder that there entered into my scene-drugged mind no foreboding thoughts. No wonder, as the full view of Kilauea broke from the copse of ferns and ohelos on my left, that for the moment only the thrill of another picture of startling newness and strange beauty came over me.

The fascination of the volcano--the fascination of it, I say, I did not at that moment comprehend.

But then I was surfeited with sightseeing.

I turned to the chauffeur.

"Take me to the observation laboratory," I said.

It was perhaps a hundred yards farther, and but a few steps from the crater's rim; a long flat yellow frame structure, mostly of glass and wire screen, it impressed me, and remarkably fitting its purpose. A Japanese, in starchy white, bowed at the doorway.

"Meestah Whitcomb?" he queried with great display of teeth.

I nodded; and he hustled my bags away. I tipped my driver, a Portuguese, and followed.

"Thees a way, sah," hissed the Jap. And he lead me to the farthest room of the building, deposited my grips, shot up the blinds, and with another grin swept aside the curtain, and said:

"Mos' painstakin' view, iss not, Meestah Whitcomb?"

I nodded at his rather remarkable adjective--another bit of the strange country, I mused. Then I started--for as I leaned out of the window I found that it actually overhung the great hollow beneath. I drew back with heart beating wildly and palms pressing against the sill.

I caught the servant swiftly turning away in pretense at putting away my clothes--I saw the grin on his face.

"Whew!" I smiled. "Pretty deep right here."

He turned.

"Four hundred eighty feets, sah, Profess' Rhodes say. An' ovah there"--he pointed to the bluffs at the right--"ovah there, Professor say eight hundred--straight jump."

"Whew," I said again, for I began to feel a bit perspiry after that first glance. "Under my feet."

"Floor ver' strong," said the Jap. "Professor Rhodes smile when he see it," he added ambiguously.

Then I recollected.

"But where is Professor Rhodes?" I asked quickly.

The Jap shrugged his shoulders, and showed his prominent teeth again.

"Halemaumau," he said, giving the native name--"main crater, sir. Study."

"Oh," I said, and took another look out of the window. "Where is it?"

The Japanese pointed straight out to where, in the basin that was beneath me, the shiny stove polish gray of the old lava flows coned up to a smoking eminence a short distance off.

"Oh--too far," said the Jap. "Couple miles, ver' hard on shoe--and Professor Rhodes be back lunch time."

"Two miles to the main fiery pit!" I cried. "Just over there?"

The little chap nodded.

"Air ver' clean," he explained. "Rock ver' hot, an' sharp where are break places. Professor Rhodes say me keep you here where he come lunch time, sah. Yes, sah."

I stayed.

So Rhodes was already hard at it. Scientific enthusiasm! Well, let him study. I'd take my own time--unless he drove me. And Harry Rhodes had a way about him that was driving, too--a personal force that impelled one to work as he willed, and when he willed, and where, and in what manner. That was one reason I liked the man. When "on the job," as he used to say, poor chap, he was "on the job"; cold, hard, matter of fact, determined to win out, going at his work in an everything-else-be-damned attitude that was simply inspiring. All his life, short but already full of achievement, he had sought, and believed only in, fact. He had come here to discover the facts about the volcano of Kilauea. I believed he would not leave until he had worked out these facts. I was not surprised that, instead of lingering here to greet me, he was out there where the smoke was rising, after facts.

And already I began to feel that I, too, must get out and to work.

## CHAPTER II - THE PIT OF EVERLASTING FIRE.

AT noon I heard a stamping at the door, and then in crisp hard tones, but full of friendly greeting: "Hello, old man. Mighty glad to see you. What a great time you must have had! No circles under your eyes, plenty of healthy color, firm grip in your hand, quick movements, head up. Great! Great! Fit for work. And you'll have it. By jinks, man, it's a great study, great study. You'll have work. Let's get some food in us, and then we'll be off. Glad you're so fit--need to be. Got heavy shoes?"

There you are. That was his way.

I grinned. The Jap began to fly about like a white shade. Evidently he knew Rhodes pretty well after these few short weeks. I looked fine, did I? And so could do work, eh? I suppose he would have had the same enthusiasm over a piece of machinery that came to him in good condition.

"Thanks," I said. "I have."

"You'll need 'em," he said. "Where the surface lava is cracked it's like broken glass--is broken glass. Fact!"

I smiled again. Fact.

"Your first trip," Rhodes snapped, as the Jap served, "we'll make a general round-up. Broad view at first is better. Did it myself. Later come details. Great work--you'll be mad over it. I am already in a little more than two weeks. Fact!"

Lord, thought I, he is going to lead me a merry race!

And he did. But how dearly was it won! And how appalling it's finish! Had I known then, or felt--but that of course, is absurd. How can one know that a thing is to occur, and then set about to avert it, to thwart the will of fate? It

is well we have no vision of the future. Our miseries are sufficient as they are, God knows.

But perhaps I sound pessimistic, gloomy. I should not, for after all it was a glorious thing, a splendid thing that Rhodes did at the finish--a thing that should, in the reflected glory it sheds on civilized man, make us who know, and perhaps you who read, better, whole-hearted, more optimistic.

Luncheon over, old-clothes donned, and we started down into the crater by way of a trail out in the precipitous wall below the observatory. And all the way down, and as we picked our way over the ancient flows in the basin below, Rhodes, in his jerky matter-of-fact sentences was giving me a general idea about the thing we were to study.

"Whole groups of islands are volcanic," he snapped. "Bubbles, blisters, on earth's surface, shoved above sea. On this island two bubbles, Mauna Kea. Loa's dead, more or less--Kea, this one, still a bit hot. You'll see that," he added grimly. "Damn hot!"

"And smelly," I interpolated facetiously.

"Sulfur," he snapped without a smile. "To continue: Kea rises up twelve thousand feet--main crater on cone top, dead long ago--but this one broke out on the mountain's flank--like a boil. Big one though, Kilauea is--see for yourself. Take a lake the size of Manhattan Island, and let the bottom suddenly drop out of it so that the banks fall straight down from five hundred to eight hundred feet--let the muddy bottom be a hard and shiny slate gray, and appear to have flowed, or be flowing, in massy rounded molasses-like rolls, from a slightly raised place in the crater--let steam be rising at odd intervals about the muddy looking floor, and a cloud of blue sulfur fumes and whiter smoke be blowing as from a great conflagration in the hollow of the mounded crater--let a mist be falling, a strong breeze blowing, an all permeating odor combined of steam laundry and match factory be ever in your nostrils--let a feeling gradually grip you that you are treading on a mined field which may at any moment blow you to atoms or crack open and drop you into a sea of molten stone and living fire--let your senses suddenly comprehend that this is a work of living nature in the very

act of earth change, and that over it man has not the slightest control--and you have Kilauea. God! It's magnificent!"

We reached the bottom at last, and began to pick our way over the crackling crust of brittle lava. Now and again a section of the stuff would tip beneath my foot, and my heart wildly pound.

But Rhodes would exclaim:

"No worries, old man. Nothing hot right here. Hell's a bit further on."

Yet a hundred paces along, he stopped and pointed to a bit of steam trailing in the breeze from a low break in the floor.

"Stuff flowing there," he said matter-of-factly.

I craned my neck and started for the place.

" Approach it from below!" cried Rhodes.

"But it will run right at me, then!" I remonstrated.

"You can dodge these little fellows. But if you get above, you might break through the crust, and lose a foot before you knew it was burned. "Native did that a month ago--unpleasant, they say."

A little coldness seized me.

"You mean that above us here, under the crackly stuff on which we're treading, the liquid molten rock is lying."

He nodded.

"Fact," he said. "There's the main fiery pit--" He pointed ahead a mile or so to where the rise was craggily cut off and smoke was rising. "Natives call it the Pit of Everlasting Fire, Halemaumau. They've names for everything here you know--queer ducks. Well, up in there the lava level must be a hundred yards or more higher than we are here. Only the hardened crust around the pit holds it from getting us right now--from getting the whole

country, I might just as well say. Why, if the thing took a notion to rise, it could flood half the island, and destroy--ugh! I don't like to think of that--with nothing, *nothing*, you know, to stop it--beyond man's power. Huh!" He smiled belittlingly at the thought of man. "Huh! Little shrimp--man--insignificant atom."

I smiled my appreciation.

"But this little tongue of lava breaking out right here?" I hinted.

"Well, there are weak places, of course," Rhodes went on. "And of course the pressure of all that stuff above in the pit is terrific. So naturally some of it leaks through--creeps between old flows, you know--under enormous pressure. See!" He pointed at a little glowing tongue that suddenly streamed from under the crust to our left. "There's a bit forced out. But see it turn gray--hardened almost at once. Watch it, now--and you'll see the hardened tip lift a little, and out the molten stuff will run again."

It so happened, and weirdly enough. Then the surface of that tiny flow hardened; we waited a few moments; then as before, the tip of this last flow raised ever so little, and out was forced another fiery trickle.

I gasped.

"It's alive!" I exclaimed.

Rhodes smiled mockingly.

"Yes, the natives say that. They have legends, you know. Superstitious rot!"

"But do these little flows take place throughout all the older stuff?" I queried.

He nodded.

"They are continually raising the bottom of the crater. It may be that the very spot you stand on will to-morrow be covered a couple feet--"

I jumped.

"Let's move on," I said. "The stuff is alive."

"You're as bad as the Kanakas," smiled Rhodes. "Remember you're here to get facts, not to go batty over a bit of hot stone being alive."

"I don't blame 'em," I grunted, as we turned aside to clear another tricklet of smoking, glowy stuff that seemed to hurriedly run out to meet us.

"Who?" said Rhodes.

"The natives," I answered.

Then Rhodes stated another fact.

"You're a fool!" he snapped, and strode on.

Submissively I followed.

But I smiled within myself. Harrison Rhodes, volcanologist, said I to myself, will let nothing prevent him from getting the facts about Kilauea. And nothing I added soberly, can prevent him from learning all that mere humans might learn.

There is always a place, admittedly, where man comes against a wall, a vast wall, opaque, impenetrable, unsurmountable, against which he may fling himself until exhausted and yet which, still stubbornly sphinx-like, will answer his questions--not. I felt that Rhodes would glean all he could, all man could, until he reached this wall. Then, for the man was built that way, he would scan the wall from afar, measure it with wisdom's eye, close up to it and minutely search every detail; then, because he wanted fact and only fact, he would say, "I have come to the end of my labors. There is nothing farther that I can pick apart and set aside and say: This is fact. Therefore, my good friend, let us pack up our notes, our photographs, our paraphernalia, and hie us back to the good old coast where we can, at leisure, write the book the university so madly craves--a book of facts." Then he might add, for he differed not from the rest of our kind: "Let some fool old graybeard there theorize--we'll get the facts."

Again I smiled to myself as I slipped and stumbled over the crackling surface. Rhodes was practicality itself--I a fool.

