Edited by Katherine Nabity

Happy Halloween

from

The Black Cat

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Introduction

The Black Cat was a Boston-based periodical, published from 1895 to 1922. Herman Umbstaetter was its editor and, in the magazine's first several issues, a contributer as well. Issue #1 was published, appropriately enough in October 1895. By January, Umbstatter's fiction (under his own name and several pseudonyms) receded as the publication gained traction. His wife, Nelly Littlehale Umbstaetter, illustrated the magazine's covers and her work from 1907 graces this volume.

I became interested in *The Black Cat* in 2018 after I edited an anthology of late 19th and early 20th century automaton stories. Digitization efforts by various institutions had made it possible for me to peruse the pages of public domain periodicals from the comfort of my office chair. *The Black Cat* caught my eye due to the spooky connotation of its title, though I knew very well that genre magazines were a decade or two away from being a trend. Still, I hoped that maybe Herman Umbstaetter would throw in a creepy story every now and then. I was rarely disappointed!

Starting in October of 2018, I read along monthly, experiencing each issue one hundred and twenty-three years after it first hit the shelves or landed in a subscriber's mailbox. By the end of its inaugural run, I was surprised at the variety of genres that *were* included—everything from mystery to western to romance to horror—and I was happily surprised by the number of women published. About a third of the stories over the course of that year were written by women. If this is part of Hawthorne's theory of "scribbling women," I can't be sorry about it. In this anthology of the best mystery and horror stories from *The Black Cat*'s first year, half the stories were written by four different female authors.

Given the connotations of *The Black Cat*, Halloween seems the natural time to indulge in spine-tingling tales. But with a little insistence, Halloween can be any day and I hope you enjoy these tales as much as I have, no matter what time of year.

Katherine Nabity, 2021

"The Secret of the White Castle"
Julia Magruder

The Black Cat, No. 1, October 1895

WHEN I BECAME THE OCCUPANT of the Chateau Blanc, in the neighborhood of Fontainebleau, I found that my wish for a place of complete seclusion was likely to be realized to the full. I was not in a state of mind for society, and I had deliberately given myself three months in which to fight out a certain battle with myself, for which I needed solitude and reflection.

When the old woman who acted as keeper and caretaker of the place took me through it, on a tour of inspection, there were three things which, in spite of my preoccupation with my own affairs, struck me very forcibly. The first was the forlorn remnants of the body of a white swan, which must once have been a creature of splendid size and shape. My informant told me that this swan had been a great pet of the former owner of the chateau, until some accident had killed it; after which it had been stuffed and fastened in its place upon the surface of the little lake under his window. There it was still—what remained of it—a mass of weather-beaten and dirty feathers.

Another thing that compelled my strong attention was a certain picture which hung in the bedroom of the late owner, and which I was informed was his own portrait, painted by himself. This room, by the way, was sinister and mysterious in its effect beyond any I had ever entered. One reason for this was the fact that all the furniture, which was elaborately carved and which must once have been of beautiful polish and color, had been ruthlessly covered with a coat of black paint,—the bed, the table, chairs, wardrobe, chests of drawers, and even the great leather easy chair which was placed just under the picture, facing the opposite wall.

It was a wretched piece of work, that picture, representing a man dressed in some sort of court dress of the last century, and it would have seemed ineffectual and amateurish to the last degree but for the truly marvelous

expression of the eyes, which were fixed on a certain spot in the wall opposite with an earnestness and intensity which made me feel that there was some hidden significance in this look. The man not only looked at the spot him self, but he compelled me to do the same, and forced me, by the insistent command of his eyes, to look again and again.

And yet there was nothing to see. The wall was perfectly bare in that place and covered with a meaningless sort of wallpaper, which gave me no encouragement whatever.

Another thing that I noticed specially, with a feeling of being imperiously directed to do so, was a large rusty key that hung on the wall directly under the picture. When I inquired of the old woman what this key belonged to she answered that she had never known, but that it had been hung there by the late proprietor and had been undisturbed since his death. That event had occurred a great many years ago, and it was owing to the provisions of the will left by him that no one had ever occupied the house in the interval. The prescribed time had only just expired, and I was the first person to rent the chateau, the revenue from which was to go to a nephew, who lived abroad.

The somberness of the black chamber suited my frame of mind, and I decided on taking it for my room. Besides this, the picture, the key, and the white swan all interested me, and, as it was the first time that an outside interest had made any headway against the melancholy of my own thoughts, these objects, far from cheerful as they were in themselves, afforded a grateful diversion.

So continually did I wonder why the picture looked always and could compel me to look at that one spot, and why the key had been hung in that place and had kept its position so many years undisturbed, as if some ghostly guardian watched over it, and why, ever and always, the old white swan compelled me, as if by some irresistible power, to connect it with these other things, that I kept myself awake at night, weaving all sorts of stories concerning these objects, and spent half my days in looking from the picture to the wall, and back again to the key, and then out of the window at the battered effigy of a noble bird beneath it, until the confusion of mind thus produced seemed likely to drive me crazy.

I expended all the ingenuity of which I was master in questioning the old woman, who had lived here in the time of the former owner, but the satisfaction of my curiosity in that direction was rather meager.

She told me that her former master had had a wife whom he adored, fair

as an angel, and gifted with a divinely beautiful voice, such as none had ever heard, before or since. This young wife had been snatched from him by a sudden and frightful death. The fever which seized her had been so contagious, the woman said, that every one had fled the premises, except one woman servant and the master himself. These, with the help of the doctor, had nursed the young wife through her brief illness until its end.

My informant had heard it said that the circumstances of her death were very peculiar,—that, in her delirium, on the very last night of her illness, those who had ventured to linger about the premises had heard her singing more gloriously than ever in her life; that it had reminded them of the great white swan, which but the night before had sung its last sweet song on the lake, in the moonlight, and had been found dead in the morning.

The woman who had remained to help the master in his last sad ministrations to his dying and dead wife had gone away the day after the funeral, and had never been heard of since.

That funeral, in the quaint old church but a few paces from the house, had been, from the woman's account, a melancholy affair enough. Scarcely any one dared to come to it, so malignant had been this fever, and it was feared that the few men who were willing to act as pall-bearers would not be equal to the task; but the poor lady had always been slight and fairy-like in figure, and so wasted was she from this consuming fever that the bearers declared that her weight was scarcely more than that of an empty coffin. The woman further said that, as the small funeral cortege was leaving the church, it had surprised every one to see the husband, who was directly behind the coffin, pause abruptly under a statue of the Virgin, and single out, from the great bunch of white ribbons which hung there, the long strip which his young wife had placed there on the day of her marriage to him, less than a year before. It was an old custom connected with this church. Every girl ever married there had conformed to it, and some of the ribbons were yellow with time and almost dropping to pieces. The longest and freshest bit of all had been put there by the beautiful and beloved young creature now lying dead in the flower of her youth and loveliness.

No one ever knew, the woman went on to say, how the master spent his days after the funeral was over. He had forbidden every servant to return, and turned a deaf ear to the rings and knocks of visitors. Months had passed, and no one held speech with him. They knew he was alive, because people who had looked through the palings had seen him walking in the garden, and one

person reported having seen him carry from the house the stuffed body of the great swan and fasten it in its place on the lake, where it could be plainly seen from his window. He must have embalmed or stuffed it himself, the old woman said, for he was known to have remarkable knowledge and skill in such strange arts, and had once had a great room filled with birds and beasts, which he had preserved by methods studied in foreign lands.

As was inevitable, after hearing all this, my interest in the picture, and swan, and the key deepened sensibly. There was certainly a spell of the supernatural about these things for me. I had only to stand near the spot on which the eyes of the picture were fastened to experience the strangest, the most overwhelmingly significant sensations I had ever known. The spot was haunted by a presence for me, and as often as I stood there I would feel my heart throb and cease throbbing, my breath pant and cease panting, my very flesh turn cold and moist with consciousness and apprehension. I tried to account for all this on natural grounds, but I found it was quite impossible to do so.

One day—it was the 19th of August—a hot, sultry, close, indescribably gloomy day, when the heavy clouds that lowered seemed only to darken the whole earth without giving forth one drop of moisture, the old woman came to my room and chanced to mention that it was the time of the death of the young mistress of the Chateau Blanc. She had died, it appeared, just at midnight between the 19th and 20th of August. After giving me this information, she said good-evening and left me to the reflections which it aroused.

I can scarcely call them reflections. They took the form, rather, of a sort of compulsion that was laid upon me to obey a certain force by which I felt myself suddenly dominated.

It was the picture that did it; this was certain, for, as often as I faltered, one look into that insistent, commanding, coercing face compelled me to go on. In obedience to its bidding, I did as follows:

I went to an old desk in the room, and took from it some simple carpenters' tools, with which I deliberately cut through, first, the wall-papering, and then a thin boarding, which covered all the space between a door and window opposite the picture. When this was done I saw—I cannot say whether most to my satisfaction or my horror, that I stood opposite a door,—a regular, ordinary door, with panels, hinges, and, more than all, a keyhole. I glanced at the picture. It seemed to me that the canvas positively

lived with expression.

The eyes commanded me to get the rusty key. I got it, fitted it in the lock, in which it turned with difficulty, and then, with my heart almost choking me with its throbs, my knees shaking under me, my body covered with a cold sweat, and my tongue dry in my mouth, I opened the door.

As it creaked on its rusty hinges, I saw, by the light of the candle which I held in my hand, a mass of cobwebs, heavily weighted with the dust of years, and, through these, a woman's figure.

It was clad—for I obeyed the eyes, which commanded me to examine it, though my heart was cold with terror—in what I made out to be a white silk gown, above which was the face, withered and awfully livid, as I had heard the faces of embalmed corpses appear years after death. Still, it was recognizable as a real human face, and was surrounded by masses of yellow hair, which, even through the dust and cobwebs, gleamed with the brightness of gold. The hands held something in their shrunken fingers,—a white ribbon, with the date of her marriage and death upon it, her husband's name and her own, and these words, which, under the compelling eyes of the picture, I laboriously studied out:

"I have been able to keep you near me, even in death. I have never been separated from you, or from what was you to me once. But when death shall come to me you will have no power over my body, and they will take me from you. That I am unable to help. I think only of this: you cannot suffer for it, since you have have so long ceased to be, and by that time my suffering also will be over. I shall put my spirit into the eyes of my picture, which will watch over you still."

I looked from the paper to the picture. It seemed dull and inexpressive,—mere canvas and paint. The power of the eyes was gone.

Their spell over me was broken. Suddenly I felt within me a long-absent yearning for human companionship,—for life and love. I had come to this place impelled by a morbid and unhealthy desire for solitude, and my experiences here had made me more morbid and unhealthy still. They had culminated now in this awful revelation of disappointment and death, which threw into brilliant contrast the bright possibilities which still remained to me, and I resolved to go back into the world and do my best to deserve and win these.

"The Interrupted Banquet"
René Bache

The Black Cat, No. 3, December 1895

THOUGH QUITE FAMILIAR WITH THE STREET, I could not remember having seen that particular house before. My recollection had been that there was a vacant lot just there. But I must have been mistaken, for the dwelling before me was substantial enough, though old-fashioned, with high front steps and large windows. A trifle out of repair it looked, by the way, and I even noticed that two or three panes of glass were gone. On the whole, the mansion presented a somewhat mournful appearance, as if fallen from an old-time respectability into a condition of decay and decrepitude.

I am sure that it would never have occurred to me to enter, had it not been that the young lady who accompanied me turned and deliberately mounted the steps towards the front door. Of course I followed. She did not ring the bell; for, in truth, there seemed to be no bell to pull. But the portal was noiselessly thrown wide from within, and we entered. I looked in vain for the servant who, I supposed, would receive our cards; but, to my surprise, Mabel walked straight ahead through the wide hall, without hesitation, appearing quite familiar with the place. There should have been a light, I thought, though it was only two o'clock in the afternoon; for the interior of this strange mansion was very dark, and I could only make out in an indistinct sort of way the faces that looked down upon me from some old portraits, obviously fine works of art, as I passed.

Mabel had introduced me to most of her friends, for we had been engaged for six months and were to be married very soon; but she had never spoken to me of these people, who, perhaps, were rather out of the fashion and had been forgotten. As these reflections passed through my mind, we ascended a broad staircase to the second floor, and then it was that I heard a sound of revelry which came from a room which I correctly judged to be the dining room of

the house. The heavy oaken doors of the room were slightly ajar, and through them was cast a strong beam of light that fell full upon an object which startled me for an instant. It was a headless human figure. A second later I smiled at my own alarm, inasmuch as the figure was nothing but a suit of old armor without the helmet.

If I had had a chance, I should have questioned Mabel, in order to make sure that our unannounced entrance was not an intrusion; also, I might have asked why, after starting out for a day's yachting trip, we had returned so early and for so strange an entertainment. But either query would have been out of place just then. Very likely, I thought, she had some surprise in store for me,—a lunch party, maybe, arranged by some friends in our honor; for quite a series of dinners and other entertainments had been given to us in celebration of our engagement. Moreover, all that I have related took place within less than a minute and a half, and in another moment I found myself in the large and brilliantly lighted dining-room. If the rest of the mansion was dark, there was no lack of illumination here. I was fairly dazzled by the numerous lights, clusters of which, arranged in silver candelabra, helped to adorn a long table, at which twenty-five or thirty people were seated. There were flowers in profusion, with a great display of silver and cut glass.

To my astonishment, not one of the people present seemed to take the slightest notice of our entrance. Near one end of the table were two vacant chairs together. Mabel quietly took one of them, and I, deeming the time hardly proper for an explanation, seated myself in the other. Soup was immediately placed before us—evidently we were not very late—and I took two or three spoonsful of it. It struck me as being singularly tasteless.

The courses followed each other in the usual mechanical fashion. What there was to eat I do not remember with any distinctness, for I was so absorbed in wonder and in studying the other guests that I took little notice of the viands. Opposite me was a funny-looking old lady in white silk, cut low at the neck to such a degree, I thought, as would have been more appropriate to a younger and plumper person. I particularly recall the fact that she wore camellias in her hair a fashion which I had heard of as belonging to a generation ago. It was palpable, too, that her front hair was false. Withal she was most agreeable and amiably disposed, as I presently discovered from her conversation. She was the first person who addressed any remark to me, abruptly making some inquiry about my grandfather, and stating in the same breath that she was from Philadelphia.

At her left sat a gentleman of rather more than middle age, as I judged, with a remarkably pink nose and a great expanse of shirt-front, who was devoting himself so assiduously to his plate that not a word escaped his lips. On the other side of the old lady with the camellias was an extremely thin man, with a peaked countenance, who so strongly reminded me of an undertaker that I felt almost tempted to ask him a question or two about the state of the market in respect to coffins and other funeral equipments. His necktie was black and likewise his hair, while his expression was one of extreme solemnity. Mabel was seated at my right, while on my other hand was a buxom matron of forty or so, who manipulated knife and fork with an activity that suggested a most excellent digestion.

Among the guests these were the first whom I noticed particularly. As I looked along the table, I was rather surprised to find that not a face was known to me. There was a cadaverous-looking young man with a prematurely bald head whom I pointed out to Mabel, asking who he was; for I had noticed that a sign of recognition passed between them.

"My brother," she replied quietly and, as I imagined, sadly.

Now this was a surprise, for I did not know that Mabel had a brother. Perhaps, I thought, he was not an especially estimable youth, and so was ignored by her family. If that were so, why should he be present on this occasion? Here was another puzzle, to be solved when a suitable opportunity offered for questioning my fianceé.

On the left of Mabel's brother was a remarkably pretty, though very pale young lady, who wore in her hair, oddly enough, what looked to me like a bridal wreath. But the handsomest woman present was she whom I supposed to be our hostess. She was of regal presence, and, with her velvety eyes and coronet of black braids, resembled a Spanish señorita. Though I had never seen her before, I took it for granted that she must know who I was, and repeatedly I tried to catch a glance from her; but it was in vain, for her conversation and attention were addressed almost exclusively to an elderly man on her right, apparently a foreign diplomat, as half a dozen orders glittered upon his breast. At the other end of the festive board sat a gentleman with a huge gray moustache, presumably our host. I heard no remarks from him, save now and then a request to "pass the decanter," addressed to one or another of the guests near him. I had no opportunity for speech with him, inasmuch as Mabel and I were divided from him by almost the length of the table.

On the whole, the affair struck me as entirely extraordinary. Here we were, myself completely a stranger, at a banquet in a house which I had never visited before! Indeed, had it not been for Mabel's assurance of welcome and the two seats apparently reserved for us, I should have supposed that we had made some mistake. Mabel herself was singularly silent, though ordinarily quite talkative and even jolly, and offered no explanation of the situation. But perhaps what astonished me more than anything else was my discovery, some time after we were seated at the table, of a young man, some distance away, who bore a striking resemblance to my chum at college. Upon my word, I was on the point of shouting at him across the board. In fact, the words, "Why, Bill, old man, how did you get here?" were on my lips, when I checked myself in time, owing to a remembrance of the fact that Bill had been dead for eight years, having met a most untimely fate in a railway disaster.

While engaged in wondering whether the young man could be a near relation of my former chum's, I was startled at seeing a telegram in the familiar Western Union envelope laid beside my plate. Some people, notably stock brokers and newspaper men, are accustomed to telegrams, and for that reason are not alarmed by them. But habit had not rendered me thus callous, and with some haste I tore open the envelope and glanced over the con tents. It read:

Mabel died this morning of acute congestion of the lungs.

AMELIA PARKER.

I declare that I trembled as if I had a chill. If Mabel had not been by my side, I should have been overcome by the shock. Holding the telegram before Mabel's eyes, I exclaimed in a voice that trembled with conflicting emotions of horror and anger: "This is carrying a practical joke too far. Here, some brain less wretch telegraphs me in your mother's name that you are dead."

Careless of the almost frenzied energy with which I spoke, I looked around upon the faces of my fellow-guests as one does who is confident of sympathy. To my amazement, in response to my speech, there arose a cackle of laughter which was presently transformed into a general ripple of mirth. And such mirth! The like of it I had never heard before, and, please heaven, I hope I never may again. It was not like real laughter, but rather the empty and strident cachinnation of beings lost to the feelings of humanity.

Pale with anger, I rose to my feet and, steadying myself with one hand on the back of my chair, exclaimed:

"What does this mean?"

Dead silence was the only response. Conversation had ceased, but I felt that every eye was fixed upon me. Aghast, I looked at Mabel, but she did not return my gaze. At length, the old woman with the camellias in her hair, who sat opposite, addressed me, saying:

"Why do you think that Mabel is not dead?"

"Good God!" I replied. "Here she is. Don't you see her? What do these people mean?"

The old woman grinned and waved her feather fan at me, play fully, saying:

"Ask her if she isn't dead?"

I turned to Mabel in wonderment, but she only shook her head sadly.

"Why, of course she's dead!" said the old woman. "Don't you know that all of us here are dead?"

"Indeed, yes; we are all dead," cried the other guests in general chorus.

"This is getting beyond patience!" I exclaimed. "You, too, are pleased to joke with me, but I tell you frankly that I fail to see the fun of it. Perhaps, since you possess such a fund of humor, you will be telling me next that I am dead, also."

Then came that laugh again. I never shall forget it. Beginning with a cackling titter, it spread until the whole table was in a roar, making my very flesh creep. Then all at once it ceased, and again there was dead silence.

"Certainly you are dead," said the old lady with the camellias. "She's dead, and all of us are dead. She died this morning of acute congestion of the lungs, but I have been dead for these twenty years, and he, too," indicating with her fan the elderly gentleman with the pink nose. "My own complaint was cerebro-spinal meningitis."

My legs gave way under me and I sank into my chair. As I did so my hand touched Mabel's, and I grasped hers tightly. It was cold as ice. Leaning toward me, she whispered in my ear:

"Don't make a scene! It is all quite true. You were run over an hour ago by a trolley car."

Not daring to believe my senses, I replied:

"And this house—?"

"Sh—h!" said Mabel. "It is only the ghost of a house,—the phantasmal reproduction of an old mansion that used to stand on this spot, where there has been an empty lot for fifteen years past."

"I—I think I understand," I gasped. Then, though my brain swam, I made a tremendous effort to summon up my courage and face composedly this dreadful situation. Addressing myself to the old woman opposite, I said:

"Perchance you were acquainted with the former occupants of this dwelling?"

"Oh, yes," she answered pleasantly. "I am somewhat distantly related to our host and hostess of this evening. They were drowned—lost on the ill-fated *Ville de Paris*. This house belonged to them, and not very long afterwards it was torn down."

"But suppose that the present owner of the lot were to build upon it?" I suggested. "It would be necessary to hold these charming entertainments elsewhere?"

"Not at all," she said, laughing and waving her fan. "The occupancy of the site by a real house would not interfere. It frequently happens, of course, that a building is put up on ground previously occupied by another dwelling. You must understand, though I might have supposed you knew it, that, while the material parts of a tenement may be removed at any time, its astral shell remains in perpetuity. Thus the ghosts of half a dozen or more dwellings may remain on the site occupied by a new and substantial structure. They are none the less real for being invisible to living eyes. The most remarkable instances of haunted houses that you have heard about are due to conditions of that sort,—several families of phantasms, perhaps, tenanting premises topographically coincident with a mansion which affords physical accommodation to people in the flesh. I trust I make myself clear?"

"Quite so," I replied politely.

This conversation was interrupted by the elderly gentleman with the pink nose, who seemed to be dissatisfied with something. Having poured out a water goblet half full of sherry from a decanter, he called for brandy, and with those strong spirits filled it to the brim. Then he took a caster of red pepper and sprinkled its contents liberally on the surface of the mixture. Raising the goblet to his lips, he drained its contents to the last drop and set it down with a sigh.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "it has no strength. If only I could get a schooner of real beer."

The old lady regarded this performance attentively, with a lorgnette held to her nose. Said she sympathetically:

"That is the way with all pleasures in the after world. They seem to have

no savor. Even the milk is chalk and water."

"I suppose that is why this mince pie tastes so insipid," I responded, toying absently with a bit of pastry on my plate.

"Of course it is," she said. "Don't you see it is only the ghost of a mince pie."

"Then it seems that—"

But at this point the banquet was suddenly interrupted by a convulsive swaying and creaking of timbers. The table rocked, the lights in the silver candelabra flickered, and all was darkness. Then, through a ray of brilliant sunlight, I saw the strange dining hall, the gleaming table, the ghostly banqueters all fade into the distance. Another moment of utter darkness, of creaking and swaying, during which I made a desperate effort to grasp and steady Mabel's chair. To my bewilderment, my hand touched a coil of rope. I heard familiar voices. There was a burst of sun light. I sat propped up by cushions on the deck of the pleasure yacht *Undine*, surrounded by solicitous friends. Mabel, with her warm hand reassuringly clasped in mine, told me of my half hour's unconsciousness. I had fallen overboard in my attempt to recover her hat, and had been rescued only after sinking for the third time. Not until I had heard all this, could I banish from my mind my horrible experience in the house of the dead.

"Aidu"
Hero Despard

The Black Cat, No. 4, January 1896

IN THE EARLY FALL OF 1880 I was in Dahbol, India, having run down from Bombay, upon a sister who had set up a little bungalow there.

Dahbol is charmingly situated between the sea and the wooded heights of the Western Ghauts, and as nothing pressed me at the time, I remained there, spending my time rambling about the place and sometimes running into a chance adventure. Thus it happened that the following strange experience befell me.

One evening, in the cool of the late twilight, I was strolling about through the sea-end of the town, and, stopping before a small temple which was a little removed from the houses around, stood studying out the lines of the usual grotesque figures cut upon its face. Dense shadows cast by the rising moon threw the entrance into such obscurity that nothing could be seen within. In fact, I thought the place deserted for the time, and was about to obey an impulse to step up into the shadows banked in the doorway, when, suddenly, a human figure hurled itself upon me from out the darkness with such force that I staggered back and almost lost my footing. I had instinctively thrown out my arms and clasped the figure for support, and now, as I covered my balance and looked down, it was into the face of the fairest woman I have ever seen in any land.

The marvelousness of her beauty served to steady my faculties where ordinarily I should have felt bewildered, and, still holding her close, for she trembled as if she would fall from my arms, I said in such Hindustani as I was capable of:

"Something has frightened you. You are fleeing from danger ?"

"Sir," she answered, in a voice soft and rich, though broken by low gasps, "I must hasten;" and she pulled against my arms for release.

From my knowledge of the country, I felt sure no woman like the one who stood before me could safely venture into the streets at this hour, and, having an Anglo-Saxon's feelings for all woman kind, I acted on a quickly formed resolve.

"I do not know what sends you out into the night, nor what pursuit you fear, but I am ready to take you where you wish to go," I said.