Yet I argued, I was right where I said that I didn't blame the natives for their superstition. That vast wall against which we would finally come was simply one of a series, an infinite series. The wall against which the Kanakas came was simply one earlier in the series. We had solved the Open Sesame to its mystery, had penetrated it and trod the ground betwixt it and that wall that finally would defeat us, with eagerness, certainty, wisdom. To them, what lay beyond the wall at which their knowledge of fact ended was blackness, mystery, gods--to us, because we were secure in deeper sight, this blackness, mystery, and talk of gods was superstition. They did not conceive, perhaps, of other walls beyond our wall. To them all that could possibly be beyond theirs was blackness, mystery, gods--but to us, what lay beyond our wall we smugly said was yet unsolved nature, and we let our graybeards build fanciful theories. The natives conjured up ghosts and gods and pulled off each other's heads to prove a favorite's peculiar powers. The graybeards conjectured over heat and pressures, and plucked each others whiskers to prove their own particular principles.

A difference not of kind but of degree.

And even Rhodes had said that we were to note fact and fact only.

"Well," said I to myself, as we puffed up the steeper slope to the main fiery pit, "just what will he do when he comes to his wall. He said all he wanted was fact--let the philosophers at the university theorize." As I looked about me at the vastness of the arena of steaming heat to the center of which we, little atoms, walked so boldly confident, I wondered if Rhodes would hold to his word; just get facts--or would he then try to go beyond? And if he tried to penetrate his wall--what then?

Perhaps it is fortunate that man has not the gift of prescience. I am glad, with such thought running through my mind, that I had not.

As we slipped and crunched upward, a deep gurgling and heavy puffing struck my ear. And at the same time came a shrill chorus of excited voices. A half dozen tourists at the pit's brink beckoned to us to hurry.

We leaped on, and in a moment more stood with them.

### CHAPTER III - MME. PELE'S HAIR.

THERE are two visions of Halemaumau that I will ever carry with me--and would that they were but one! The first view I had of the fiery pit is one, the last view is the other. The first, a vista of weird, thrilling, fascination. The last--of hellish horror. God, had I but dreamed it! Had I but--but the thing is done, and naught is left but to tell it--naught but to tell it all.

My first impression was of craggy, jagged, out-reaching jaws, a wide opened mouth of heated--hazed gray and livid red, a leaping, pulsing, eager tongue in the very center--madly opened wide and spewing at the heavens, and, in a sobbing thwarted voice, cursing God--a thing in and of itself, alive, terrible, malevolent.

My second impression--I turned to Rhodes.

"A bit of hell, itself," I muttered.

There was no answer.

Rhodes, hands behind his back, was gazing fascinatedly at the leaping turmoil of lava in the swirling pool of molten rock at our feet. His face was tense, his eyes burning with a heat that was second only to the crater itself. I thrilled a bit--if I could only feel in myself but a portion of his scientific ardor!

I nudged him.

"As if beneath that pool," I said, "softie monster ogre was chained in everlasting torment, his writhings causing those slow currents beneath the cliffs, his choking breath the convulsive leaping of the molten lava, his desperate sobbing the grumbling of the stuff and the trembling of the rock beneath our feet."

Rhodes jerked awake.

"Perhaps there is," he said in a low voice.

For a fraction of a second I took my eyes off the pit of fire. This much from Rhodes--even in fun?

"Well," I said, "that is a concession to native superstition, and"--I could not help but add--"to a fool."

A bit irritable, I fancied, my good friend shook himself.

"Every day for almost three weeks past," he said, "three hours each day, I have watched the scene before us. I have seen the whole pool silent, heavy, gray surfaced and wrinkled slightly--as elephant hide in tough appearance, as a pot of molten lead in color and calmly latent possibilities--gray, placid, but hot; only at the edges beneath the cliffs continually and redly lapping, lapping, lapping, hungry for the rock on which it feeds.

"And then in a moment a split appears, great sections of the congealed surface swing apart, the red molten stuff beneath, touching the air, leaps and hisses and bellows, the whole pit becomes alive, great blocks of the cliffs slide in, leap in, eagerly throw themselves in--and the place does become even as the natives call it, Halemaumau, the Pit of Everlasting Fire. Three weeks of it, I've seen. And the natives sacrifice to it." Here his face hardened and his hands clenched. "Fools! As if man--" Then he shrugged his shoulders again. And stared to the left, where the gray, hardened surface was slowly entering a glaring, puffing hollow beneath the cliff--and disappearing in its maw.

Then suddenly Rhodes chuckled.

"Look at 'em," he said nodding to the tourists, who had made their way to a low level of hardened lava to our right. "That is what I call practical--broiling ham over a crack in the surface."

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Not possible?" he ran on. "Look beneath you."

I did, and confess to another real thrill. For not three feet below the surface the fissure in the lava was glaring red. I stepped aside a bit hastily--nearer to the crater's edge.

Rhodes chuckled again--then his face went white--and tightened in horror.

"This way," he cried hoarsely. "Jump! Jump!"

Needless to say I leaped straight over the red hot crack that I had just avoided. Rhodes, still white and tense, seized my arm and ran me a dozen paces to one side. And as we scrambled on, a rending crash came from behind us, a giant plopping splash followed.

And when I turned to look, the entire ledge on which we had been standing had disappeared and the pool of molten rock was in turmoil. My knees weakly deposited me onto the ground, and my head swam.

Rhodes's hand trembled as he, sitting also, and breathing heavily, placed it on my shoulder. His smile was rather forced, I imagine, when he said:

"Well, old man, your tortured ogre nearly got you that time, didn't he?"

I nodded quietly, jerkily.

"Not a pleasant way of going, I imagine," he ran on a little smoother. "I never did fancy so hot an end. Rather glad we noticed the ham broilers--"

I looked up, a bit anxiously.

"Oh, they never even heard it," he said. "But if they hadn't been playing there I might not have looked at the crack beneath our feet, might not have

seen it slowly widen, might not have jumped with you in time, you see? Tourist boasting--'I did it too--over a crack!'--probably saved us from a rather unpleasant end."

I pressed his hand.

"It's not a joke," I murmured. "Thanks."

He grinned, but returned the pressure.

"No joke--fact! But it did almost get you-- Beware what you say of Kilauea. Now let's go over to the second crater. Three little ones now, you know." He hurried on, seemingly quite over his emotion. "All the stuff in sight, even the crust we're standing on, is new flow of the last four months--used to be one great pit, now three--fact!"

So was the man changed again. Fact, fact, fact--he adored fact. And yet--there was that on his face as he stared at the lapping, fiery rock that seemed to say:

"Yes, this whole thing is a single great fact; it is, it exists, it is fact, But behind it all--well, I do wonder now what is hidden there. Something--it fascinates--fascinates." That is what his face, his glowing eyes, had seemed to say. And recalling, I wondered if something were changing in the basic character of my good friend, Harrison Rhodes, volcanologist. Whether, after all, he were not wondering what lay beyond his wall--whether, after all he was charmed only by--fact.

The days passed; we photographed, took notes, tested for temperature, for the chemistry of the lava, the fumes, the steam. We observed by day, by night--recorded the movement of the flows, the varying heights which the pools in the crater caldrons reached, the coincident amounts of vapor and smoke and seismic action.

Rhodes was incessantly "on the job." He never wearied. He never seemed to fear. He was obsessed with scientific fervor. He must have facts. He took chances, risked horrible death a dozen times a day, laughed when I remonstrated, when I recalled to him our narrow escape of my first day at the crater--boasted that nothing could get him--and on it all waxed fat.

Then one day came a package of books from Honolulu. I was glad, for I anticipated an evening of enjoyment.

But, before I had a chance to mention the thing to him, Rhodes had Azaki carry it into his bedroom, unopened. He did this almost secretively, as though he thought that I might see the books--and laugh.

I wondered at this--for we shared all our pleasures and difficulties together, even as we had done when students in the university for which we now labored.

I wondered too, as each day we made our observations at the fiery pit of Halemaumau, why Rhodes had at times those fits of seeming abstraction, why he would stand and gaze so fascinatedly at the teeming stuff within--stand thus when our notes of that particular formation or phenomenon were already quite complete.

He would watch the stuff as the surface spiraled about, as the gray sections of it would tip and up-endedly slide the one beneath the other, as great chunks of cliff would thunderingly fall into the lava with a ponderous splashing and upheaval of the heavy liquid, as fountains of liquid fire would dance with clumsy grace and fantasy--would watch it as though dazed by its vastness, as though hypnotized by its constant variation.

Then one day as we were taking motion pictures of a particularly beautiful play of lava, I saw his eyes eagerly scanning the formation on which he stood. And suddenly he stepped closer to the crater, stooped, and scooped up something from the ground.

He held out his hand to me, one finger bleeding plentifully--and in the palm was a fluffy bit of hairlike material, soft as spun glass, and really the same stuff spun by the winds playing on the spurting lava.

"Pele's hair," he said with a smile.

I nodded.

"Yes," I said, "another pretty native superstition. And you've cut yourself on the sharp lava break--that's a blood sacrifice for the hair, I should say, eh?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned away. I watched him from the tail of my eye. He did not toss the soft stuff to the winds, but surreptitiously stowed it in an envelope. Playing with me, eh, I smiled to myself? Or seized with a sudden taste for curio-saving? Or--what else might it be?

Why this growing secrecy--if indeed it were secrecy at all?

That night I found one of the new books on the spreading porch where he had undoubtedly forgotten it. I picked it up, and read the title.

It was: "Native Hawaiian Superstitions." The author I have forgotten.

I laid it in my hand, and it opened naturally and easily at a chapter labeled:

"Legends of Kilauea." And a little further along came the story of Mme. Pele, the goddess of fire, and of native sacrificial feasts in her honor on the crater's crumbling edge.

So that was what Rhodes was reading. I had heard of such books. I knew the Kanakas had such tales, such folk-lore. Rhodes knew that I knew this too. Then why, I pondered, this secretiveness? Why did he not share the books with me? Was it perhaps that he didn't wish to distract me from the work at hand--gathering facts? Was it that he knew it was utter nonsense, and so was a little ashamed that I find him immersed in such literature after all his outbursts regarding his obsession for the pursuit of fact and his mocking of those who, halted at their wall, according to their lights, conjure up spirits or conjecture as to principles?

Or was it something else?

Why had he been so fascinated to-day in that little tangle of Mme. Pele's hair, when the stuff was in every nook and cranny near the crater, and we

had seen it every visit we had made?

Why were his observations of the changes in the pit made now with so much more of the fanatic than the cool, hard-headed, practical-minded, only-fact-believing man of exact science that heretofore he had been?

Why had he not accepted my little joke about blood sacrifice when I noticed his finger bleed from the cut made by the newly broken lava edge?

He hadn't. He hadn't even smiled. He had simply turned away, and tucked that bit of volcanic spun glass in his pocket.

And that evening when he came in, I having left the crater earlier in the day in order to develop some film in which I was particularly interested, I mentioned jokingly, testingly, I had better say, these books.

It was natural for me to do this, too, for no sooner was the dinner over and our cigars lit, than he started for his own room.

As his hand touched the door knob, I opened the question.

"Pretty interesting stuff for a practical man whose business it is to set down fact," I hinted.

He paused--his face a study.

"You mean--have seen--" he then said a bit hotly, chin lifted.

"I didn't spy, Harry, old man," I said. "But why the secrecy--why all the--"

He closed the door, and dropped into a seat at my side, whence through the great glass windows he could view the fast dimming crater. He seemed to be pondering over just how to explain himself, and put his action into the right light. His cigar smoke drifted idly for several minutes, before he spoke. And finally when he did vouchsafe a further answer, his voice was calm, but his words uncertain, as if he himself were not sure of himself, were not quite clear in his own mind.