"I must go far from this place,—and alone," she answered, speaking agitatedly.

"We will go," I said reassuringly. "I will take you to your own people."

Upon this her slender body trembled anew, and replying, "I have no people. I cannot stay here," she turned from me and began to walk quickly away.

I as quickly followed, walking behind her through street after street, she choosing the deserted by-ways, until we came out through some suburban orchards, and finally reached the edge of a stretch of thick forest which belts the eastern side of the town. Here she stopped suddenly, and, turning to me, said entreatingly:

"Leave me! You cannot help."

I looked at the town behind, at the forest in front, and felt it a moral impossibility to obey.

"I think I can," I ventured, "if you will confide in me. I have a sister here in whose care I can place you, and if anything is threatening you I can hide you with her. She is an English doctor, and is devoting her life to work among your country women. "

It would be impossible to describe the changes of expression which flashed over her face at this. Relief, questioning, consent, and doubt arose from the depths of her dark eyes and looked out at me. For some time she stood thus, inwardly debating, and at last answered:

"Yes, if I may come out alone once in seven days."

"You shall have perfect liberty, of course," I eagerly assured her.

This promise seemed so completely to allay any lurking feeling of fear or doubt that at once she laid her hand upon mine, saying, "I will go with you."

Now, I had no hesitation whatever in taking this girl to my sister, who, as I had said, lived in India for the purpose of dealing with the conditions of life surrounding the Oriental women. Indeed, no sooner had she seen Aidu and heard her story than she insisted upon taking this beautiful waif into our household as one of ourselves; and as time passed and the lovableness of her

nature was fully revealed to us, we found that we had rescued one of the rarest of pearls from the depths of the human sea around us.

She was pathetically gentle, and when the first constraint of the situation wore off showed herself possessed of a brilliant though unformed mind.

My sister built many hopes upon Aidu—for that was the name of our waif&mdas;as a future coadjutor in her chosen work; though I may as well confess at once that I had other intentions about her.

After only a few weeks spent in her society, I found myself deeply in love, and but for one singular, inexplicable circumstance would have begged her then and there to become my wife.

The mystery was this:

While she looked the perfection of sweet and elastic health and possessed an unusually pure vitality, no one ever saw Aidu par take of food. At first we thought that perhaps she shrank from burdening us, and believed that in some way she secretly procured cheap food outside. To all questions on the subject she returned a jesting reply, or else remained pleadingly silent. Once only, during each week, was she seen to leave the house, when she went upon those twilight walks for which she had stipulated. And the mystery of her sustenance, puzzling at first, grew darker and denser every day, the more so as Aidu steadily became more radiant in health and tinted like a ripe pomegranate from a fountain of rich vitality. Indeed, she seemed the incarnation of some flawless vital force consciously masking itself in human form.

But there came a day when I could restrain my love no longer.

My jealousy of those walks, during which she went I knew not where nor whom to see, became at last unbearable, and I determined to push my misgivings to a conclusion by questioning her outright.

Late in the afternoon of one of these seventh days of the week, on which she never failed of her twilight walk, I sought her where she sat in the shade of a trellised veranda, and, seating my self beside her, took her hands in my own.

"Aidu, you must know how I love you!" I said impetuously.

I could wipe out the fact of my own soul sooner than I could forget the measureless depth and meaning of the look she gave me, straight from her lifted eyes! Oh, cold and reasonable Westerner! Never, even through eternity, will you know the infinity of meaning hidden in the lotus-heart of love, never having looked into the eyes of Aidu raised in a pure and perfect confession!

"I love you!" she murmured. Echo of my own words only, but enough.

"You will not go out alone again, now, Aidu?" I questioned pleadingly.

"I would try to do what you ask, even that which I cannot," she said wistfully.

Having gained so much, I was in a measure satisfied; but I determined, in virtue of my now undoubted right, to follow her should she again go on her secret errand. This I hoped she would not do; but later I saw her steal out from the house and walk away, not briskly, as was usual, but with a certain languor, as if pulling against her will. It was an easy matter to follow her at a little distance, for she went straight forward, as to a well known goal, never once looking back. On she went, past the houses of the town, out into a stretch of the suburban orchards, until we stood again upon the edge of the same tangled forest where we had stopped on the evening I first found her. Surely, it could not be that Aidu would venture within those dense shadows!

Yes, even here she did not hesitate, but forced her way through the gloomy thicket, deftly stepping over obstructions and pushing away the drooping vines as if the path were a clear and familiar one. And all the while I followed, possessed by an intensity of curiosity and feeling which must have given me the eyes of a night animal, for I never for a moment lost sight of her; but, while she walked easily and swiftly, I rushed on, panting through excitement, until when, at last, she halted and leaned back against a tree in an attitude of expectation, I stopped, trembling and weak from agitation.

And now that happened which is burnt into my memory forever.

As she stood there, motionless, her slight figure in its snowy garments dully outlined against the dark tree trunk, I noted that Aidu's eyes were fixed upon a certain spot in the ground before her, whither mine followed. At first I saw only a faint glow in the grass at her feet, like the light of two phosphorescent insects side by side, but as this rapidly grew and widened, the shape of a dark head was outlined within the rays. Brighter and brighter the light grew until yes, a cobra's hooded head appeared! and from the glowing eyes streamed the rapidly increasing light in a coruscating flood.

Horror-stricken, I looked at Aidu ! She was gazing down into those burning, venomous eyes, whose radiance was momentarily intensified until her rapt face and figure, the coiled length of the serpent, and even the grass and trees around were illuminated as by the shining of two small suns.

Under this compelling gaze Aidu's languor melted. Her form dilated and changed in my sight as if the very crucible of vital life were there, purging

away the particles of mortality and building her form anew out of imperishable materials. Her glowing beauty was indescribable; it was a revelation.

And now the monster slowly raised himself, stretching up out of his coils, until his scintillating, fiery orbs were on a level with the smiling, dewy eyes of the woman whom I loved. She leaned gently forward and softly stroked the mottled neck. A tremor shook my whole body. In that moment I was overwhelmed by the horrible certainty that here I beheld the rites of the ancient mystic serpent worship still practised in certain parts of India; and that Aidu, my Aidu, served as the unwilling instrument of the priests of the temple, from whose fearful power she had vainly attempted to escape on the night of our first meeting.

Crazed by a fury of conflicting emotions, I seized a stone that lay near and hurled it upon the erect serpent. It struck his neck just below the level of Aidu's matchless chin, and as the ugly head dropped suddenly down upon the coils of his body, slowly settling to the ground, the wonderful light faded, and a heart rending shriek from Aidu rang through the woods. I sprang to her side, and lifted her in my arms!

"Aidu! my love!" I cried, "speak to me."

But the exquisite form hung relaxed in my embrace, and the white lids slowly shut down over the eyes of my love.

The fearful spell had been broken, but at what cost! By arresting too suddenly that strange, magnetic current, I had checked the fountain from which her life was fed.

Aidu was dead!

"The Little Brown Mole"
Clarice Irene Clinghan

The Black Cat, No. 5, February 1896

THREE YEARS AGO, WHILE SPENDING a few weeks in New York, I was invited to the home of Paul Fancourt, the famous naval architect, whose family residence is on the shore of the Hudson, and but a short distance from the city.

I found my old college friend, whom I had not seen for several years, busily engaged with a set of drawings; but, notwithstanding his enthusiasm in his work, he looked worn, haggard, and unhappy. On the afternoon of the last day of my visit I pinned him down to a serious talk, in the course of which I begged him not to undermine his health by too close application to his favorite pursuit.

With a flitting smile he exclaimed: "Why, it's all that keeps me alive!" After a moment's thought he added: "Of late years I have been weighed down by the memory of a dark spot in my life—an unwritten chapter—until at times it seems as though I must make a confidant of some one."

Upon my assurance that I would be a most willing listener, he related the following history:

"Twelve years ago," he said, "when I was twenty-three, I met a singularly handsome girl, a débutante enjoying the triumphs of her first season. It does not speak well for the good sense of either of us, but I am compelled to admit that within six weeks we had met, loved, married, quarreled, and separated.

"The trouble between us was incompatibility of temper. This sounds insignificant, but there was certainly an enormous lot of incompatibility and much temper! We were very unhappy—at least, I was. We both said things that could never be forgiven or forgotten. Before the honeymoon was over I left my wife in this house, with a corps of servants and a handsome balance at my banker's, and started on a trip around the world.

"I was absent five years. During that time there was no communication between my wife and myself, although I frequently heard of her through correspondence with friends. Her conduct during my absence was most exemplary. She remained in the place where I left her, but gave up society. She studied art, making much progress, and I was informed that her pictures and illustrations were selling for extravagant sums. She seemed to have struck a popular art note and was playing upon it.

"These bits of information neither entertained nor amused me. Indeed, I thought myself beyond the point where anything she might say or do could interest me. Not that I had learned to care for any one else, but simply because our short association had utterly destroyed my early boyish affection. Before I had been absent a year her very image seemed effaced from my memory.

"On my arrival in New York, however, I was irritated to learn that not a penny of the money I had left at her disposal had been touched. I believed she had done this for the purpose of annoying me and causing me to look mean in the eyes of the world,—she, meanwhile, earning her livelihood by her art. Being abundantly able, I wished to make a settlement upon her; but, as she absolutely refused to talk with the lawyer I sent to her, I was compelled, repugnant as the idea was, to seek a personal interview. To this end I telegraphed Mrs. Fancourt on the third morning after my arrival, asking if she would receive me at five o'clock that afternoon on an urgent business matter.

"In less than an hour the reply reached me. I tore open the envelope and read the one word which comprised the answer, standing alone, naked of punctuation, on the yellow sheet: 'Come'

" 'That means war to the knife,' I thought, tossing the paper on my dressing-table. 'No words wasted.'

As I made preparations for the trip I caught myself glancing at the letter now and then. *'Come'* After all, it had a certain charm of its own, that word. Like all affirmative expressions, it possessed drawing power. The more I looked at it, the more alluring it appeared. Then I examined the signature. It was simply 'Leila.' Really, it was almost coaxing.

"Arriving in this village just at nightfall, I hurried towards the house which had been the scene of so much unhappiness. To my surprise, it gleamed with lights, as if for some festivity. As I sprang up the steps and laid my hand upon the bell the door was suddenly opened by a maid-servant whose face was strange to me.

" 'Where is madame—Mrs. Fancourt?' I asked.

" 'In the drawing-room, sir,' she answered, and then discreetly disappeared.

"As you know, the drawing-room in this house is connected with the front hall by an arch, hung with portiéres. These were drawn. Pushing them aside, I entered, and suddenly found myself in the warm glow of a big wood fire which had been lighted in the fireplace. This crackling, cheery blaze and the waning light of the October day were all that lighted the room. There in the center she stood, clad in an exquisite gown of palest yellow, and, as I moved towards her, I saw two hands, instead of one, outstretched. The next moment I was holding them both, the cool, soft fingers clinging to mine while she whispered: 'Paul!'

"For a few seconds we looked at each other silently, breathlessly; then, obeying that irresistible law that causes the needle to be drawn towards the magnet, I bent and kissed her.

"All this took place as I have described it; but it would be impossible for me to account for the feelings that actuated me. I know only that all my bitterness towards my wife, all my dislike for her, in one revulsion of mind changed to the most passionate admiration and affection from the instant her lips touched mine. Dazed, astonished, I could not find voice to speak, but Leila chatted quite naturally as she led me to a big armchair on one side of the fireplace, while she threw herself on a low divan piled with cushions on the other side, putting out a slim little yellow-slippered foot to the blaze.

" 'It's such a sorry day that I ordered this big fire, so your home would seem pleasant after your long absence,' said she, in her mellow, vibrating voice. Then, looking at me across the fire, with a winning smile, she added: 'Besides, it was so good of you to come out to see me.'

"I looked at her, still amazed. I now saw that she was much changed. Perhaps she was not so handsome as she had been in her early womanhood; but what she had gained more than made up for that which she had lost. She was thinner; her face had grown ethereal, luminous, spirituelle. Surely, she had suffered, this fiery, savage-tempered girl, for the hardness and selfishness had melted away from her face and left it softened, lovely, and changefully brilliant. At first I thought her eyes were darker; but I soon made up my mind that it was because the pupils were so dilated. Then I knew she, too, was under the tension of strong nervous excitement. Her manner, however, gave no suggestion of this. She talked rapidly and almost continually, saying,

apparently, whatever first came into her mind.