"I don't know," he said. "I confess it--I don't know why I did it. I sent for the books on--well, on impulse. And I found, when they came at last, that I was a bit fussed, you know--wondering what you would say."

I raised my brows.

"Was there any reason why I shouldn't think it quite natural that you read that type of book--dealing with the subject that is our present study--even though only native superstition?"

He glanced at me--and I read surprise in his quick eye, and a little mortification as well.

"Well," he said slowly, "you know I detest fanciful--"

"Yes," I interrupted quickly, "you did detest such stuff."

At that his face hardened slightly. Then he said shortly:

"The things interest me--rest me. And it is possible, is it not, that even native folk-lore may shed some light on ancient volcanic phenomena here. Legends originate in something--some physical, concrete action or object of nature, do they not?"

I had to acknowledge that they did. But nevertheless, I could see clearly enough from his talk, his actions, the suspicious and furtive look in his eye, that he had hidden these books from me for more reason than he would acknowledge. And as I sat and the blue smoke of my cigar mingled in the ensuing silence with that from his, I saw him again as he stood a few days before in rapt fascination on the crater's edge--I saw again the strange look that was on him as he held up that suddenly plucked fluff of Mme. Pele's hair.

The first days of my stay with him he had not acted thus. Why did he now?

Surely, tourists enough had I seen gazing enraptured, even dazed, into the seething, glowing crater, their eyes reflecting the reds and vermilion of its fires, their cheeks afire with the heat. All who came to see Kilauea did thus;

then, awestruck, inspired, perhaps a bit frightened and dreaming of a cleaner, friendlier life during the rest of their days, they picked up their bits of lava, their envelopes full of Mme. Pele's hair, burned the edges of their souvenir post cards in the red hot fissures, and went their way.

But Rhodes--his case was different. His was not to be expected. His was unique.

And why?

As I dreamed thus there came a knock on the door.

I instructed Azaki as he came through the room to answer it.

"Wait!" said Rhodes quickly, "I think I know who it was."

And he opened the door himself and stepped outside.

#### CHAPTER IV - THE RUMBLING OF THE PIT.

I CONFESS that I listened intently, and unashamed of my eavesdropping.

From the soft gutturals of the strangers, for I had seen at least three forms standing in the gathering darkness outside, I knew them to be natives. And I concluded at once that they were bringing specimens to us--possibly of a whiter-colored lava formation that was found in one of the olden craters, long since quiet.

Yet when, after the conversation had continued for at least five minutes, Rhodes gravely and with only a silent nod to me came in, took his hat, and left again, I began to wonder what his errand might be.

Rapidly on the hard roadway the echo of their footsteps retreated--and I was left alone with my cigar and my reverie.

Heretofore, in all our expeditions--and Rhodes and I had been to Java, to the Aleutian Islands, to Popocatepetl in Mexico, to Vesuvius in Italy, and Etna in the island of Sicily, in our pursuit of facts about volcanic action-- Rhodes had been in all things my confidant, and I his. Personal matters we discussed with the openness of full and trusting friendship; business matters with the confidence of a friend's suggestion and aid; professional matters with the free give and take, acceptance or mockery, construction or sarcastic destruction, of two men who had studied the same branch of geology and shared the same discoveries, the same defeats, and who held the same ambitions, for a full score of years.

And yet here, but why I could not for the life of me see, Rhodes chose to hold aloof, chose other books than those we might together enjoy, chose other thoughts than those he might communicate to me, chose other companions than myself for an untimely and secretive jaunt away from the laboratory. Leaving me, his lifelong partner in all he did and was, alone.

With my cigar dropping its ashes unheeded, I stared out at the crater which now, with the great glow in the clouds above the Pit of Everlasting Fire where dwelt Mme. Pele, and with the living rubies dotted about the great basin where the little tongues of lava continually broke up the open, was a veritable bivouac ground of a mighty army. The scene was beautiful, and I confess, despite its natural explanation, awesome. And I shrugged my shoulders as I thought of those books on native superstition. Who, viewing such a vast example of nature's mightiness, could blame the natives for their beliefs. Who, seeing that gleam from the fiery pit, could mock the native when he declared that pit to be under the control of Mme. Pele, goddess of fire--particularly when that mysterious, and all-powerful superwoman's hair lay in every nook and cranny near the pit itself. I smiled. What these simple, spirit-loving, spirit-fearing folk would not conjure up in answer to their questions of the unknown!

By ten o'clock Rhodes had not returned, and, a bit disgusted, I told Azaki to go to bed and turned in myself.

In the morning, at breakfast, Rhodes seemed a bit sheepish, and hung his head as though he felt his truancy.

Then, with the meal half over, he suddenly burst out:

"Poor fellows, poor chaps--they--they believe--believe."

I glanced up questioningly.

Harrison flashed red as the strawberries on his plate.

"Believe, eh?" I said a bit coldly.

He pattered with his spoon.

"Came to get me last night--me"--he went on hastily, yet, it appeared to me as though to confirm his own thought--"me, the most practical man in the world--whose sole ambition is to discover and make note of the fact--get me to go to one of their infer--I should say--ungodly native luaus in honor of Mme. Pele. Imagine"--he looked up but his eyes were anywhere but on mine--"imagine that--me--at a native feast, eating seaweed, and unsinged chicken, and raw pork liver, and slimy poi--in honor of a Kanaka goddess. Ye gods!"

He pattered once more at his berries.

"You left here a bit hurriedly, Harry," I said.

He hastened to answer--face still red.

"They wanted me to hurry--pretty far to go--and the kahuna said there's a prophecy or something that there's to be an eruption, a violent one, that'll cover the whole island very soon; so they wanted me. Pele has said it, they declare. Absolutely sure about it. Can you imagine that? And getting me--me, a man of fact, mind you--fact and cold, hard, science--to go to their horrible feed and--well, and help them--help stop that, awful thing that's prophesied."

"Help them!" I cried. Then, with I don't know what underlying thought forcing my words: "Think you can?" I questioned with a bit of scorn in my voice.

His answer was astonishing.

"God knows!" he said with great reverence--then abruptly put his napkin down and left the table.

All that day he avoided me.

And that evening, again, he disappeared.

And so for a week at least each day the same thing occurred.

Our conversations were limited to bare necessity. His attitude, do not mistake me, was not unfriendly--but simply aloof. He acted as though a bit ashamed, a bit abstracted, a bit frightened of possible consequences of I knew not what--a bit mysterious, a bit secretive. He acted as he had never acted before. Two months ago he was himself, Harrison Rhodes--now, after two months' ultimate acquaintance with the volcano, he was another man--another being, I might say.

On the evening of the eighth day, however, my friend did not as usual retire to his room, nor did the natives come to the door and call him away.

Instead, he sat himself down, humming softly, and picked up one of his books and idly fingered it.

Then he said, out of a clear sky:

"Well, old man, you'll admit, after what you've seen of the fiery pit, that if there isn't a goddess of fire, there ought to be one."

I looked up. His face was unclouded, clear. This, I instantly concluded, was more like my friend's real self.

"Absolutely!" I affirmed enthusiastically, and waited for him to go on.

But he did not--simply sat down and puffed away at his cigar and turned the leaves of his book.

And at perhaps ten he arose, stretched himself, smiled warmly, shamefacedly, as though in confession and plea for forgiveness, and went off to bed. And I, after a glance at the fire-dotted abyss below us, retired too.

I was awakened shortly by a slight trembling of my bed--as though some giant hand was gently shaking it. I sat up in the darkness, and heard a muffled exclamation from the next room as I did so. My bed trembled again, and the timbers of the building creaked protestingly--and I knew at once--an earthquake--a good one, and this house on the very edge of that dizzy gulf!

Even as I leaped from my bed, the door opened, and the giant, pajamaed figure of Rhodes stepped in.

His voice was hollow as he spoke--and his words unbelievable.

"Even as it was prophesied," said he, "it has come to be--Mme. Pele awakens."

A shot of cold thrilled my spine. Was the man suddenly mad? Or was the whole thing a vast hoax he had contrived to relieve the monotony of our study. Should I rush him, knock him down, and drag him out of the house before another earthquake shock should precipitate us both into the hungry abyss below--or should I pass the thing off as a joke.

I decided on the latter.

"Nonsense!" I cried. "Get some clothes on and let's get off the edge before we're tumbled in."

His white face shook negatively.

"The kahuna said it," he went on, "at that first feast he foretold it--Mme. Pele awakens."

"Get shoes on, anyway--snap into 'em," I ordered.

He came over and put a hand on my shoulder--I winced at its chilly touch. The scene was weird enough--what with the drizzle outside, the creak of the house, the pale ghost of this madman beside me, the talk of fire goddesses, and all about us tinged with the crimson reflection from the glare of the eternal fires without. Rhodes patted my shoulder reassuringly.

"Don't worry, old fellow," he said soothingly. "Nothing will happen to us--at least"--here he hesitated, and I saw that his eyes sought Halemauau, above which the clouds were as of blood--"at least," he repeated--"not yet."

Another rumbling shook the building. The hand on my shoulder gave a spasmodic clutch.

"What the devil do you know about it?" I cried. "Come, now, you've got to go."

He did not resist. And once outside, my own fear left me, and I confess I felt the complete fool that not so long ago Rhodes had called me. We waited in the silence for half an hour or more. Then, following the example of the hastily clad guests we could see on the hotel lawn, we turned back to our rooms.

At his door Rhodes seized my arm again.

"Forgive me, old man," he said quietly, sanely. "I--I must have been dreaming--and those kahunas are so damn impressive when they prophesy--I admit it--must have had me going." Then he nodded toward the crater. "I don't see that the shock has changed things any over there, do you?"

Through the glass I could see no increase or decrease in the palpitating glow above the fiery pit.

"Not yet!" I said shortly.

Rhodes's hand still held me. "Not offended, old fellow, are you?" he asked.

"See you in the morning," I answered, and left him.

I could hear him sigh deeply as he entered his own room. And later, as I lay awake, unable to sleep as yet, I could hear him tossing and muttering on his bed, and wondered what was so troubling his mind. Was the man a bit crazed by his strenuous concentration over the gathering of fact, or was the various and vast superstitious lore of Kilauea overpowering his scientific faith, and slowly making him, too, as confident in the belief in, and worship of, Mme. Pele, as any native of these islands? Or, after all, was it all a hoax--was he simply, by strenuous means, trying to have a little sport with me?

Toward dawn came another knocking on the door, and a thump from Rhodes's room. But hushed voices immediately following, told me there was no need for me to arise. The natives again! Yet this time my friend did not leave with them, but shortly the door closed, and I heard him retire once more.

## CHAPTER V - TONGUES OF FIRE.

AT the fiery pit that day were fair a hundred natives.

"Come to make sacrifice," nodded Rhodes, a lot more communicative than lately.

"To their gods?" I asked, to draw him out.

"To Mme. Pele, goddess of fire," he said. "Those fellows last night came to ask me if it would be all right."

I stared.

"Came to ask *you*? What do they think you are--a kahuna?"

He shrugged his shoulders and looked away.

"Hardly that, I think. But they know I study the thing, and so--" He made an expressive gesture.

"Humph!" I grunted, eyeing him--"I study it, too--they don't--"

He wheeled.

"Perhaps," he said shortly--"perhaps I understood them better."

"Harry!" I cried then, "do you mean to say that you believe all this bally rot about this thing being alive, and all that?"

I was resolved to get at the root of things at last.

When he turned again to answer me his eyes were aglow. But instead of the flood of biting words I had expected, came the following enthusiastic outburst:

"Why, man, man!" he cried, flinging his arms out wide, "it *is* alive! It's the good old mother earth alive. Form-changing mother nature, struggling to exert her power, and in the struggle shaking the very earth as she did last night. Can't you see, man, that this living fire is indeed the living earth? Why the very spirit of the universe is fire--the very heavens are alight with it at night--the infinitesimal bit of cosmic dust which we inhabit owes its life to its congenial warmth. Fire? God, it's man's salvation. The structure of all our civilization is built on fire, even as is the ground we stand on at this moment. Man is man, dominant, thinking, dextrous, because of fire. Alive, you ask? Alive? You bet this old Kilauea is alive--as alive as you and I--and its spirit is as animate.

"Good old Mme. Pele"--here he choked and his face paled, and he added in a lower tone--"and cursed old Mme. Pele! The goddess of fire! Yes--good, for she warms our bodies--evil, for she feeds upon our souls. God! old man, if you but understood her as do I. These last days"--his voice broke again, then--"and Pele, Mme. Pele, the living earth rising and falling, leaping playfully, storming in diabolic rage; gay, dull, beautiful in glowing color,

now hideously red, mouthing at these walls that hold it in from the destruction it might do man--the force, the living, vibrant force of it--seeking outlet with little fingers of it eagerly breaking into the sunshine and freedom through every long-sought weakness in the barrier the outside cold throws over it; great flows of it now and again seething over the crater's mammoth lip and seeking to find far fields; or baffled, falling deep, deep, deep back into the unfathomed depths of Halemaumau, back to the comforting bosom of Mme. Pele, back for fiery food, and new vigor, and greater reenforcement for the next vast attempt. Alive, man? Alive? And you can call it bally rot, what these wise old natives think--what they believe. I tell you, friend of mine, that had we, too, dwelt as long as they beneath the glow of Kilauea, beneath the rule of Mme. Pele, we, too, might hold some strange beliefs.

"Look below you at those natives--even now they make sacrifice to Pele, for last night she made her power felt; last night came her warning even as the kahuna declared it would, even as the kahuna swore she had told him as he slept--warning that she was about to rise, to summon all her fires, all her terrors, and all her diabolic hosts of hissing gas, and liquid flame, and vast torturing floods of the molten flesh and bone of earth, and sweep with godlike avenging power over the fair lands and villages and cities below, that once more can she say: 'Behold, how little is man; what conceit hath he in the puny forces he controls; what pride in the puerile destruction he makes in far countries; how vain are the intricate labors with which he builds in this--while I, with but a single day of silent use of fire, can destroy a civilization, can erect a new land.' Thus did the kahuna declare Mme. Pele had spoken in his ear, my friend--and thus it may well be."

Rhodes paused, breathless.

I stared at him in unbelief--then turned to the worshipers.

The natives, perhaps a hundred strong, were gathered on the windward side of the fiery pit in a curved line not a dozen feet from the sharp, cut edge of the crater. The lava pool was now within as many feet, too, of the brink, and was in slow motion, the leathery, heat-hazed, surface lead colored, heaving gently, corrugatingly and folding, as it spiraled below the cliffs. None of the molten fluid was visible save, where the tough scum met these jaggedly

rising walls, and there, as usual, the liquid lava constantly and hungrily lapped, lapped at the crumbling rock, bit off huge chunks of it, swallowed them bodily and lapped, lapped, lapped, and mouthed and chewed for more--insatiable was Pele's appetite.

The stuff was alive!

A sudden chanting arose from the group of worshipers, and with the rhythm of the song their bodies moved in unison. One old fellow who seemed to be the leader tore off all his clothing but a cincture about the loins, and led the chanting and the dance. Faster and faster the time arose, wilder and wilder the antics and gyrations of the dancers became, until finally they went suddenly into frenzy.

I heard Rhodes, gazing spellbound beside me, gasp as the madness increased.

And when the leader seized the pile of his clothing and advanced to the very lip of the crater's maw, stood there a moment with eyes upcast, then threw the lot of it into the mass beneath him, my companion muttered:

"Good old kahuna. That'll help--that'll help."

And he pointed to the natives, who by now were all casting into the mouth of the pit small articles they valued--seed chains, poa pots, metal rings, and ornaments saved from the old days of the whaler settlements. I gripped Rhodes's arm.

"Is it sacrifice?" I whispered.

"To Pele!" he whispered breathlessly-- "to Mme. Pele. That kahuna has brought them here--the prophecy, the earthquake." My friend paused a moment, then muttered: "God! If I only could help--could stop the trouble--could prevent--"

He seized my arm convulsively.

"Look--look, man, for God's sake--the pit--the pit!"

I turned from the natives--and froze stiffly. For the level of the lava had risen half-way to the jagged crust of the verge--and before my eyes, with a silent menace that was diabolical, was swiftly rising still--but a few scant feet and the margin would be reached and the fiery stuff rush over upon us.

For a space I stared, hypnotized.

Death in the most horrible form confronted us, for the crusted lip of the crater was, but for a few jagged bluffs, the highest part of the volcano. Should that steadily rising mass of molten fire reach the lip no power of man's could prevent us and those simple worshipers from falling its victims. I looked about me, and dimly heard Rhodes shouting to the Kanakas, and saw him motioning desperately for them to run back while the chance for life still remained.

They, too, seemed as dazed as I at the sudden rise of the lava, hypnotized by the terrible menace of its motion.

The kahuna, by his frantic gesticulation, was evidently exhorting them to stay; and he seized treasures from the heap before him and cast them into the mass to appease the angry spirit of Kilauea. Rhodes continued to wildly wave, and his voice was already hoarse from pleading with them to retreat. Then, suddenly, like sheep, they bolted for the little ridge by which they had come--daring not to cross the slightly lower swale toward us.

They were safe, and I breathed a sigh of relief and turned to seek our own retreat. Then I heard a cry that seemed racked from the souls of men--and I turned about again.

Rhodes, beside me, pale as death, exclaimed harshly:

"They're cut off--a flow has broken over the edge just beyond that turn--they'll have to risk it this way!"

And then he shouted again--and by now the level of the stuff was lapping at the very rim, and our clothes beginning to smoke.

"This way--this way!" he cried.

"Your only chance--this--" And then he interjected some words in the Hawaiian tongue of which I knew nothing, and had never known him to know anything before. Then: "Cross the low place--for God's sake, don't hesitate--come--come! Ah, God, it's too late--too late!"

## CHAPTER VI - THE LAP OF PELE.

IT was, indeed, too late. For even as the flock was teetering in hesitation, the lip was reached, and a wild, eager, seething mass hissed triumphantly over the swale.

A shivering wail arose. The natives were cut off on both sides by spreading rivers of molten rock, gorgeous glowing streams which, the veritable arms and fingers of Mme. Pele herself, sought out every nook, every crevice, every fissure. As we stood, half-dazed, the mass in the pit arose higher and higher, and the flood over the rim became deeper and widened hungrily, and the living mass of it arose about the little islet of higher lava on which the little group of erstwhile worshipers pitifully huddled.

The kahuna, his back to the creeping death, still exhorted his flock to pray, to sacrifice. Wildly he shouted, frantically, he tore off chains from his flock, hair ornaments, clothing, and cast them into the seething torrent. Vainly he raised his arms to the crater and cried out to Pele to hold back the horror that crept upon them, that so eagerly devoured with flaming tongues the sacrifices they had made, to stay the torture that even now the half-naked assemblage was beginning to feel.

A curse gritted at my side, and Rhodes megaphoned his hands and pleaded frantically with them.

"Sacrifice, you fools!" he cried. "All--all--all you have--you, there, with that purse in your hand--throw it to Pele--throw it to Pele! Fools, is it worth more than your life? Will you burn in that hell of fire before you give that money? Sacrifice--and Pele will hear your prayers--give--give--give--all--all!"

Madly the Kanakas stripped. Great chunks of the cliff beside them fell off, eaten away by the blazing flood, and floated like islands on the rushing stream. A great hissing geyser of sulfur smoke and lava leaped a hundred feet in the air from the center of the crater. The solid crust began to tremble. The natives fell on their knees on the smoking ground.

"Pele! Pele! Pele!"

Rhodes, pale, seized me. His breath came more quietly. He was as death itself.

"There is but one way," he cried to me, "but one way--Pele must be appeased and those fools--"

I turned on him.

"We cannot stop that flood. Let's get out over that point while we can. God help them--no man can now!" I cried.

Rhodes's face set.

"No man can save them," he repeated. "You are right. No man can--but a god could, or a *goddess*--and Pele, Mme. Pele."--he turned once more to the natives--"Give what you have left!" he cried. "All--all--sacrifice--or it will be too late."

He turned on me savagely.

"There is one way left to save them," he muttered. "Lead on--I'll follow you. One way!" he cried. "And the fools see it not!" He gritted his teeth. "Nor will I tell them, for I see now it is for me to do. The kahuna said it when he told us of Pele's talk. One way--"

His voice died away behind me, though I could hear the gritting and scraping of his heavy boots on the crust over which our path to safety lay.

A mighty wailing arose as we left, and I covered my ears with my hands to keep it out.

Then I cried out once more:

"Hurry, hurry, man, hurry--the stuff is higher and higher--and we must cross."

There was no answer. I turned.

Rhodes was not following me.

He was rapidly making his way up a steep incline that led to the highest crag overhanging the fiery pit--a mass of hardened lava that arose straight forty feet above the sea of liquid fire in which Pele dwelled. At the very tip, with his feet at the brink itself, he paused--his coat and hair waving in the seaward breeze, his profile bending toward the center of the mass, toward the vast geyser-like eruption that gracefully, ponderously, and menacingly diabolic, danced in the center.

A full minute Harrison Rhodes, man of hard science and cold fact, stood there, arms hanging naturally, head slightly bent, figure erect. Then he stretched out his arms toward that playing fountain of molten stone.

"Pele!" he cried clearly, simply. "Pele--accept a final sacrifice--I am coming. Take me, and withhold your anger, Pele--I am yours."

And he forthwith flung himself from the crag--flung himself, and hung suspended in mid air a moment even as does an expert diver. Then down, down--

Involuntarily I started for him, hands outstretched--to help to stop him. Then involuntarily, too, and mercifully, my eyes closed, and I fell upon my knees with my head buried in my hands.

How long I thus remained I do not know. Yet when I stumbled back to that same crag in a sobbing effort to see if something might not be done about my friend, a sight struck my eyes that has caused me to wonder much since as to the exact meaning of Harrison Rhodes's faith.

For the flow had ceased, the playing fountain had fallen, and the level of the lava, now once more gray and leather surfaced, had fallen to a vast and dizzy depth--the glowing lake of fire had retreated--the crater was now simply a deep well of vast size--and, for the time at least, harmless.

And when I looked across to the islet on which were marooned the Kanakas, the turbulent stream of liquid fire had already crusted over, the natives were singing once more; and though to me the song sounded more like the funeral dirge of my good friend, I learned afterward that it was in praise of and thanksgiving to the goddess of fire, to Mme. Pele--who had stayed her hand in time and saved their lives.

I blindly found my way back to the hotel. And the first remark of the persons there was, how badly my trouser knees were scorched.