" 'I suppose it seems frightfully dull to be here again. The merry-go-round has stopped, and here you are at the place from which you started. The curtain has dropped, has it not, dear? You've been everywhere and seen so much; and now everything is at a standstill and you feel a bit giddy from sudden lack of motion. It's much the same with me, only my merry-go-round isn't so merry and not so far around. I've just rotated between here and the New York art schools, and lived very quietly. But I believe I'm doing all the talking. Would you like to say anything—just a little word? Well, I won't let you, for I know two things. You are tired, and no man feels like talking before he has dined. So not a word until after dinner.'

"In the dining-room another surprise awaited me. A miniature banquet had been prepared, evidently in my honor, for I was the only guest. The room was adorned with palms and vines, and the table was gracefully decorated with roses and ferns, among which gleamed the silver and china. Over all was the soft, almost moonlight effect of wax tapers. The only objection I could make to anything was the flowers on the table, which partially concealed the face which I was now hungry to look upon. It was what I believe is termed the Celtic type of beauty, quite common among Anglo-Saxons,—dark brown hair approaching black, gray eyes, and a complexion of creamy fairness.

"We were long at dinner, talking of everything but the subject I came to introduce. I became reminiscent of travel; she was easily entertained and was herself brilliant, serious, and amusing in turn. As we walked back to the drawing-room at the close of the meal, I whispered, like a lover:

" 'Leila, I came to scoff, but I remain to pray. Can you forget the past?'

"She promptly put her hand over my mouth. 'The past must remain a sealed book,' she commanded.

"And so it did.

"In the hour that followed, spent before the open fire, I inadvertently referred more than once to the forbidden subject. But each time I was stopped by a warning gesture and an impressive, 'Remember, not a word. We begin life anew from this hour.'

"With every moment my desire for a reconciliation grew stronger. But when at length she yielded, it was only on two conditions: first, that I would never refer to the past; and, second, that our future be consecrated by a ceremony of marriage.

"I readily agreed to the first condition and took the solemn vow required;

but at the second stimulation I laughed. But she said, very seriously, that she could be reconciled to me under no other circumstances. So, yielding to her whim, I ordered a carriage and we drove to the house of an elderly clergyman in the village whom we well knew, who, on hearing our story, willingly agreed to repeat the ceremony; and, lightly, almost laughingly, the words of five years before were once more said.

"Then followed five months of the most absolute happiness that was ever accorded, it seemed to me, to human beings. It was an atmosphere of love, joy, and ineffable content. The beauty of my wife, her changed nature, and fine intuitions grew upon me day by day. There never was, I am sure, a woman like her. I lived in her love; and yet I lost it forever on account of a thing of such infinitesimal importance that it drives me nearly mad to think of it. This object was no more nor less than a little brown mole on my wife's neck, just below her left ear.

"It came about in the following manner: One day, having returned from the city on an earlier train than I had anticipated, I went to Leila's room and found her lying on a couch, fast asleep, her hands clasped behind her head, and one slippered foot crossed over the other—in fact, the posture in which Du Maurier's famous Duchess was wont to 'dream true.' Knowing she was sound sleeper it occurred to me to softly kiss the little brown mole to which I have just referred—something I had not thought of since the days of our first short honeymoon so long ago.

"Carefully I pushed aside the masses of tumbled hair that lay across her soft white throat, and bent over her. No—the other side—but, surely—what did it mean? Her round neck of infantile whiteness and smoothness lay before me, *but the little beauty spot was missing!* Nor was there the slightest evidence that it had ever existed.

"I went downstairs and smoked a pipe on the piazza to think over this mystery. But the longer I thought, the less I under stood it.

"That evening I said to my wife: 'Sweetheart, where is the little brown mole that was just under your left ear?'

"For a moment she looked at me; then she said softly, but with a certain power in her voice: 'Have you forgotten your vow?'

"I stared a moment; then recalled my promise never to allude to the past. Somehow, it impressed me differently now than when I had first taken it. To be sure, I laughingly begged Leila's pardon, assuring her there would be no more lapses from rectitude in that direction. But from that moment a strange

restlessness took possession of me. I felt something impending. In the morning I would wake with a singular sense of oppression, which when traced to its cause always arrived at the same starting point,—the little brown mole which should have been on my wife's soft white throat, but was not.

"It was about this time that I noticed that there was not a likeness of Leila in the whole house. When I went away there were many scattered about,—water-color sketches, paintings in oil, photographs, and etchings, for Leila had always been proud of her beauty. Now not one remained; even the oil-painting that had been finished, as companion to mine, just after our first marriage, had been removed, though mine hung in its accustomed place. I was about to call attention to this fact and ask the reason, when I remembered that this circumstance, also, belonged to the past, concerning which I had promised never to question, and was silent.

"My mind had now become so perturbed that it continually demanded something on which to focus its attention. For this reason, I turned my thoughts to my favorite pursuit—naval architecture, which had been neglected for months. Before my trip abroad I had left in a sandal-wood box in the library some unfinished plans, which I now decided to complete. But as the box was missing and the servants knew nothing of its where abouts, I climbed to the attic to look for it myself.

"After an hour spent in a fruitless search I was turning to leave, when my eye fell upon a large picture lying on its face among a heap of papers in the darkest corner. I knew the frame, and the first glance at the picture told me I had happened on what I was not looking for, but had wished for,—a portrait of my wife. It was the one that had been painted directly after our marriage.

"Dragging it from its hiding-place, I carried it to the long, low window, and, propping it up against an old dressing-table in a position that would catch a good light, I carefully wiped off the dust and cobwebs and stood back to view it.

"As I looked I became as a man stricken with death! The face on the canvas was not the face of the woman I loved and worshiped as my wife!

"How long I stood benumbed by this discovery I do not know. After the first shock lessened and my senses began to act, I fell to studying the portrait and comparing it with its living double.

"That there was a remarkable resemblance between the two it is unnecessary to say; but at the same time there were so many points of difference that I was amazed that I could have been so easily deceived. There

was, in fact, what might be termed a 'family' resemblance such as often exists between two sisters, who, when together, are not thought to be remarkably alike, but when seen apart are often mistaken for one another. In the picture the ears were larger, the mouth smaller, the chin less decided, the forehead a trifle narrower, and the eyebrows heavier.

"While I stood revolving in my mind this terrible mystery I heard the sound of hurried footsteps. My wife had returned from her afternoon walk. I went downstairs, arriving in the lower hall just as she entered. She came sweeping in with her usual vivacity her eyes bright, a faint rose tint on her cheeks, enveloped in that atmosphere of exhilaration that was like a breath of ozone, and which gave her a charm above ordinary women.

"Something in my appearance must have startled her, for she paused at sight of me and waited for me to approach. I went to her, kissed her, and then, clasping her gloved wrists in mine, looked steadfastly at her and said, 'Dear, where is Leila?'

"In a moment her brilliant color faded. Her eyes fell. Then, suddenly wrenching herself free from me, she moved unsteadily towards the staircase, pausing with her hand on the banister only long enough to say, 'You have broken your pledge. Leave me alone until to-morrow. Then you shall know everything.'

"Then I heard the sound of her garments on the stairs, presently the closing of her door, and the key turning in the lock.

"All that night I restlessly walked the floor of my room, trying to bring order out of the chaos of my mind. Fear, love, trust, suspicion, all by turns possessed me; but in the end my belief in the goodness of the woman I loved conquered. At early dawn I knocked at my wife's door. There was no response. I tried the knob; it yielded and I entered. There was a dim light in the room; but she was gone. On her dressing-table was a letter which told me all.

"The first few paragraphs are sacred to me alone. I will begin her letter where she commenced her own history.

" 'My name,' she wrote, 'is Olive Berkeley. I was born in England, the only child of a retired naval officer. My father had a moderate fortune, and for eighteen years I lived a quiet, care free life in a Devonshire country-house. During my nineteenth year my father's income was so much reduced by unlucky investments that we moved to London that I might study art, with a view to supporting myself. Two years later my father, who was my only

near relative, died suddenly, leaving me less than a hundred pounds clear of debt. By this time, however, I felt confident of success in my profession, and, thinking America offered a better field than England for a self-supporting woman, I came to New York. Here I took a studio with the intention of giving lessons in drawing and painting.

" 'But the pupils did not come; my pictures failed to catch the popular fancy; my money was soon spent. Overwork and worry culminated in illness, and I soon found myself deeply in debt without a friend in the world to whom I could apply for aid. In this extremity I accepted the first work I could obtain —a situation as companion to Mrs. Paul Fancourt.

" 'This woman, whose violent temper and moody disposition had driven her husband to foreign countries before the honeymoon was over, was the terror of her household. She, I believe, took a dislike to me from the first on account of a singular resemblance between us, and also because she saw I was her equal by birth and education. At any rate, she delighted in humiliating me in every way, as well as in making my duties as laborious as possible. I hated to touch a morsel of food under her roof, but my unmet obligations made it impossible for me to resign my position, as I did not know where else I could obtain remunerative work, and I had a horror of debt. But, though I outwardly kept my temper, a volcano of hurt pride and misery burned with in me.

" 'One Wednesday night I went to my room more than usually worn and enraged by Mrs. Fancourt's caprices. It had been one of her stormiest days, culminating in the discharge of her butler, and the bitterest invectives against the other servants. I had just retired, and had hardly fallen asleep, when the bell over my head rang violently. Springing up, I slipped on a dressing gown and went downstairs. Mrs. Fancourt was sitting in an easy-chair reading a novel. The hands of the clock on the mantel pointed to eleven. Without looking at me, she motioned to a table not three yards away, saying insolently, "Bring me that paper-knife."

" '"Never," I answered passionately.

" 'With this she rose and came towards me, striking me full in the face with the paper-covered novel in her hand.

" 'Then it was as if all my pent-up self-control snapped. I sprang toward her, seized her by the shoulders, shook her until my strength was spent, and flung her from me.

" 'She fell heavily, striking her temple upon a sharp corner of the fender,

where she lay quite still. I hurried forward and spoke to her. There was no response and I lifted her face to the firelight. To my horror I found that she was dead.

" 'And what was to become of me? I had killed her in a fit of passion, I could not deny, though it was by accident. How could I prove my innocence? I was without friends or money. When my debts were brought to light, might not theft and the fear of discovery be advanced as the motive for the crime? If not the scaffold, I saw, at least, prison bars before me.

" 'Instinctively looking around for something to wrap about me, I caught up a satin-lined garment of Mrs. Fancourt, and, slipping it on, rang the bell. Wishing to spare the one who answered it a shock, I met the housekeeper in the hall.

" '"What is it, Mrs. Fancourt?" asked the woman very respectfully, evidently mistaking me for her mistress.

" 'In that instant there flashed into my half-crazed brain the wild idea that I might personify Mrs. Fancourt for the time being. The death of the poor, unknown English girl could be of little moment, while the announcement of the death of Mrs. Fancourt would cause much more comment.

" 'With this idea, I told the housekeeper to come to me in half an hour; then, with the courage of desperation, I clothed the dead body in one of my dresses, arrayed myself in one of Mrs. Fancourt's gowns, darkened my eyebrows to simulate hers, and let my hair fall about my face in confusion.

" 'Meantime, I had determined to insure myself against detection by the three remaining servants by getting rid of them at once, a plan rendered all the easier by the fact that it simply carried out Mrs. Fancourt's mood of the day. In fact, it had been her custom to vent her feelings by discharging her entire corps of servants in a body and with no warning; and their comings and goings caused not the slightest comment.

" 'The scheme succeeded to perfection. The other servants, terrified by the catastrophe, gladly left the house at once, especially as each was provided with two weeks' wages in advance. Mrs. Fancourt's only sister and near relative was traveling in Europe; her husband was at the antipodes. Of course there was a coroner's inquest; but, as nothing was proven to the contrary, a verdict of death by accident was brought in. The whole matter passed off very quietly; few outside the household knew that Mrs. Fancourt had an English companion or that she had died. Those who did thought it very kind of Mrs. Fan court to give the companion burial in her own family lot.

" 'Then I fell sick, and for weeks raved with brain fever. When I recovered I was but the ghost of my former self, and friends of the dead woman who came to call after my recovery said they never would have known me.