"Had I perhaps been worshiping Mme. Pele?" they asked.

And then I told them of the thing my friend had done.

## The Cult of the Dead by Gabriel Wilson

(pseudonym of Ray Cummings)



MY VILLA lies behind a high brick wall, with a tall grilled gate at the entrance to its driveway. It was up this driveway, lined with palms and bordered with flowers, that I saw my young nephew approaching on foot. He had arrived at Port-au-Prince from New York a few hours before to spend several weeks as my guest.

I watched his approach from my doorway with a strange sense of coming trouble. There was something in his laughing, eager face that boded daring and inquisitiveness, two attributes most likely to precipitate disaster among the native Haitians. His grinning abandonment was accentuated by the jaunty swing of the camera hung over his shoulder and a row of pencils standing ostentatiously out of the breast pocket of his coat.

"I've come!" he said gaily, as he swung up my piazza steps. "And I'll not go until every Cult and Creed of Haiti is registered here--and here!" He tapped his camera and then his pencils; and he winked at me as we shook hands.

That evening, with the eerie night sounds of the tropics floating in our open windows, I warned my nephew uneasily.

"Harry," I said, "you must realize this is not America and you're not dealing with Americans here. This is a strange country, filled with weird cults, superstitions, penalties and mysteries. Only a fool would try to pry into them, unless one uses the utmost tact and caution."

He grinned. "Sure, I know. And tact is my middle name."

"Things get under your skin here, too, Harry, if you play with them," I warned. "Perhaps it's the native's earnestness, their own sincere belief in the existence of these things that are piffle to you and me. I don't know. But I do know I've given them a wide berth."

"Coward!" he laughed.

"Fools rush in," I countered.

BUT the lad's light-heartedness was irresistible. I joined his gay laughter with a chuckle of my own. Then I sobered once more, for mine was a real responsibility.

"If you're set on getting authentic information and pictures, I'll take you to see Dr. Banè. He doesn't connect himself with any cult, but being a native, he has information and influence where I have none."

"Right," Harry agreed. "When will you take me to him? Could we get hold of him tonight? You see I'm keen to get started."

"We'll be off tomorrow morning early," I promised. "But you must keep in line and don't try anything fancy."

He knew what I meant. "You're the boss," he said.

The next morning we went to downtown Port-au-Prince and across from Mohr & Lauren's offices to the office of Dr. Banè. He was there, alone, and expecting us, as I had sent a message to him earlier.

"This is Dr. Banè," I told my nephew. "Dr. Banè, my nephew, Harry Mason."

They shook hands.

An hour later, I put down the pamphlet I had been perusing and listened and watched the incongruous sight of my clean-cut, ultra-American nephew and the black, quietly intelligent Haitian, with his queer injection of realism into what he was discussing.

Dr. Banè was saying: "This necromancy--the uses which they make of various parts of the corpses--has been verified, of course, a condition which the American government is intent on blotting out."

"Yes," Harry agreed, "I know that. Some facts about their struggle with the natives here have appeared in military reports of the Caco Guerilla uprisings, but the reports were brief. No details. But the little that seeped out, intrigued the public. It's my job to get some real dope about it."

"Well, now let me see what will be of further interest," Banè reflected as he accepted one of Harry's cigarettes. My nephew took one himself and lighted first Dr. Banè's and then his own. Dr. Bang smiled as he puffed it and gave me a sideward glance. I could see he liked the boy.

"Their use of the corpses--" Harry prompted.

"Oh, yes. They rub the grease made from the dead brain upon the edges of machetes and tools."

"Why?" Harry demanded.

"Let's call it a superstition. They believe that in this way the implement will become intelligent--have the ability of thought--and cut more accurately. The same thing applies to the head of the hammer, so that it will know

where to strike. And upon the sights of a gun, to insure the bullet of reaching its mark. I know of an actual incident, quoted here by natives.

"The grease from the dead brain had been rubbed on the gun of a young warrior. He was shot in battle. As he fell, his comrades swear they saw his gun, without this warrior's assistance, rise up, aim, and fire. The enemy at whom it aimed, was shot to death, whereas our hero recovered and lived to tell the tale.

"To him, the dead brain upon the sight of his gun, saved his life. For if the enemy had not been instantly killed, the young warrior most certainly would have received a fatal shot from his adversary, who was closing in upon him. It all sounds very fantastic, doesn't it? But these things are accepted here without question."

HARRY leaned forward. "That's the brain," he said in a low voice. "What about the rest of the body-the hands and feet and arms?"

"They make *ouangas* of them. In other words, charms, used for various purposes.

"So that's what a *ouanga* is," Harry said softly. "I wondered. I read about them in a book back home. It called them a charm, used for both good and evil."

"Yes," Dr. Banè; agreed. "The *ouanga* is their chief weapon--for good or evil. Naturally, there are many incidents involving them, gossiped among the natives. One of them I know will possibly interest you."

"An *ouanga* used for evil?"

Dr. Banè smiled again at Harry's swift, punchy question.

"No," he said. "Let this be a time it was used for good. The young woman who had had the charm placed about her neck at one of the meetings of the

*Culte des Morts*, was leaning over about to pluck some berries. Suddenly she felt a jab, as though someone were nudging her. Then another. She stood up, startled, for there was no one in sight. Again the jab. It was in the back of her neck. A warning?

"She was superstitious, and suddenly she remembered she was wearing a *ouanga*, supposedly sent her from her dead father in return for the good she had done him by leaving food and water for him at his grave. A dead hand, severed at the wrist, was strung on the *ouanga* at the back of her neck; and it seemed as though one of its fingers had nudged her, trying to warn her of danger."

Dr. Banè paused to light a cigar as he stared at Harry.

"And that was all?" Harry asked.

"No, that wasn't all. The young woman had become alert with this realization. She looked swiftly about. Then, behind some shrubs a few feet away, she saw the evil face of the man who had murdered her father, and who had never been apprehended. She let out a scream. The brutal man crouched, started toward her. She was helpless here, far from other humans, with nothing but the birds and the beasts to hear her cry.

"The murderer was upon her now; he clapped his black hand to her mouth, his other hand held her in an iron grip. He was facing her, struggling to draw her against him. In horror she looked down at her breast. Where it seemed that her *ouanga* there was moving. A portion of a human wrist and forearm was strung on the *ouanga*. Its bone, six or eight inches long, was blunt at one end, but it was splintered at the other into a sharp point.

"The bone lay flat against her chest, but now as the murderous man clutched her to him, distinctly she saw the dangling *ouanga* bone turn itself outward, so that it was horizontal between them. Its blunt end pressed against her, and as the murderer's arms drew her close, she heard him scream. He had been stabbed to the heart by the sharp-pointed bone, and he fell dead at her feet. Her magic weapon, needing neither her brain nor will to guide it, had saved her life. She went screaming hysterically to the small town and told her tale. It was one of a great number, very similar."

A strange silence followed this gruesome anecdote. Harry sat staring before him, lost in thought for the moment, weighing the possibilities of these mysteries of Haiti. At last he said:

"I had thought that, for evil purposes, they included the poisonous leaves of the machineel tree. But this is quite different."

DR. Banè smiled. "Don't take it too seriously. We're only quoting the tales of ignorant superstitious natives." Then he sobered. "But, of course, we have no way of being sure one way or the other. It might be exceedingly dangerous for you to attempt to verify, or discredit, what I've been telling you. These things are best allowed to remain with those who comprehend and seek them. But for you and me--let them remain mysteries in which we dare not delve except superficially.

"You would get no more actual facts than I have given you. And if you forced yourself into one of these meetings, you would have to believe that you would be dealing not only with these superstitious natives, but possibly with the Unknown. The chances are, one way or another, you would not live to put it before your readers."

Why had Dr. Banè said this? What had prompted him to fear for Harry, just as I had feared? Was he reading the man, or the future, or was it some mysterious instinct which warned him for the reckless, inquisitive young man's safety? I did not know. But the fact he had felt as I felt, put me doubly on my guard for Harry's protection.

"This cult is little known. Perhaps there is no other man here who could tell you these things, other than its members," he added.

"What's the name of this particular cult?" Harry asked.

"*Culte des Morts*: Cult of the Dead. Papa Nebo is its oracle, delving in deep matters in which I have no interest and yet at which I dare not laugh."

"But I must have the pictures," Harry said, almost as though he were speaking to himself. "Gosh, what a scoop for me. And I could write it. There'd be warmth, a feeling behind it."

I coughed and yawned. This thing had gone far enough: it was beginning to give me the creeps. Dr. Banè saw that I wished the interview terminated. He stood up, and Harry rose and faced him.

"These pictures," Dr. Banè said solemnly, "cannot be obtained, either by you or me. I advise against trying it, most emphatically. This cult assembles at night only. In the daytime this Papa Nebo is a black man, mild, impersonal. His picture would do no good, and the danger to yourself might be extreme."

We left a few moments later and returned to my villa. I must say its normality and quiet were in strong contrast to our visit with Dr. Banè. I had left his office with an unpleasant, slightly foreboding sense of being too close to an ugly reality: a side of the life here in Haiti, both incomprehensible and revolting, yet casting its shadow of possibility and crowding mystery.

I felt also, in a sense, a defilement in even the impersonal discussion of the hellish cults of this devilish island. An almost overpowering impulse was upon me to force Harry out of it all; to forbid him, as his uncle, to even so much as take his camera, should he go off on any pretext from my grounds. He had some facts. Let them suffice.

But I held my peace, merely suggesting that he take Dr. Banè's advice. I took the precaution of ordering Chauvet, my houseboy, to shadow Harry whenever he left the grounds alone.

A week of quiet went by. Harry had discovered in my library, books by Paracelsus, Eliphas Levy, Frazer, Swedenborg, William James, and Blavatski; a rich field indeed for esoteric research and for anyone interested in comparative religion, folklore, mysticism, and magic. He seemed satisfied in sopping up their contents, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

During the month that followed, he began to discuss these books with me. At first our talks were brief, impersonal. Then they took on a more argumentative turn. The boy's interest was a thousand times increased since his arrival. I realized with a pang that the books had been like fuel to the fire. I wished fervently that he had never read one of them.

AT THE end of the month, he had grown noticeably thinner. The fire and excitement in his eyes were intensified. He would go for strolls without me quite often now, slipping out without my knowledge. Yet Chauvet would come back faithfully and report. It was obvious, from what Chauvet said, that these strolls were scouting expeditions.

They were innocuous enough until one night less than two months after his arrival in Haiti. I was lying in my bed, tossing restlessly, when Chauvet rapped sharply upon my door, asking permission to see me with all speed. His voice was high-pitched. I could discern an excitement and fear in its shrill tone.

I threw open my door. Chauvet rushed in, breathless. He told me in gasping sentences that Harry had discovered the habitation of Classinia, the Papa Nebo of the *Culte des Morts*. Secretly he had planned to attend a meeting, under guise of being one of the *papaloise*. He had dyed his skin with juices, obtained native garb, and at this instant he was awaiting the arrival of members of the cult to join them and attend their meeting, his camera hidden in the folds of his costume.

There was no question of his danger. In less than ten minutes I was dressed, and Chauvet and I were on our way, riding through the mountains between *Morne Ronis* and *Les Verettes* until we came to a ravine below the trail. There, huddled behind a clump of banana trees, was the habitation I sought.