" 'As soon as I was able I devoted myself to art, which now, by a freak of fortune, brought me large returns. I not only paid the debts of my "deceased English companion," but supported myself comfortably without touching the fund left at the disposal of Mrs. Fancourt by her husband. That I never could have done. I should have been happy but for the grief I felt at having—though unwittingly—caused the death of another. There has never been a moment when I would not have willingly yielded up my life, could it have restored that of my victim. The fact that I usurped her name and position was due to a momentary cowardice. There was only one thing belonging to the dead woman that I coveted, and that was her husband!—and not even him until that night of nights when he came into my monotonous life and kissed me with that quiet air of ownership and dominion!

" 'I had dreaded your coming, fearing you, above all others, would discover the fraud. And when your message reached me, and, on the impulse of the moment, I sent that fatal answer, "Come," it had hardly left my hand before I regretted it. For at once it flashed upon me how impossible it would be to account for all or to conceal all. But from the instant that you stood be fore me I was conquered by another feeling than that of dread,—I loved you. Love and not fear held me to the lie. And it was my respect for you and for myself that made me insist upon that marriage ceremony.

" 'I always knew that should you discover the deceit I should leave you—not because I felt guilty of crime—for of that I have always felt morally innocent—but because I won and married you under false pretenses. I cannot bear to lose one iota of your respect and remain where I can miss it.' "

Here Paul Fancourt closed his story. I heard the high wind lashing the trees; darkness was growing dense; the early November evening was closing in.

"It was seven years ago to-night that I first met her in this house," went on Fancourt.

"Surely you have taken measures to find her?"

"I have done everything under heaven. Once in a while I grow desperate and try everything over again. But it is useless. And yet I have a feeling that she will return, and that if she does it will be to this house. So I am just

waiting here, waiting—

"Well, John?"

"A lady to see you, sir," said the butler at the door.

"Who is she?"

"I don't know, sir; she wouldn't give any name."

Fancourt rose and went towards the door; but before he reached it his visitor pushed past the servant and stood,—a tall, veiled figure in black,—clutching nervously at the drapery at the door. Then she threw back her veil. I caught a glimpse of a marvelous face and hair sprinkled with snow about the temples, of two dark, beautiful eyes fixed on Paul.

"I—I couldn't stay away—any longer," she whispered huskily.

Fancourt rushed towards her with an inarticulate cry. Then, with hands outstretched, "My wife," he gasped, "I—"

But what followed I shall never know; for the next moment I had retreated into the library, where for half an hour I sat diligently reading a book held upside down.

What I do know, however, is this: All that I have told happened three years ago; and up to the present time Paul Fan court's third experiment in matrimony has proved a triumphant success.

"To Let"
Alice Turner Curtis

The Black Cat, No. 6, March 1896

ON ONE OF THE STREETS leading from the park in the center of a town near Boston is a very attractive modern house with a history. It was built for the occupancy of a Mr. and Mrs. Leslie, whose mysterious deaths mark the beginning of this story.

The facts here recorded are just as I heard them. Indeed I was a resident of the town during the period in which these strange occurrences took place, and had a personal acquaintance with the people mentioned.

The Leslies had been married a year, were apparently happy, and were well and favorably known in the town. One morning a neighbor noticed that lights were burning in the Leslie house. He ran up the steps and rang the bell. There was no response, and after a few hours the neighbors decided that something was wrong inside, and that an entrance must be made at once. The front door was accordingly forced open, and as the men went in they could see into the room beyond the hall, the sitting-room. Mr. Leslie was sitting with a paper across his knees, apparently asleep, and on a couch near by lay his wife.

It took but a few moments to ascertain that both had been dead for some hours. Their faces were peaceful and composed; there were no signs of disturbance in the house.

Every possible inquiry was made. No trace of poison or of foul play could be found. Numberless theories were advanced, and the wonder and excitement over the tragic death of the young couple grew daily.

After some months their relatives removed the furnishings, and "To Let" appeared in the cottage windows. The house was immediately taken by a man from Boston, whose family consisted, beside himself, of his wife and two little girls. None of this family had heard the story of the Leslies, nor did they

hear it until they had been in the cottage for some weeks.

One night, after they had occupied the dwelling for over a week, the man of the family was awakened by a sudden scream. His wife awoke at the same moment, and exclaimed: "One of the children must have the nightmare," but just then the two little girls rushed into the room, exclaiming, "What's the matter, mother? What are you screaming about?" Almost before they had finished speaking two more screams in quick succession rang through the house. The place was carefully searched, but no cause for the disturbance could be found.

The next night at about the same hour like sounds were heard. After that Mr. Weston made inquiries of the neighbors. None of them had been disturbed. One suggested that possibly a cat was shut up somewhere in the house and had made the noises heard, but a careful search of the entire premises failed to discover any such commonplace solution of the mysterious sounds.

A week passed without any recurrence of the midnight sounds, when one night Mrs. Weston awoke from a most terrible dream. She dreamed that she was lying upon the couch in the sitting room. In front of her stood a young man who held a pillow in his hands. "I shall stifle you," he said clearly; "it's no use to struggle." Mrs. Weston dreamed that she tried to scream; that once, twice, three times she endeavored to rise from the couch to push away the pillow, but could not.

From this dream she awoke suddenly, and, as she lay endeavoring to overcome its impression, a gasping shriek, quickly followed by two more, awakened her husband, and again sent the little girls flying in terror to their mother's room.

This time Mrs. Weston held herself responsible for the terrible screams. "I've had a dreadful dream, and I suppose I screamed without knowing it," she said. She had hardly finished this explanation when again came the screams, the last dying away in a stifled moan.

The family was by this time thoroughly terrified. They had heard the story of the Leslies, and without waiting for further experiences in the house they moved at once.

Their story got about the town, with the result that the house was vacant for a year. Then a family, consisting of an elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Walters, and their son, a young man about twenty-five, moved in. The remainder of the story was told me by this son, and I will give it in his own

words as nearly as possible:

"I wasn't afraid of any haunted house. My father was deaf, so it would take a reasonably loud scream to wake him, and my mother was a sensible woman. The house just suited us. We got nicely settled in a few weeks, and my elder brother and his wife came out from Boston to make us a visit. The first night they were there I stayed in town for the theater. The train I came out in left a few minutes after eleven, and I reached the house at about a quarter before twelve. I was nearly ready for bed when a shriek like that of a person struggling for his life sounded through the house. I hurried into the hall, and as I did so my brother opened his door. Before either of us could speak a second and a third scream followed. By this time even father's deaf ears had been penetrated, and we all sat up talking the matter over far into the night before we felt like sleep.

"In the end we decided not to mention the occurrence. We thought of several possible explanations of the noise. The next morning we made a careful examination of the house and surroundings. We made inquiries as to late trains, thinking we might have mistaken the shriek of an engine for a human voice; but all our conjectures led to nothing. We could find no satisfactory reason for the disturbance.

"I made inquiries about the Leslies, and found that many people believed that Leslie had stifled his wife, and then taken some subtle poison which left no trace; but there was no evidence to support this theory; no sign of poison had been found, no cause could be given for such an act, and nothing could explain the midnight screams. A weeks passed quietly, when one night my brother awakened our mother, telling her that his wife was ill. She had awakened from a bad dream almost suffocated, and my mother worked over her for some time before she was restored. She refused to tell her dream, but we were well assured that it was a repetition of Mrs. Weston's. The next morning my brother and his wife went to their home.

"I had one more experience in that house which I shall never forget. My father was to be out one night until midnight at the meeting of a society of which he was a member, and my mother and I decided to wait up for him.

"About eleven o'clock mother lay down on the couch and went to sleep. The room was brightly lighted, and I sat near the couch reading.

"Just as I heard my father come in I was startled by a sudden moan from my mother. I turned quickly toward the couch, and as I did so I saw plainly that the sofa pillow lay upon her face. I snatched it away, and awakened her

with some little difficulty.

"Meantime my father had come into the room, and as he entered a scream, terrible in its nearness and intensity, rang out, thrilling us all with a sickening shock. We left the next day."

This finished his story. No explanation of these happenings has ever been given. The Leslies ' death remains a mystery, and to explain the Presence that occupied this cottage after their death would be to account for a side of life which we barely touch and cannot comprehend.

The house is still to let.

"The Williamson Safe Mystery"
F. S. Hesseltine

The Black Cat, No. 7, April 1896

ONE MORNING IN THE SPRING of 1894, the attention of persons walking along Sudbury Street, Boston, was attracted to a huge iron safe that was being put out from the warerooms of a well known safe company, which for many years had done business on that street.

The way was blocked, and all passage by cars and teams prevented while a number of men, with great effort, by the aid of blocks, rollers, and windlass, drew the huge mass of iron onto the platform of a stout dray by which it was to be transported to its destination.

Of course passers-by wondered and queried as to the purpose and possible use of a safe of such unusual form and dimension. But the curiosity of the questioners remained unsatisfied; no one standing by knew, and the merchant with his employees was too busy to answer those who ventured to interrupt with their inquiries.

This much, however, was evident: the safe was not new; indeed, the style and appearance of it indicated that it had been built many years ago for some special purpose, in which it had doubtless seen long service. Altogether the appearance of this strange object so excited my curiosity that, although I was in a hurry to reach my office, I waited until the thing was finally loaded and moved slowly off up the street. Then I entered the store of the safe company, and, being well acquainted with the manager, I asked if he could give me the old safe's history.

He replied that there was a strange story connected with it, known now only to himself. For certain reasons it never had been known except to two people, and they had been sacredly bound, one by personal interest and the other by a solemn vow, never to divulge the secret. "This promise," he said, "has been faithfully and sacredly kept; but now all those in any way

connected with or affected by it have passed beyond the dark river. The safe, which has stood here for many years like a specter, reminding me of the dead past, has now, to my great relief, vanished forever, and I know no good reason why the strange story should not be told. While I may withhold or change names in the recital, that which I am about to relate is true, and is capable to some extent of verification.

"More than fifty years ago a stranger of good appearance, whose speech and manner indicated that he was of English birth, entered the shop of one Kershaw, a manufacturer on the corner of Chardon and Green Streets, in this city, inquired for the proprietor, and stated that he wanted constructed a strong, fire-proof safe, giving the description and dimensions desired. By his conversation he appeared familiar with such work, and stated plainly how he wanted this constructed and the kind of lock required,—the keyless combination not having then been invented. In answer to inquiries he said that he was about to open a jewelry store in Hanover Street, that he did not intend to do a retail business, but would carry a considerable stock for wholesale, visiting for trade dealers in neighboring cities. He added, also, that as he would be absent from his store from time to time, he desired a safe of large dimensions where his stock could be safely stored during his absence, as well as at night. He required no shelving in the safe, and wanted it of unusual depth, that he might put directly into it the cases and trunks in which he would keep or carry his stock.

"Being convinced of the stranger's responsibility by a large advance deposit, and by the promise of full payment on completion and delivery, Mr. Kershaw accepted his order, and in due time the safe was completed and delivered. Soon after a sign was put up on the store,—'J. Williamson, Wholesale Dealer in Watches and Jewelry.' No great display was made in the window. Goods were received and shipped by the rear entrance opening on an alley-way. Apparently, but little business was done at the store, and frequently Mr. Williamson was absent visiting his customers, or buying additional stock in New York City. He contracted no indebtedness, paying cash for everything. He expressed a lack of confidence in banks and bankers, saving that he had once lost a large sum by the failure of a bank in which he deposited, and for the future should be his own banker.

"Shortly after he began business he took up his residence on Sheafe Street in the North End of the city, and attended regularly the Baldwin Place Baptist Church. No subscription paper or contribution box ever passed him without a

fairly liberal donation.

"In disposition he was quiet and retiring, and rarely spoke except in response to some inquiry. His earlier life he never referred to except in reply to one or two persons who ventured the question, when he briefly stated that he was the second son of a well-to-do English squire, that at an early age he found that there was no future for him in the old country, and that when little more than a boy he came to New York where he acquired a knowledge of business, and by diligence and economy saved enough to start in business.

"Within a year after his arrival in Boston Mr. Williamson sought the hand of the eldest daughter of a respectable merchant, a deacon in the church which he attended, producing at the same time letters from New York indorsing his worth and character. Having thus satisfied her parents, he was accepted and with little delay married. Very soon after he was received, on profession of his faith, into the church, and by his quiet, correct life, liberality, and honest dealing, secured the confidence and respect of all who knew him.

"About this time a strange epidemic of crime swept over the Puritanic city of Boston. The houses of the wealthy were entered and robbed of their valuable contents. Packages of money were boldly seized within the very enclosures of the bank, the thief escaping through some passageway or by fastening behind him the door through which he escaped; the satchels of bank messengers, filled with valuable contents, were suddenly snatched, and the robber eluded pursuit. At night persons were garroted and robbed on the public street. The police force was small and, although they exercised unusual diligence, every few days some new and startling crime, committed with wonderful skill and boldness, was announced. It was thought that a gang of experienced criminals had made a descent upon the city so long exempt from crime, and every stranger was under suspicion and carefully watched.

"One night, not long after his marriage, Mr. Williamson was found on Charlestown Bridge in a dazed, exhausted condition, and assisted to his home. When sufficiently recovered he stated that while crossing the bridge he was suddenly seized from behind, his throat grasped so that he could not cry out, and his pocket book, containing a large sum of money, taken from him. He struggled to free himself from his unknown assailant until he gasped for breath, and fell exhausted, unconscious.

"On the following day Mr. Williamson offered a liberal reward for the arrest of the highwayman, but as he had not seen him he could give no clue to

aid in the detection of the criminal. Some of the persons robbed, however, who had caught a glimpse of the thief, described a dark person with heavy black hair, wearing blue glass spectacles; and, as it was believed that he and the assailant of Williamson were one, search was made for a person answering this description.

"One evening the whole city was startled by the news of a crime just committed, bolder than any that had preceded it. The store of Davis & Palmer, jewelers on Washington Street, had been entered between the hours of seven and eight P. M., and the most valuable part of their stock taken, the trays containing many valuable watches, diamonds, and jewelry, having all been emptied. As was customary, the store was closed at seven o'clock and a night-watchman came on duty within an hour after. On this evening when the watchman entered he found the cases stripped of their valuable contents and immediately gave the alarm. The police were sent for and an investigation began. It was soon discovered that persons near the store had seen a sleigh drive up, a man alight, unlock and enter the store. Not long after he came out bringing two heavily laden bags, one after the other, which he placed in the sleigh and drove away. At the time no suspicion had been excited, as there was nothing peculiar about his manner of entering or leaving the store. From his course of action the thief was evidently well acquainted with the fact that there was a brief period between the closing of the store and the arrival of the watchman; and, having at some time, doubtless, obtained an impress of the key and made a duplicate, the task of entering and robbing the store at a time when it was least expected was an easy one.

"In those days there was no detective force or special police to investigate crime and capture the criminals. The attention of the few policemen employed by the city was given wholly to the preservation of order, and to preventing a breach of the peace. There was, however, a force of a few constables who served civil processes and worked as private detectives for a reward, headed by an old experienced officer, Captain Darius Clapp; and when it was known that a large reward had been offered for the discovery and return of the goods irrespective of the arrest and conviction of the criminal, Clapp devoted himself at once to that object. As a first step he visited every stage-office, stable, vessel, and mode of egress from the city, but to no purpose. The owner of the sleigh was found, but could give no information except that it had been hired in the afternoon by a dark-haired man wearing colored glasses, and that late in the evening the team was found without any

driver in Haymarket Square.

"As weeks passed and the mystery seemed no nearer a solution, the strange robbery became the universal topic of conversation. Every clue and suspicion was followed up. Strangers were arrested and obliged to prove their innocence. Everybody became a detective.

"Some weeks after the robbery, a stranger came to the express office with a trunk which he wished transported to New York. Something in the manner of the man, an unnatural, half-disguised appearance, excited the suspicion of the alert, sharp-eyed express agent, who had been cautioned by Captain Clapp, and while he proceeded to make out the receipt he secretly sent a messenger to the constable. Upon his arrival that official instantly began to question the stranger, demanding to know the contents of the trunk. His inquiries were frankly answered with proper explanation, and the key produced that the captain might verify the same by examination. The innocent frankness of the stranger disarmed the constable, and, half apologizing for not accepting his statements as sufficient, the captain stooped to unlock the trunk, when suddenly the stranger leaped by him and out through the door, barring it after him by thrusting a stout cane through the iron handle. Throwing himself against the door the captain soon broke the improvised bolt and rushed off in pursuit, following the fugitive down through Dock Square, Marshall, and Hanover Streets, into a narrow court leading from the last street, where the man had disappeared. But though there was no outlet other than that by which he had entered, a thorough search of this place a few moments after failed to discover the fugitive, or the way of his escape. After the houses opening on the court were searched without discovering any trace of the probable thief, the proprietors of the stores fronting Hanover Street on each side and having rear entrances, were sent for. Among these was Mr. Williamson, but as it was ascertained at his residence that he was absent from the city, entrance was gained to his store by a side window. Here, however, as in the other stores, no person or sign of one was found. The burglar, for such an examination of the trunk at the express office proved him to be, was never captured, nor was trace of him discovered, although diligent search of that neighborhood was made by the whole police force.

"Not long after, the city was again startled, this time by the announcement in the morning papers of the mysterious disappearance and probable murder of Mr. Williamson. He was known to carry large sums of money upon his

person, and as there was no good explanation of his absence, it was thought most probable that he had been robbed and murdered. In fact there were some who reported hearing at night cries for help in the vicinity of his store, and a hat which had been found one morning on the street near his store, proved to be one worn by him on the morning when he last left his home.

"Information was sought by advertisement in the newspapers with promise of liberal reward, but all investigation proved unavailing.

"After some weeks of vain inquiry and search, the general suspicion that he had been murdered and his body thrown over the Charlestown Bridge became a settled conviction; but his faithful, trusting wife refused to believe him dead, and her father finally proceeded to New York to see what information, if any, could be gained from those with whom his son-in-law had had dealings in that city.

"What he ascertained there I do not know, but immediately on his return he came to my employer for a workman to go to the store and open in his presence the safe containing the stock stored therein. After some drilling the bolt was sprung and the door swung open, disclosing a sight at which I started back affrighted and amazed, and which so horrified the troubled and anxious father that he fell like a dead man on the floor. There within the safe lay the dead body of Mr. Williamson, the trusted and respected jewelry merchant!

"On recovering consciousness, the good deacon, heart-broken, implored me for his sake and the fair name of his daughter never to make known the sight then revealed, and to assist him in concealing all evidence which would tend to disclose it. To both these requests I at once consented, and that night I helped him to carry out the body privately for burial—no matter where.

"An examination of the safe disclosed a hardly discernible aperture drilled through the back near the top, from which, on the inside, hung a flexible tube by which respiration was made possible for a person enclosed, and through which noise from with out could reach the inmate.

"On the inside of the door a hole had been cut so that the key could be inserted and the bolt thrown. The handle of this key had broken off, leaving the key in the lock. There were indications that food and water had been stored in the safe, but none remained; even the shoes bore marks of the teeth, as if gnawed for sustenance. A black wig and blue glass spectacles lay on the floor of the safe. Seeing all this, we soon conjectured for what purpose this safe was made and used—a temporary place of quick retreat. We wondered if

the key was broken by accident in the haste to elude that last pursuit, or in attempting to re-open the door. We thought we knew now, though each was silent, the mystery of the many recent crimes; but one thing was certain, they ceased and the author of them was never found or arrested."

"The House Across the Way"
by Leo Gale

The Black Cat, No. 9, June 1896

WHEN I ANSWERED THE ADVERTISEMENT of the man in whose employ I am now earning my daily bread, I said that I was "a young man twenty seven years old, single, experienced in the haberdashery and perfumery lines, willing and obliging, and very desirous of obtaining employment." That was the exact truth, particularly the last part; as I was then down to my last ten dollars, without a resource outside of my own humble labors, and not a friend or a single relative in the world to help me, or to put forward one dollar to pay for my room rent, or my modest two and a quarter meals a day; or to buy me the one suit of clothes I usually wore in a year, or the two pairs of shoes, and the few other things which I obtained by laboring steadily from ten to fifteen hours daily, almost three hundred and sixty-five days in the year.

So you know what I am. However persistently some of my fellow-salesmen may assume the manners and appearance of bankers and bondholders, I personally was, and am, a very humble young man, who knows himself pretty well, and, as a result of a long introspection, has settled down to be everlastingly content with enough to eat, drink, and wear, and a bed to sleep in, with a roof over it. Romance has never had a place in my life, and sentimentalism is a word devoid of any meaning for me. Only when a boy do I remember reading or hearing any thing beyond the bare facts of life, daily labor, debts, troubles, and half-filled stomachs, and a few day dreams, —not mine, but other young men's.

I never thought that I should play a part in, or be a witness of, a life drama or tragedy, or ever hear of one (I mean right close up to myself), or see the sequel of one, or anything of that kind. But I did. And when I think of it now, it makes me creep; for what I saw, others will some day see, and when it is

discovered there will be quite a stir in the papers. The stir may not last long, but it will be talked of as a really strange, uncanny sort of thing. And so it is. Not absolutely frightful, but just simply very, very strange.

Before I obtained the position I at present occupy, I rented a small front hall room in a very quiet, respectable street. This street is situated between two avenues that lie east of Eighth Avenue and west of Lexington, and is between Twenty-third and Forty-second Streets. That is as nearly as I can or will describe it. This street was, as I said, respectable, and so was the house (though the house was the least pretentious in the block). It was a street that has that peculiarity of a great many New York streets: some houses were old, some were new, some extremely modest, bordering on shabbiness; others quite attractive, of brown stone, and tenanted by people comfortably if not well off.

The room of which I was the quiet, silent occupant was one that needs no description to the man or woman who knows any thing of city boarding-house life. It was on the third floor, over looked the street, and was just over the stoop. I won't stop to tell everything that was in it, for that is not my purpose here. I came every night and went every morning; at seven o'clock every morning, generally at eight or nine every night. When I got home I generally stayed right in my room, retiring at ten or eleven regularly. I had no money to spend, and so was, perforce, a very regular, good young man—for I also went to church every Sunday morning, and sometimes Sunday night. I used often to gaze out of my window at the people passing by, particularly during the long Sunday afternoons when it was raining or cloudy, and everything seemed very quiet, somber, cold, and puritanical. It was not much of an entertainment, but it was all I had. There was one thing, however, that occasionally made my street gazing interesting, and that was the coming and going of a very smart-looking young man who was, it was reported to us less favored "roomers," the son of the owner of the house just opposite—a man who had made quite a fortune in the produce business, and was now retired. You must understand that we had some quite rich neighbors, for this street, being near a large center, had some solid householders, and a few stylish boarding houses further up the street, besides the modest ones of which I was a patron.

This young man I speak of was evidently a favored son. He did nothing but go out in the morning at from ten to twelve, and many times I had been awakened by the noisy stopping of his cab at all hours of the night. He was a

"blood" beyond a doubt, and the envy of many of us who gathered at the dining-table and discussed this young child of fortune's escapades. For some of us came closer to him during odd moments of the day, when he perhaps came into some store where one of us was employed, or when we met him face to face, or passed him in a carriage on some of the avenues. Sometimes he had male or female companions, always of the flashy kind.

Well, life jogged along for me in the same dull, dry way for some years. I earned the same salary, ate the same sort of food, wore the same sort of clothes, and lived the same sort of life as I had always done and hoped always to do. At some time or other—when, I cannot place exactly—the young man disappeared, and, in a way that excited no special comment, so did the young man's people. The house was either sold or rented; a new tenant came and opened a boarding-house, failed and moved out; another one took it, and in time went away; so also did a third and a fourth. Just then our landlady died, and somehow I moved across the street, right into the very house where the young man had lived, but now so long ago that he was but a memory; and as nearly all his contemporaries in my former quarters had scattered, I never heard him spoken of, nor spoke of him myself.

The room which my small income permitted was a hall room, on the third floor front, exactly like the one across the street, only just a little bit larger. I settled down in it uneventfully, and so continued to live. The only thing which lent a ray of light to my existence here was the coming of a middle-aged gentleman (and he was a gentleman), who took the small room at the other end of the rather long, narrow hallway, so that when our doors were opened each could see the other sitting in his little den, and could engage in conversation if he cared to talk loudly. But for the sake of the other lodgers we never did, though we exchanged visits frequently on the long winter evenings. This was a good thing for both of us, for he was poor and alone in the world, and so was I, and our acquaintance brought us much mutual entertainment.

Our rooms were not elegant, nor was any part of the house—now. It did contain some evidence of former luxury, but such evidence was very scarce and seedy, and fast disappearing. Besides the rooms we occupied, there was a closet here and there along the hall, and two large square rooms that were let to richer lodgers; though, on account of the narrow stairs and the gloomy aspect that characterized this landing, these more expensive rooms were more often empty than not. Often I sauntered in and out of them, side by side with

my fellow-lodger, talking of various things. We sat down on the sofas and chairs, and sometimes lighted the gas, for we were quite alone up here, and being quiet, never gave any trouble, or called forth any reprimands. A great many others came and went in all parts of the house, some staying a week, some a month, some only a few days; but we two were like fixtures—not very profitable, but desirable in a way.