"Wait here," I admonished Chauvet, "but come if you hear a disturbance."

I had decided upon a brash course. Everyone on this island knew or had heard of good Dr. Banè, and although he was not a member of any cult, he

was respected and trusted not to betray them to the American government.

I slid down the slight incline and came to the entrance to the door. A man from within saw me and came to me.

"*Bon soir, blanc,*" he said, eyeing me furtively.

I introduced myself and told him of my interest in the *Culte des Morts*, and of my credentials from my good friend, Dr. Banè. He looked at me with suspicion, wondering doubtless, if this were a trick of the government's to get evidence. A woman appeared in the doorway and he told her in his native tongue, my request. She gazed at me aggressively, unpleasantly. But a growing panic over Harry, tensed me.

I forced my most amiable manner. I was desperately afraid for him, here in the hands of these crazy fanatics. Or, if you will, these evil necromancers.

The sky was overcast. I felt a few drops of fine rain. In another five minutes the heavens would open and there would be a downpour. Brief, perhaps, but torrential. The flashes of lightning in the distant sky were answered with low rumbles of thunder. All evening there had been promise of this storm. Harry must have grown acquainted with its warning signals. But he was obsessed, as fanatical in his way, as these natives. Dear God, I prayed that he might not reap their vengeance at his brash intrusion into their mysteries!

Finally the black man turned and gave a grudging assent to my request. A sense of awe came over me, for I knew that few, if any white men, had ever witnessed this particular scene. It was not a religious ceremony, nor had it anything to do with Voodism. But it did have to do with the magic workings of the dead!

A shuddering chill crept down my spine as I followed my guide into the hut and down a dark corridor behind it. It was evident that the moment was at hand; the *papaloise* were gathered. Was Harry behind this door we were approaching, ready to risk his life? And if he were, would I be able to control these people and explain to them the lad's harmless purpose, nevertheless an unforgivable affront in their sight to their dead and their magic?

MY guide opened the door upon a narrow, long room, very faintly lighted. I caught a glimpse, as I entered it, of a table at the far end, filled with bones, a shovel and pick. All about me, were prostrated natives, moaning, writhing, supplicating their dead. I searched frantically for Harry. I was sure I should recognize his broad shoulders. But there were fully a hundred natives gathered here, and the light was too dim to discern more than blurred blobs of figures. My guide continued forward, but I shrank back to the wall in the rear, hoping to attract as little attention as possible.

My gaze continued to rove swiftly about. There was a wooden cross in the front of the room, painted like a totem pole and wreathed with a feather boa. Before it were rows of lighted tapers, slender, brown, crudely made candles of the sort placed on graves and in the niches of tombs. But my glance at these things was casual.

There was an increasing alarm upon me, for no one could look upon this sight and remain calm and unaffected. Joined with my fear of these natives' wrath, was the questioning fear of the actual power of the supernatural. Was Harry about to outrage some creed of these dead upon whom these suppliants were to call?

A line of *ouangas* hung on pegs on the wall behind the table or altar. Their grisly parts, consisting of pieces of corpses, were strung in abandoned disorder, one part upon the other. Were these *ouangas*, of which Dr. Banè had spoken, to be used for good or evil?

My forehead was burning. I knew that the malarial fever I had been hoping to avoid, was upon me. I felt weak and ill, and it seemed to me there was a stench here of newly dead flesh. The storm burst, and the rain came down in torrents, thundering upon the roof covering the low-ceilinged room.

Lightning flashes brightened the interior weirdly, giving an outre sheen to the uplifted black faces with rolling eyes and mumbling mouths. The claps of thunder were like the mighty wrath of a vengeful God. Suddenly I felt a

cold sweat upon my forehead. God, what I would have given to have been back at my villa with Harry safely returned to America!

In the fitful, murky light my attention was suddenly arrested by the slow progress into the room from a side entranceway, of three figures. The tall central figure, which moved slightly in advance of the other two, was garbed in a soft white skirt. Above it, was a long-tailed black frock coat and the incongruous crown of a high silk hat. Then I realized this must be the symbolical Papa Nebo, the oracle of the dead whom Dr. Banè had described to us.

As he drew nearer to the altar and its torches, I saw that he was wearing black smoked glasses, making his face gruesomely inscrutable. I shuddered involuntarily at the sight. He came forward, his ebony face gleaming in the faltering light, an unlighted cigar protruding grotesquely from the side of his mouth.

I wanted to laugh; not with mirth, but a frightened hysteria. Things were about to happen here unmentionable, blood-curdling things which would be sufficiently horrendous even if I were only what I was posing as--an onlooker. But I was not a curious onlooker; I was an uncle with a real terror for the safety of my dead sister's son, here to save him from the rage of these writhing, moaning fanatics. Or worse!

Again my gaze swept the prostrated forms before me, and I prayed that the lad had changed his mind and was not here. Yet I knew that I prayed in vain.

THE two figures on each side of Papa Nebo, slightly behind the oracle, were in no particular garb. Both were women.

Papa Nebo came to a stop when he reached the totem pole cross with its grotesque feather boa, and the lighted tapers sent a strange, ephemeral light flickering across the features of this tall and straight black man. It seemed to imbue him with an eerie unearthliness, as he stood so stiff, hands

extended, the black goggles glaring his imperviousness at what he was about to do.

The two women separated and went slowly to the pegs behind the altar, and each took down a *ouanga*. I saw now that they were like long, disjointed necklaces of parts of the human corpse. The women handled them with complete unconcern, even as I felt myself go sick at the sight of this mutilation of the dead. The two women came forward and stood, one on each side of Papa Nebo, facing, as he did, the supplicating blacks before them.

Involuntarily, I drew back closer to the wall. There was no mistaking this scene as it lay before me at this instant; it was the picture of the *Culte des Morts!*

Then there was a snap and a flash of lightning. It was within the room! But almost before the thought formed itself, I knew that it was not lightning. There was a sudden scream of adulatory terror from the swaying, moaning mass of fanatics. The entire mass of blacks started to their feet at the oracle's wail and shrill babble to the waiting dead, those dead who were here and ready to hear the supplications of those who had come to ask favors of them.

And now I saw Harry. He was standing in the folds of a kind of hanging, like a portiere, his camera outside the folds, its light attached on the top and to the side. The lightning, this last flash within the room, had been his, of course, as he took the prized picture!

I would not let my terror take control of me. Did anyone else in this room know what I knew? Or did they think, as Papa Nebo in his prayer appeared to think, that some dead enemy had dared intrude into this gathering with defiance and desecration?

I never knew what they thought. I stood trembling against the wall, watching the natives scrambling toward Papa Nebo, listening to his words. The order came from him that they must get to the cemetery and consult with other of their dead, and when he, with one of the lighted tapers held high before him started slowly forward, the blacks backed sideward,

leaving a path for him. He went down it, followed by the two women with the *ouangas*. Even with the black glasses, he found his way unerringly.

I looked ahead, to be sure Harry had made a retreat, as Papa Nebo headed for the place I had seen Harry an instant before. I did not see him. The excitement had heightened my fever; the suspense had been too much for me. I felt the floor swaying beneath my feet. My sight blurred.

My hands trembled as I braced myself against the wall. I don't know how many minutes I stood there, watching the departing ebony-faced, shiny-eyed blacks, with their mouthing moans and supplications as they shambled forward. It seemed an eternity. My strength was ebbing. If only their long line would come to an end, so that I could get to the other side of the portiere and find Harry. He must have seen me from his hiding point and would be watching for me.

At last they were gone, with never one glance at me in my dark recess to the side of the room. I could hear their distant chant as they filed out of the house and down over the hill to the cemetery, the weird sound coming back in waves, mingling with the spatter of the lessened rain and the intermittent low rumbles of thunder.

I KEPT my eyes on the portieres. I tried to start forward, but my legs would not carry me. I slithered to the floor. I watched, with a kind of fascination, the low sputtering tapers, and wondered where Harry could be.

Then my heart suddenly pounded, for there, crawling on all fours, I saw him. At first I thought his camera was about his neck. Then I knew it was not his camera, but a *ouanga*! Who had put it there? Was it one of his jokes?

Why was he in such a posture? I tried to call to him, but my throat seemed to contract. Then I saw that as he pressed forward, he would drop, then struggle up to drag himself further toward the altar.

With a superhuman effort, I mustered my strength. Harry was in trouble. He was unable to stand up. Now he had ceased moving. God knows how I managed it, for my fever was raging, but I got to my feet and staggered toward the front of the room, not far from the altar, where Harry lay. At last my voice came.

"Harry--dear God, what has happened?"

He did not answer. In the distance I could still hear the monotonous chant of the blacks. Finally I was within a dozen feet of Harry. I saw the *ouanga* about his neck. I did not know whether there were any of the poisonous machineel leaves strung with the mutilated fragments of corpse.

As I reached him, he seemed to go into a brief convulsion and threw himself onto his back. The incongruous black of the juices covered him. His native garb was open at the throat. I stood looking at him, at the sweat on his forehead, hanging there in great sparkling beads. His eyes were open; they met mine appealingly, baffled.

Then my attention was arrested by a hand from a newly-dead corpse, which was strung as part of the *ouanga* about Harry's neck. Was it my imagination, or was the hand moving? I saw the fingers twitch, then start moving slowly, dragging the remainder of the *ouanga* after it. I tried to scream. I stood paralyzed with unbelieving horror. The hand was moving higher! Now it paused at Harry's throat, poised, and sank its fingers into Harry's throat like a pouncing cat. I saw his eyes bulging.

The next instant I was on my knees, tearing at the hand, but it was like steel. I had no power to stop its action. It tightened its grip upon Harry's throat. I heard his gurgling, suffocating efforts to breathe.

I was like a madman now, ripping at this unholy thing, dragging at it, thrusting the *ouanga* from about my poor nephew's neck and panting with my effort. But the hand clung, strangling the youth to death. His bulging eyes were glazing. His breath stopped. I let out a cry of anguish. My nephew was dead!

I swayed on my knees before him an instant. Then I was swallowed in merciful oblivion....

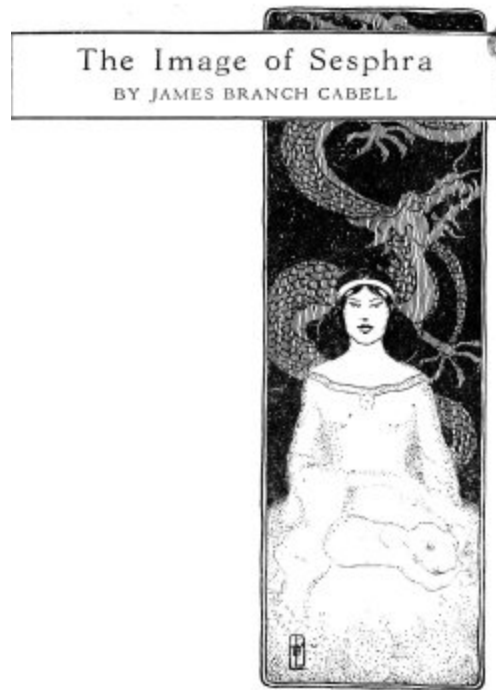
I was in bed at home in my villa, when I recovered consciousness, with Dr. Banè bending over me. At first I wanted to think it had all been a horrible nightmare, but Dr. Banè's compassionate look convinced me that it had been no nightmare, but stark, tragic reality.