Between our two rooms, on one side of the hall, was a closet just outside of my door, the baluster, then the top step of the staircase, another closet door, and at the end of the hall my friend's room. On the other side of the hall were the doors of the two large rooms, and between them a blank space of wall.

Now I know there is nothing very interesting about a third story landing of an old house, nor anything special to be said about the wall outside of two rooms; but many a time I have walked up and down this hallway on Sunday afternoons or evenings when alone, making no noise and gazing at this wall with its gilt paper,—of which I knew every figure, and how many figures there were—and at the little skylight overhead, or at the faded red carpet on the floor. I often went into the front room, lighted the gas, and wandered around from object to object, sat first in one chair, then in another, then in the rocker, and lastly pulled the folding bed down, simply for something to do, or to speculate how nice it would be to sleep in this bed instead of my own. But I could not conceive of such extravagance for any other than a married man. I would go, also, into the little wash-closet, where there was a basin and running water, and a cupboard overhead, or into the clothes-closet just next to it, both doors of which faced the front windows. Then I would go into the other large room, at the other end of the hall, and perhaps do just the same thing. I often borrowed an easy chair from one of the rooms; but more often I would sit in one of them, preferably the front, and pass whole evenings reading, with my back to the window, at ease in the large rocker, and with the light falling over my shoulder onto the book I was reading. Thus my face was towards the two closets at the other side of the room, and as the doors often stood open, I could, and often did, sit gazing at the blank walls; and for lack of anything better to do, often laid down my book and just sat and stared. A blank mind, you will say. That's true. Outside of my daily labors, there was nothing much else in the world for me, or in me for myself. So I found entertainment simply in staring at a blank wall.

In my many goings and comings into these two large rooms I had often

and often done the same thing. I was, perhaps, in these rooms, either sitting down or talking to my friend, as often as three or four nights in seven. He, too, did exactly as I did—stared and stared, or talked, read, or walked, and stared again at the wall of these inside closets. I had often remarked that there were generally doors in such houses connecting the front and rear rooms. I said so to my friend, but he just nodded. Of course it didn't interest him, or me, either, very much just then, and people who are idle often say things of no importance. Time passed on in a humdrum way, and while I repeatedly went into the rooms, the temporary occupancy of either or both, from time to time, quite naturally put more important things uppermost in my mind.

For a long time, then, the rooms were both occupied. At least it seemed a long time, for nobody cared to stay in them more than a week or a month. While they were let I had no opportunity to go into them, but simply minded my own business, only calling on my friend, and nodding whenever I met the new comers, who seemed to be men of no very interesting or attractive stamp. At last they went,—first one, then the other,—and we were again alone on our third-story landing, and able to indulge in the same inexpensive habit of whiling away time in the large rooms. One night, when I was the only one on the floor, and the rain was beating a soft tattoo—sweet to a lonely man on the roof and skylight, I was taking my favorite promenade from my own room through the hall and into the room of my friend, which I always entered at will. I was stepping out with long strides, my head bowed down between my shoulders, my hands in my pockets, and my shoulders humped high over my chest, in schoolboy fashion, from sheer idleness and laziness; and while I walked back and forth I was saying to myself under my breath: "La, la, la, lum, tum, tum, la, la, um, bum, la, la, lum." I did this two or three times. Quite naturally I continued: "Ah, ah, la, la, one, two, three, four, one, two, three;" and so on, indefinitely and quite foolishly. Others have done the same, I am sure, out of pure listlessness. So I went on walking up and down, in and out of the two small rooms and the two large rooms, thinking of nothing, and now and then counting from one up to twenty, or any number, till my fancy commenced again on "lum, lum, tum." On one of these trips I began to count, "One, two, three, four," and so forth, still out of pure idleness and not with any intention of pacing off the depth of the house, which, however, I did unwittingly. Starting from the window of my room, I counted twenty-two to the window of the small rear room. At the time I made but slight note of this, but on going back I noticed that I counted again up to

twenty-two exactly. That was as far as it went. I counted twenty-two from front to rear wall of the house. That was all. Then, after a little while, I went to bed. Some other matters coming up, I was not again at liberty to do any more pacing off or other idle nonsense for a week or more. Then, as I happened to think of measuring off the two large rooms in order to compare their size with my own, I paced from the front window of the front square room to the closet doors. I measured first six paces, then, going back, seven, then once more I made it six and a half, and at last about eight regular paces of two and a half feet long. Now I cannot be sure as to these little details, as I was not doing it with any purpose, but only for pastime. After measuring off my own room, I went back to the large rear room and measured that.

I was becoming interested.

I counted eight paces. Eight? Yes, eight. No, it couldn't be. I tried again. Seven, seven and a half. Seven, then eight, then eight again. I knew it must be about eight, at all events. Eight and eight were sixteen. I saw that this disparity was absurd, but presently it occurred to me that the wash-closet accounted for the very apparent difference; only the closet, which I had not taken into account, could not be more than one pace in depth, making seventeen. And I had counted twenty two that night in the hall. But perhaps I had taken larger steps to-night. I determined to try again. Once more I paced off the hall—twenty-two!

Naturally, I was very much perplexed, but as I was not of a very deep or romantic nature, nothing suggested itself to my mind, except that the architect who had planned this house, perhaps twenty-five or more years before, had made some strange calculations, and wasted much valuable space between two rooms. That night I certainly did not think of one thing that was not perfectly commonplace and sensible.

It turned out, however, that I often thought of this problem on the many subsequent occasions when sitting in that front room; and one night, when my usually slow mind was troubled with some unusually fanciful notions concerning the black space of at least ten feet between these two rooms, I decided to bring home a long builder's tape measure from the store the next evening. For what purpose or with what end in view, I did not stop to analyze. I was just curious and mystified. The next night I somehow got upstairs with alacrity, and as luckily no one was around, I fell to at once, and began measuring off the front room from the front windows to the closet doors. The exact depth to the door-sill was twenty-one feet, six inches, and

from the door-sill of the wash-closet to the wall, a little under two feet. Then I went into the rear room, and found that the depth from the window to the wall was nearly nineteen feet. I next went out into the hall, and again opening both doors, found the depth of the house from the inside to be about fifty-four feet. Here it seemed to me that I must be mistaken. I could not understand the curious disparity. My head seemed to be made of wood. Had I been quick-witted, I should at once have seen that, allowing for all sorts of thick and thin partitions, there were at least ten or eleven feet unaccounted for between the front and rear rooms of this third-story landing. As it was, nothing of the sort suggested itself to my mind. Indeed, I had done well to get as far as I did, considering that I had not started out with any strange ideas, or with the hope of unearthing any mystery.

For a long time I stood in the hallway, holding the tape in my hand, biting my lip, and trying to think what it all could mean. Certainly there was something out of the way. Even supposing that I was quite mistaken in some of my measurements, in consequence of a general inability to do more than a few things well, I could not have been more than two or three feet astray. But what that something was, it was quite beyond me to imagine; though I did put my hand on the wall, and look up and down, and feel of it from end to end, but rather aimlessly, and with a sort of stupid wonder. "What's in there?" I asked myself. But I got no answer. Mine was not a fertile brain. So barren was it, that I did not at the time feel the least sensation beyond a dull curiosity and perplexity. After wandering round a bit without much purpose, and attempting to read a book, I went into my room, shut the door, and sat down, and fell asleep in my chair.

About this time my friend in the back room was often obliged to work late nights at his place of business, and in consequence I was left alone more than usual. Had it not been for this, I should probably never have done much thinking regarding the matter of the queer measurements of this floor and its spaces, apparent and invisible. But often, when I sat alone in the large front room, looking into the closet at the blank wall, I would think, What's there? Who built such a funny house? And can it be a large well hole that takes up so much of this unexplained space? I thought over these things something like five nights, during which the subject forced itself on my mind with growing persistency, before it occurred to me to go up on the roof and see. This I did, forcing and fighting my way up through an ill-smelling, black, cobwebby scuttle that had probably not been opened in the memory of the

lessee of the house, fearful of making a noise, a little bit scared by the lonesomeness of my situation, and not knowing, either, what I might come face to face with on my way.

At last I succeeded in prying the scuttle cover up, and not very spryly got out on the old gravel roof. The night was black. For a few moments I could not see an inch before me, but as my eyes became used to the darkness, the bare outlines of things were visible, and I groped my way to where I thought the room should lie; then, getting down upon my hands and knees, I crept from front to rear wall, feeling every foot of the way, lest I should plunge down into some terrible place from which there would be no escape. I went along slowly, feeling quite vexed with myself for having forgotten even a match; but I found nothing but a straight, plain roof—that is to say, my hand found nothing, for I could barely see. Accordingly, I wasted little time on the roof, but soon returned to my room, quite chilled, and feeling that I had very nearly made a fool of myself. So I concluded to put the matter from my mind once for all.

For two weeks I succeeded. Then I began to think of it again, at first a little bit, then more and more, till out of business hours I could think of nothing else. Finally, I concluded that as I could not walk through the wall at will to investigate, the best thing I could do was to go up on the roof again, with a lantern, and examine its surface once more, this time carefully. I felt loth to spend any money on a lantern, but after a day of stubbornness, finally gave in, and one night brought one home. That night, however, my friend was at home, though, in answer to my somewhat impatient inquiry, he said that he should spend the next evening at his place of business. On the following evening I was at the foot of the ladder leading to the roof at eight o'clock, or as soon as it was dark. I might have waited for Sunday to come, but as that was five days off, and as my friend would be at home to ask questions all that day, I had made up my mind to try now or not at all. So I went up, opened the cover, this time a little more easily, and crawled out on the pebbles that covered the entire roof. I then lighted my lantern,—which was what is called a "dark" lantern, and illumined only such spots as I wished to examine,—and dropped upon my hands and knees as before. I began at the front, creeping along slowly, but knowing that ten minutes at most would suffice me, I did not fear being discovered; and as I was quite eager to see what I myself might discover, I was lost to all other things and went on slowly and carefully. I remember that when I judged I must be over that dark, empty space below,

something like a thrill ran through me at the thought of what might be underneath; and then, when suddenly my hand ran against an obstruction, I thrilled again with the thought that at last I had found a clue to the mystery. It was a rim of wood, which might readily be passed over if not looked at closely, and it extended around, with square corners, like nothing so much as the sheathing at the sides of a scuttle-hole, which overtops the roof generally by an inch or so. Had there been a scuttle-hole here? And to what did it lead? What did it ventilate? But I could not be sure that there had been a scuttle-hole; only the outline of the hole was there; still, roofers do not usually put four strips of wood, meeting at right angles, in any part of a gravel roof to amuse themselves. I began to think of things with a facility that surprised me, and spoke of a latent pertinacity of which I had always myself been ignorant. But however much I might speculate on the why and the wherefore of what I had found, it was no explanation, and would have amounted to nothing if the theory of the scuttle-hole had not presented itself. In spite of a careful search, I found nothing else, and after a little while went down. Fortunately, no one was a witness of my ascent or descent.

After that I could not get the matter out of my thoughts. With that newly awakened hunger for the unusual which sometimes comes to a man whose life has been wofully void of incident, I began to feast upon speculations and imaginings—a truly childish pastime, I know. But I never was a great man. And so I kept thinking of it, night after night; alone, or sitting with my friend in his room, talking of little things, or discussing things in the papers, like little people who have nothing to do with big events. I couldn't read now at all. Whenever I made the attempt at my old place, my back to the light that burned right by the window of the empty room, and my face towards the open closets, invariably my eyes would rest on the wall, and for whole minutes I would thus sit without uttering a word. My companion remarked this once or twice and looked at me curiously—but he had no notion of my thoughts, as I never spoke about the matter to him.