We discussed my poor nephew briefly. His body had been found near me. He had been strangled to death. There was no *ouanga* near him, no hand at his throat. The statement of Papa Nebo was that some frenzied, frightened native might have strangled him, but he would take no responsibility in the matter, Dr. Banè told me.

The Haitian physician and I gazed long and intently into each other's eyes. And I knew that he was not surprised at the facts I told him.

"If only he had heeded," he said. "I told him they were deep matters, at which I dared not laugh!"

## The Image of Sesptra by James Branch Cabell



THEY of Poictesme narrate that in the old days Count Manuel married, and so fell into disfavor with King Raymond. They tell how it was Raymond's daughter, the Princess Alianora, whom Manuel had loved and loved no longer, who prompted this disfavor, and thereby set Dom Manuel a problem which stays unsolved.

For Manuel fled oversea with his wife, Dame Niafer, and they came in their distress to Sargyll where Freydis, the high sorceress, received them hospitably. Queen Freydis also, they relate, had loved Dom Manuel, in a sped time wherein these two had practiced queer necromancies. Now Manuel had long ago forsaken these arts, and he had forsaken Freydis too; but he remembered very pleasantly the fallen old ancient gods and the droll monsters and the instructive ghosts which he and Queen Freydis had been used to evoke; and most pleasurably of all, and with a glow of pride, he remembered the image which he had made and to which they had given

life, because in doing that, Dom Manuel felt, he had really accomplished a masterpiece of artistic conjury.

He hoped to find Freydis, the gray witch, more philosophic than Alianora, the princess: and in this hope he did not err.

"For all passes in this world," said Freydis, "and the young Manuel whom I loved in a Summer that is gone is nowadays as perished as that Summer's gay leaves. What, grizzled fighting man, have you to do with that young Manuel who had comeliness and youth and courage, but no human pity and no constant love? And why should I be harboring his light-hearted mischiefs against you?"

"Ah, no, gray Manuel, you are quite certain no woman would do that; and people say that you are shrewd. So I bid you very welcome to Sargyll, where my will is the only law."

"You at least have not changed," Dom Manuel replied with utter truth, "for you seem today as fair and young as you were that first night upon Morven when you leaned life to the image I had made. Yet that was a great while ago, and I make no more images."

"Your wife would be considering it a waste of time," Queen Freydis estimated.

"No, that is not quite the way it is. For Niafer is the dearest and most dutiful of women, and she never crosses my wishes in anything."

Freydis smiled a little, for she saw that Manuel believed he was speaking veraciously.

"Well," said Freydis, "it is a queer thing surely that in the month which is to come your wife should be bearing your second child under my roof and in my golden bed. Yet it is a queerer thing that your first child, whom no woman bore nor had any say in shaping, but whom you made of clay to the will of your proud youth and in your proud youth's likeness, should be limping about the world somewhere in the appearance of a strapping tall young fellow, and that you should know nothing about his doings."

"And what do you know about him, Freydis?"

"Eh, I suspicion many things, gray Manuel, by virtue of my dabblings in that gray art, which makes neither for good nor evil."

"Yes," said Manuel practically, "but what do you know?"

"I know that in Sargyll where my will is the only law you are welcome, false friend and very faithless lover," she said. He could get no more out of her.

So Manuel and Niafer remained at Sargyll until Niafer should be delivered. Glittering messengers came from King Ferdinand and from King Hoel and from the Duke-Regent Sigurd, each proffering this or that alliance, now these princes knew Dom Manuel was at outs with Raymond Berenger; but Manuel considered only Niafer and let statecraft bide. Two other ships that were laden with King Raymond's men came also in an attempt to capture Manuel: so Freydis dispatched a sending which caused these soldiers to run about the decks howling like wolves and to fling away their weapons and to fight one against the other with hands and teeth until all were slain.

There was never a more decorous hostess than Queen Freydis, and nobody would have suspected that sorcery underlay the running of her household. It was only through Manuel's happening to arise very early one morning that he chanced to see the night-porter turn into an orange-colored rat and creep into the wainscoting when the sun rose; and Manuel of course said nothing about this to Niafer.

So the month passed prosperously and uneventfully, while the servitors of Queen Freydis behaved in every respect as if they were human beings; and at the month's end Niafer was duly delivered of a girl child. It was Freydis who tended Niafer and Freydis who brought the news to Manuel and Freydis who bade him rejoice now that all peril was over, if Freydis was to be trusted.

"And we shall celebrate the happy event," said Freydis, "with a gay feast this night in honor of your child."

"That is well," said Manuel. "But I suppose you will be wanting me to make a speech, and I was never a great hand at such matters."

"No, for your place is with your wife. No, Manuel, you are not bidden to this feast, for all that it is to do honor to your child. No, no, gray Manuel, you must remain up-stairs this evening and throughout the night, because this feast is for them that serve me; and you do not serve me any longer, and the ways of them that serve me are not your ways."

"Ah, ah!" says Manuel. "So there is sorcery afoot! Yes, Freydis, I have quite given over that sort of thing. And while not for a moment would I seem to be criticizing anybody, I hope before long to see you settling down with some fine, solid fellow and forsaking these empty frivolities for the higher and real pleasures of life."

"And what are these delights, gray Manuel?"

"The joy that is in the sight of your children, playing happily about your hearth and developing into honorable men and gracious women and bringing their children in turn to cluster about your tired old knees, as the Winter evenings draw in, and in the cosy firelight you smile across the curly heads of these children's children at the dear wrinkled white-haired face of your beloved and time-tested helpmate and are satisfied, all in all, with your life and know that, by and large, Heaven has been rather undeservedly kind to you," said Manuel, sighing.

"Yes, Freydis, you may believe me that such are the real joys of life and that such pleasures are more profitably pursued than are the idle gaities of sorcery and witchcraft, which indeed at our age, if you will permit me to speak thus frankly, dear friend, are hardly dignified."

FREYDIS shook her proud dark head. Her smiling was grim.

"Decidedly I shall not ever understand you. Doddering patriarch, do you not comprehend you are already discoursing about a score or two of

grandchildren on the ground of having a half-hour-old daughter, whom you have not yet seen? Nor is that child's future, it may be, yours to settle. Well, go to your wife, for this is Niafer's man who is talking, and not mine. Go up, Methuselah, and behold the new life which you have created and can not control at all."

So Manuel went to where Niafer lay pale and glad in the golden bed of Freydis, and he duly looked at the contents of the small heaving bundle at Niafer's side; and whether or no he scaled the traditional peaks of emotion was no one's concern save Manuel's. He began, in any event, to talk in the vein which, he felt, this high occasion demanded.

But Niafer, who was never romantic nowadays, merely said that, anyhow, it was a blessing it was all over, and that she hoped now they would soon be leaving Sargyll.

"But Freydis is so kind; my dear," said Manuel, "and so fond of you."

"I never in my life," declared Niafer, "knew anybody to go off so terribly in her looks as that two-faced cat has done. As for being fond of me, I trust her exactly as far as I can see her."

"Yet, Niafer, I have heard you declare time and again----"

"Well, and if you did, Manuel, one has to be civil."

"You women!" he observed" discreetly.

"As if it were not as plain as the nose on her face--and I do not suppose that even you, Manuel, will be contending she has a really good nose--that the woman is simply itching to make a fool of you again. Manuel, I declare I have no patience with you when you keep arguing about such unarguable facts.

Manuel, exercising augmented discretion, said nothing whatever.

"And you may talk yourself black in the face, Manuel, but nevertheless I am going to call the child Melicent, after my own mother, as soon as a

priest can be fetched from the mainland to christen her. No, Manuel, it is all very well for your dear friend to call herself a gray witch, but I do not notice any priests coming to this house unless they are especially sent for, and I draw my own conclusions."

"Well, well, let us not argue about it, my dear."

"Yes, but who started all this arguing and fault-finding, I would like to know?"

"Why, to be sure I did. But I spoke without thinking. I was wrong. I admit it. Do not excite yourself, my darling."

"And as if I could help the child's not being a boy."

"But I never said--"

"No; but you keep thinking it, and sulking is the one thing I can not stand. No, Manuel, no, I do not complain; but I do think that after all I have been through with--" Niafer whimpered sleepily.

"Yes, yes," said Manuel, stroking her soft crinkly hair.

"And with that silky hell-cat watching me all the time--and looking ten years younger than I do now--and planning I do not know what----"

"Yes, to be sure," said Manuel soothingly; "you are quite right, my dear."

So a silence fell, and presently Niafer slept. Manuel sat watching her with a perplexed, fond smile. For Niafer was the dearest and cleverest woman in the world, of course, but it did not seem to Manuel that she was rising to properly exalted zones of sentiment over the advent of the small heaving bundle at Niafer's side.

Nor did this Niafer appear to be quite the girl he had married a twelvemonth back. But even so, this Niafer was his wife, by his own choice; and whatever else she was, or was not, he could not now control at all.

SOME while after Niafer was asleep, and when the night was fairly advanced, Manuel heard a whizzing and snorting in the air. He went to the window and lifted the scarlet curtain figured with ramping gold dragons, and he looked out to find a vast number of tiny bluish lights skipping about confusedly and agilely in the darkness like shining fleas. These approached the river-bank and gathered there.

Then the assembled lights began to come toward the house. Manuel could now see that these lights were carried by dwarfs who had the eyes of owls and the long beaks of cranes. These dwarfs were jumping and dancing about Freydis like an insane body-guard.

Freydis walked among them very remarkably attired. Upon her head shone the uraeus crown surmounted by two crested snakes, and she carried a long rod of cedar-wood topped with an apple carved in bluestone, and at her side came the appearance of a tall young man.

So they all approached the house, and the young man looked up fixedly at the unlighted window as if he were looking at Manuel. The young man smiled; his teeth gleamed in the blue glare. Then the whole company entered the house, and Manuel could see no more, but he could hear small prancing hoof-beats downstairs and the clattering of plates and much whinnying laughter. Manuel was wondering what he must do, for he had perfectly recognized the strapping tall young fellow.

Presently Manuel heard music; it was, he knew, the ravishing Nis air, which charms the mind into sweet confusion and oblivion, and Manuel did not attempt to withstand its wooing. He hastily undressed, said a staid prayer or two, and he slept dreamlessly,

In the morning Dom Manuel arose early and left Niafer still sleeping with the baby. Manuel came down through the lower hall, where the table was as the revelers had left it. In the middle of the disordered room stood a huge copper vessel half-full of liquor, and beside it was a drinking-horn of gold.

Manuel paused here and drank of the sweet heather wine to hearten him. Then he went out into the bright windy morning and to the river-bank, where that which he loved and dreaded awaited Manuel. Manuel knew that he went to meet the image which he had made of clay, and to which through unholy arts he had given life.

The thing came up out of the glistening ripples of brown water, and the thing embraced Manuel and kissed him.

"I am pagan," the thing said in a sweet mournful voice, "and so I could not come to you until your love was given to the unchristened. For I was not ever christened, and so my true name is not known to anybody. But in the far lands where I am worshiped as a god I am called Sesptra of the Dreams."

"That name has the ring of an anagram," said Manuel.

"It is, if you insist, an anagram," the thing replied.

"I did not give you any such name," said Manuel; and then he said, "Sesptra, how beautiful you are!"

"Is that why you are trembling, Manuel?"

I tremble because the depths of my being have been shaken. I have lived for a great quiet while through days made up of small mishaps and little pleasures and only half-earnest desires which moved about upon the surface of my being like minnows in the shoals of a still lake.

"But now that I have seen and heard and touched you, Sesptra of the Dreams, a passion moves in me that possesses all of me, and I am frightened."

"It is the passion which informs those who make images. It is the master you denied, poor foolish Manuel, and the master who will take no denial."

"Sesptra, what is your will with me?"

"It is my will that you go hence with me on a long journey into the far lands where I am worshiped as a god. For I love you, my creator, who gave life to me, and you love me more than aught else, and it is not right that we be parted."

"I can not go on any journey, just now, for I have my lands and castles to regain, and my wife and my new-born child to protect."

Sesphra began to smile adorably.

"What are these things to me and you, or to any one that makes images?"

Then Sesphra began to speak adorably, as he walked on the river-bank, with one arm about Dom Manuel. Always Sesphra limped as he walked. A stiff and obdurate wind was ruffling the broad brown shining water, and as they walked, this wind buffeted them and tore at their clothing. Manuel clung to his hat with one hand and with the other held to lame Sesphra of the Dreams. Sesphra talked of matters not to be recorded.

"That is a handsome ring you have there," said Sesphra, by and by.

"It is the ring my wife gave me when we were married," Manuel replied.

"Then you must give it to me, dear Manuel."

"No, no. I can not part with it."

"But it is beautiful, and I want it," Sesphra said.

So Manuel gave him the ring.

Now Sesphra began again to talk of matters not to be recorded. And Manuel saw that Manuel's imperiled lands made such a part of earth as one grain of sand contributed to the long narrow beach they were treading.

He saw his wife Niafer as a plain-featured and dull woman, not in any way remarkable among the millions of such women as were at that moment preparing breakfast or fretting over other small tasks. He saw his new-born child as a mewling lump of flesh. And he saw Sesphra, whom he had made

so strong and strange and beautiful, and it was as in a half-daze he heard that obdurate wind commingled with the sweet voice of Sespbra as Sespbra talked of matters not to be recorded.

"Now then let us go into the house," said Sespbra, presently, "and write droll letters to King Hoel and King Ferdinand and Duke Sigurd, in reply to the fine offers they have been making you."

WHEN they had come into the disordered banquet-hall, Manuel cleared away the silver plates from one corner of the table, and he took pen and ink and he wrote as Sespbra dictated.

"But these are very insulting replies," observed Dom Manuel, "and they will make their recipients furious. These princes, Sespbra, are my good friends, and they are powerful friends, upon whose favor I am dependent."

"Yes, but how beautifully these replies are worded! See now, dear Manuel, how divertingly you have described King Hoel's hideous nose in your letter to King Hoel; and in your letter to the pious Duke Sigurd that which you say about the absurdity of religion here is a masterpiece of paradox and very exquisite prose. So I must see to it that these replies are sent, to make people admire you everywhere. But you and I will not bother about these stupid princes any more, nor will you need any friends save me, for we will go to this and that remote strange place, and our manner of living will be such and such, and we will do so and so. And we will not ever be parted until you die."

"What will you do then, dear Sespbra?"

"I shall survive you, as all gods outlive their creators. And I must depute the building of your monument to men of feeble minds which have been properly impaired by futile studies and senility. That is the way in which all gods are doomed to deal with their creators; but that need not trouble us as yet."

"No," Manuel said, "I can not go with you."

The hand of Sesptra closed on the hand of Manuel caressingly.

Manuel said:

"I will go with you. But what will become of the woman and the child whom I leave behind me unfriended?"

"That is true," Sesptra replied; "there will be nobody to look out for them, and they will perish miserably. That is not important, but perhaps upon the whole it would be better for you to kill them before we depart from Sargyll."

"Very well, then," said Manuel. "I will do that, but you must come up into the room with me, for I cannot bear to lose sight of you."

Sesptra said--

"I shall not ever leave you now."

They went up-stairs together into the room where Manuel's wife Niafer lay asleep. Manuel drew his dagger. Niafer turned in her sleep, so that she seemed to offer her round small throat to the raised knife. Manuel saw that on the other side of the golden bed sat Queen Freydis, making a rich glow of color there, and in her lap was the naked new-born child.

Freydis rose how, holding the child to her breast and smiling. A devil might smile thus upon contriving some new torment for lost souls, but Manuel had not known a fair woman's face could be so cruel.

Then this evil joy passed from the face of Freydis. She dipped her fingers into the bowl of water with which she had been bathing the child, and with her fingertips she made upon the child's forehead the sign of a cross.

Said Freydis--

"Melicent, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy" Ghost."

Sesphra passed wildly toward the fireplace, crying--

"A penny, a penny, twopence, a penny and a half, and a half-penny!"

At his call the fire shot forth tall flames, and Sesphra entered these flames as a man goes between parted curtains, and instantly the fire collapsed and was as it had been.

Already the hands of Freydis were moving deftly in the sleep charm, so that Niafer did not move. Freydis today was resplendently robed in flame-colored silk, and about her dark hair was a circlet of burnished copper.

Manuel had dropped his dagger so that the point of it pierced the floor, and the weapon stood erect and quivering. But Manuel was shaken more horribly than shook the dagger, with horror and self-loathing. So he waited, looking at his dear wife Niafer, who slept untroubled, and at fiery-colored Freydis, who was smiling rather queerly.

"Come now," said Freydis. "I must tell you that Sesphra is pagan, and can not thrive except among those whose love is given to the unchristened. Thus he could not come to Sargyll until the arrival of this little heathen whom I have just made Christian. Now we have only Christian terrors here, and your fate again is in my hands."

Dom Manuel groaned.

"Freydis," he said, "you have rescued me from unspeakable wickedness. A moment more and I would have slain my wife and child because of Sesphra's resistless magic."

Said Freydis, still smiling a queer secret smile:

"Indeed, there is no telling into what folly and misery Sesphra would not have led you. For you fashioned his legs unevenly, and he has not ever pardoned you his lameness."

"The thing is a devil," Manuel groaned again. "Oh, I have loosed among mankind a blighting misery which I can not control at all!".

"The thing is you as you were once, gray Manuel. You had comeliness and wit and youth and courage, and these you gave the image, shaping it boldly to your proud youth's will and in your proud youth's likeness. But human pity and any constant love you did not then have to give, either to your fellows or to the image or to me. So you amused yourself by making Sesptra and me that which we are today."

Now again showed subtly evil thoughts in the bright-colored, shrewd face of Freydis, and Dom Manuel of a sudden was frightened. It occurred to him for the first time that he and his loved wife and child were in this sorcerous place at the mercy of the whims and the unwholesome servitors of this not very friendly looking witch-woman. Dom Manuel thought of that discomfortable night-porter and of the madness that had smitten King Raymond's men and of the clattering, vicious little hoofs of the shrill dwarfs, and this room seemed chilly.

SO MANUEL said, with jovial laughter: "You speak as if you had not grown more adorable each year, dear Freydis, and as if I would not be vastly flattered to think I had any hand in the improvement. You should not fish thus unblushingly for compliments. Yet much of what you assert is true, for I would that I had not ever meddled in this mischancy business of creating things I can not manage."

Queen Freydis moved in shimmering splendor toward the fireplace, and she paused there, considerately looking down at the small contention of flames.

"Did you not, though, again create much misery when for your pleasure you gave life to this girl child? Certainly you must know that there will be in her life--if life indeed be long spared to her," said Freydis reflectively--"far less of joy than of sorrow, for that is the way it is with the life of everybody. But all this likewise is out of your hands, for in Sesptra and in the child and in me you have lightly created that which you can not control. No, it is I who control the outcome."

"Why, to be sure," says Manuel heartily, but in a cold sweat, "and I am sure, too, that nobody is better qualified to handle it. Come now, Freydis. Just as you say, this is a serious situation, and something really ought to be done about this situation. Come now, dear friend, in what way can we take back the life we gave this lovely fiend?"

"And would I be wanting to kill my husband?" Queen Freydis asked, and she smiled wonderfully. "Why, but yes, this fair lame child of yours is my husband today, and I love him, for Seshra is all that you were when I loved you, Manuel. No, Manuel, Seshra must live for a great while, long after you have been turned to graveyard-dust; and he will limp about wherever pagans are to be found, and he will always win much love from the highhearted pagans because of his comeliness and his unfading jaunty youth. And whether he will do any good anywhere is doubtful, but it is certain he will do harm, and it is equally certain that already he weighs my happiness as carelessly as you once weighed it."

"Well, Freydis, but, to be sure, this puts a new complexion upon matters, and not for worlds would I be coming between husband and wife----"

Queen Freydis looked up from the flames toward Dom Manuel, very sadly. Freydis shrugged, flinging out her hands.

"And at the last I can not do that, either. So do you two dreary unimportant well-mated people remain unhurt, now that I go to seek my husband, and now I endeavor to win my pardon for not letting him torment you. Eh, I was tempted, gray Manuel, to let my masterful, fine husband have his pleasure of you, and of this lean, ugly woman and her brat, too, as formerly you had your pleasure of me.

"But women are so queerly fashioned that at the last I can not consent to harm this gray, staid, tedious fellow or any of his chattels. For all passes in this world save one thing only; and though the young Manuel whom I loved in a Summer that is gone be nowadays as perished as that Summer's gay leaves, it is certain a woman's folly does not ever perish."

"Indeed, I did not merit that you should care for me," said Manuel unhappily.

But internally he felt much more cheerful, for it appeared that Freydis was not going to do anything violent and irreparable and such as her better nature would afterward regret.

Queen Freydis went to the window and lifted the scarlet curtain figured, with ramping gold dragons.

"Look you now, that ship which shows at the river-bend, with lions and castles painted on her brown sails, is King Ferdinand's ship, which he has sent to fetch you from Sargyll; and all your troubles are over, for Ferdinand will give you new wealth and forts and meadowlands. So I may now depart, to look for Sesptra, and for my pardon, if I can get it."

"But whither do you go, dear Freydis?"

"What does that matter," she answered, looking long and queerly at him, "now that Count Manuel has no further need of me?"

Then Freydis looked at Niafer, lying there in a charmed sleep.

"I neither love nor entirely hate you, ugly and lean and fretful Niafer, but assuredly I do not envy you. You are welcome to your fidgeting gray husband. My husband does not grow old and tenderhearted and subservient to me, and he never will."

Thereafter Freydis bent down, and she kissed the child she had christened.

"Some day you will be a woman, Melicent, and then you will be loving some man or another man. I could hope that you will then love the man who will make you happy, but that sort of man has not yet been found."

THEN Freydis went away, and her castle went with her as a smoke passes. Manuel was thus left sitting out-of-doors in a reaped field, alone with his wife and child, while Ferdinand's ship came about.

Niafer slept. But now the child awoke to regard the world into which she had been summoned willy-nilly, and the child began to whimper.

Dom Manuel patted this intimidating small creature gingerly with a strong comely hand, from which his wedding ring was missing. That would require explanation.

So Manuel devoted this brief waiting in a reaped field to wondering just how much about the past he might judiciously tell his wife when she awoke to question him. This problem, they relate, was set Dom Manuel in the old days, and they say, too, that it remains unsolved.