It did not occur to me for a long while; indeed, it did not seem possible until I had thought it over, and over, and over,—to destroy another's property at first seemed unpardonable,—but I did at last determine to make a hole in the wall. Now, you must know that up to that time I had no reason for thinking that the state of affairs which I had discovered was different from that which might exist in any old house, or in any of the houses in this row; for which reason it can easily be understood that a man of my nature,

unresourceful, and inclined to hold back in anything savoring of an enterprise, might move slowly in such a matter. Had I had anything else to do or think of at the time, I certainly should never have made another move in the matter. But I did at last reach the point where I resolved to make a hole in the wall; first, only a long, very narrow one, such as I could make with a long bell-hanger's gimlet, which had been left lying in the cellar under the store where I was employed. Then I could make another, or three or four, and if I found nothing then, I did not know what I might do. I did not even form the least idea of what I might find. I did, however, procure the gimlet at once, and at the first opportunity set to work. At night, when I commenced to bore, I had never once thought of seeing anything more than a few pieces of plaster drop, or of meeting anything except some hard obstruction, such as a joist or brick. I did see the plaster drop, and so much more than I had calculated that, had it been out in the room itself, I should have stopped at once; but as the little closet was dark, I felt that a hole even two or three inches wide would not hurt anything, and so kept on. How far I should have to go in I could not tell. At first only the plaster fell. Then I struck something that seemed to be a lath, but which I got through easily. My gimlet plunged forward without meeting anything—and stopped. I had still about six inches of it to spare, and began to turn. I seemed to be boring into wood, though I was not certain, and kept on twisting round and round, when suddenly the gimlet plunged in again and I knew I had passed through something more. I drew it out slowly and without any skill, but I only heard some scraps of plaster fall inside and was no wiser than before. Then for about five minutes I rested, disappointed, but somehow half relieved at finding a plain, matter-of-fact, honest wall. I did not know whether to go on or not. Should I continue my foolish quest, I asked myself, or should I go away and cease to destroy the property of others? I did not much care then what I did. But after a while I decided to make just one more little hole beside the other, or about half an inch away from it, and then, if I found I was only making a fool of myself, to give the whole thing up, tell no one about it, and forget it altogether. As I made this second hole, I saw that the plaster fell out quite plentifully till the two holes were about united. It seemed, too, from the way the gimlet acted, as if I had just struck about or near to the hole I had previously made in the lath within. Had I been calculating to enlarge the hole quickly, I could not have done it better. But as the gimlet filled up most of the space, I could only guess at the path it was making through whatever was within, though I fancied that it was penetrating

just the same substances as it had before. When it had gone its entire length, and I started to pull it back, I found it was stuck in something, and so moved it about violently, jerking and twisting it impatiently to get it out. At the same time I heard much plaster fall, and a creaking and scraping, as when rats run up and down wildly inside the walls. At last I jerked the gimlet out, and—it fell to the floor with a loud clang, for I had dropped it in the first thoughtless impulse of profound amazement. There,—right in front of my eyes,—streaming out into the darkness of this little closet, was a thin but steady ray of light, just like a bar of gold, distinct and as unmistakably a fact as my own existence. I could only stand gazing at it as rigid as a corpse, for I was incapable of motion. It was there—I saw it—a steady, clear ray of light. From where did it come? I did not know, I was lost to everything but that one fact that a light was streaming out into the closet from a place which no one knew existed. Then I came to myself with a shudder, and, after making at least twenty attempts and as often falling back with fear, I brought myself up to the hole and looked within. At the first moment I started back, my hands flung backward up over my head in an attitude of extreme terror. My face must at that moment have been absolutely livid.

A thrill of intense and sickening horror tingled at the roots of my hair, till it seemed as if it stood up on my head; and at the same time I felt as if an electric shock ran down my spine, through my whole body, rooting me like iron to the floor. I felt my eyes bulging from their sockets. I could not, at that moment, have moved for all the wealth of the world, and if my tongue had not been paralyzed, like my entire body, I should have shrieked madly. For within the brilliantly lighted room on which I looked, in a large armchair close by the table, there sat, rigid, and white, and terrible, a man whose black, open, and staring eyes were fixed directly on me with horrible intensity. By his side, on a table, lay a shining pistol, and on his forehead was a spot of blood that told the tale of self-destruction. At that moment, one thought, one mad desire,—to be away from that spot, anywhere so that I might escape from the awful situation into which my curiosity had led me,—came to me with such force as to sicken me. Had I been able to move hand or foot, I should have fled away, out of the house, to escape from those starting, lifelike eyes of this corpse, with which I was alone in this silent, gloomy place, with only a partition between us, but no bar to save me from the silent, deadly horror that came through the opening I had rashly made,—the opening that once seemed so narrow, but now all too wide,—while we gazed, one at

the other, the awful dead and I. The rigidness that terror lent to me at last gave way, and I fell prone to the floor, unconscious.

At length I came to, slowly, but not with any feeling of courage. There was the light above my head, and I knew that within—I scrambled up, and half walked, half stumbled, out of the room and closed the door after me. Then I seized my hat and coat, and, with only one side glance at the innocent-looking wall in the hallway, left the house and hurried out to the street. Here a feeling of relief came to me with the presence of my fellow-men, and with the noises, and lights, and the busy rush of life. How glad I felt to be alive, here, out in the open streets, where every one was happy in the fact of being alive. Yet even now I shuddered when I thought of that light, and that inner room, which no one had dreamed of, and of its ghastly tenant, dead in the midst of life, alone in his strange mausoleum.

But I had to return. Only I decided to wait for my friend, as I should not dare to even go up to my own room alone. So I went back to the street where I lived, and walked up and down from one avenue to another till he should come. I had a long wait, but he came at last, and together we went upstairs. He went into his room, and I followed him and took a seat.

The usual greetings were passed, and the same inquiries as to the day's business on his part or mine. I sat silent, and with difficulty repressed shivers of fear. I wondered what he would say if he knew what lay so near him. I could not tell him then—not at once. I was trembling too much, though I controlled it enough to escape notice. I let him talk on in his pleasant, courteous way. So far I did not know what I should do. I was resolved not to go back into that room again alone, and I knew that I could not go into my own room and sleep. I was on the point of asking him to let me sleep that night with him; but what sense I had left told me that such a request would seem to him ridiculous. But what was I to do? Why not tell him? I was not going to patch up the wall again and leave the mystery within forever. My queer way and occasional shiver, and the expression that must have been in my eyes, at last caused him to ask me if I were not well. He noticed my pale face and mentioned it. I could only stare at him. The horror of it all seemed again to come over me. My teeth chattered. I had jumped up from my chair; but he forced me into it again, asking me if he could do anything for me. "For, Mr. Jones," he said, "you look like a very sick man."

"I am sick, " I said. "Oh, heaven, if you—" That was all I could get out then, and I sat silent for some moments, while he (his name was Flemming)

was too polite to ask further as to a matter which I must have appeared to him desirous of saying nothing about. He did not know that I was simply overcome and almost too weak to talk. At last, however, I fully made up my mind, and, gathering all the strength I could, in broken, disconnected sentences I told him all—or not all, but at least the outline of the thing. He simply sat still and stiff in his chair. When I had finished he said not a word, but just sat as still as ever, looking at me in silence, till his eyes seemed so like those others, that I sprang up, crying, "Don't—don't look at me that way—I can't stand it. I am not a brave young man. You look like—like him!"

He at least was braver than I. Recovering himself, he got up, and putting his hand on my shoulder said: "Jones, it is all strange—very strange—but possible. It is one of those things that happen now and then. Come, let us look; I want to see for myself. Then, when we come back here, I'll tell you what I know about it."

"What you know?" I stammered, almost shrieked.

"Yes, what I know," he answered. "Come on. I'll make it all clear,—only," he added, "I did not know as much about this as you have accidentally found out. For the present, come and let us see what is to be seen. It is only a dead man,—under rather unusual circumstances, to be sure. But it is only the circumstances that give horror to it. The fact itself is simple enough. Suicide? Yes, that is bad—but come. '

How I trembled, even with him! And he seemed so strong and fearless. I had not got over the shock yet. We went into the front room. The light was yet burning as I had left it, and there the same narrow stream of light was falling through the hole I had made, cutting through the shadow of the closet. I watched him as he stood face to face with the hole in the wall, while he stopped about two feet away from it for a few moments. But he waited only a short time before putting his eye to the hole; as he did so, I saw a shudder pass through him, and noticed that he clenched his hands; I also heard his teeth meet, and heard him say to himself, "Yes—it is too true. It is Albert. "

It is hard to describe the effect these words produced on me, implying as they did, a knowledge of things on my friend's part of which I had never even faintly dreamed. They relieved me a great deal, too, and for the first time I began to feel coming into my mind a practical realization of the entire circumstance; that is to say, as far as it related to the fact of a dead man being here before us, and nothing more unnatural. But I did not cease to realize and to feel the awful strangeness of his death, and the situation in which we found

him, closed in this inner secret room, more solemn than a tomb, within a few feet of living men and unknown to all the world. My companion must have stood motionless, his gaze fixed, fascinated, on the things he saw through that hole, for a long time. It gave me a chance to assume a little courage; so that by the time he moved back, I was ready to look a second, this time to note all those other things which I had overlooked in my first great fear. But how ever strong I had thought myself, I was speechless, and involuntarily started back on beholding those intently fixed eyes, which again penetrated me, and at seeing that awful death's head, straight and erect above the rigid body; beneath it the white shirt bosom,—for the figure was clad in full evening dress,—and glistening on one finger a large and brilliant diamond, which seemed to me but to add to the grewsomeness of the picture. The first shock over, I looked around the room as much as the size of the hole would allow, or a space of about five square feet. In the center was the silent corpse, which had sat there—for how long, who could say? By his side was a table, and on it the shining weapon which had done the work of destruction. One hand rested on the knees, the other hung by the side of the chair. I could see the foot of a bed, and also the end or side of a splendid counterpane. Also I could catch a sight of a rich carpet at the far corner of the room, and part of a walnut dresser. And strangest of all, above the head of the man, the gas burned brightly and steadily, with just that little occasional flicker when the air passes through it out of the pipe. It was so strange, so passing strange, that I, too, looked and looked, not able to move away from the secrets of this hidden room, which Fate had given up, with its awful tenant, once more to the sight of men.

When I did draw away, after turning again and again to take a last look, we both gazed at each other a long while without speaking. What could we say? Astonishment was still in possession of our senses, and what words were to follow between us had not yet come to our lips. Silently we again looked, first one, then the other; then again and again, while the stillness was unbroken by the least sound throughout the house. Only the corpse sat there, while the gas burned over his head, and we, at the other side of the little hole in the wall, stared repeatedly at the man within as long as we could endure the fixed regard of his eyes. At last we both moved away. But my friend, bethinking himself that others might discover the mystery, went back. I saw him take up some pieces of plaster, and, after wetting them in the wash-closet just by, place them again in the hole. He then went into his own room (I

following closely after) and brought back with him a bottle of mucilage. With this he fixed and patched the broken wall paper over the crack again, using some pieces of matches to fill the chinks in the plaster, till the hole was entirely closed up and concealed.

"This is only temporary," he said to me. "To-morrow I am going to close this up better, and I am going to hire this room before I leave the house in the morning, and lock the door after me. No one must know but you and I. Now, will you come into my room? I want to tell you something."

If he had thought I meant to leave him for an instant that night, he was mistaken. I meant to stay with him on some pretext or other till morning, when I could think of some plan of being with him, or some companion, every night, or of getting out of the house entirely. I did think this last idea the best, and was already planning how to escape the result of what I had brought on myself. Meantime, I went with him to his room after he had locked the door of the large front room, putting the key in his pocket, and after I had closed the door of my own room. I certainly intended to cling to him closely, and so, after sitting down, I shut the door at his request, and looked at him. He took his time, however, though I could see his face was white. I think he was trying to gather himself together, because his hand shook, and his face wore a very grave expression, and he walked back and forth a few steps for some moments nervously. At last he sat down and, looking straight at me, said: "I know that young man in there. His name is, or was, Albert Clements. His father once owned this house, and lived here with his wife and that boy. There were no others, the other children having died —"

A light had been stealing upon me. The memory of a face I once knew so well, from seeing it so often, came before me.

"Heavens!" I exclaimed, "I knew him too—at least by sight. Why, it's a great deal more than five years ago. It's nearer ten, when I lived across the street, and used to see him go in and out of this house.

"We all knew him, we young fellows who boarded over there. Can it be possible?"

"It may be," my friend answered. Indeed, you are right. He did live here about that time."

"But you—you," I cried, "who are you? Or in what way were you connected with this tragedy?"

"I," he replied, "had no connection with this suicide at all. I was, in fact, a

sufferer too, from the circumstances that led up to it. I am going to tell you the whole story from the beginning. To commence with, I was the partner in business with this young man's father. I knew him well, not only in a business way, but as a friend, for we had grown up as boys together in the office of a produce broker a good many years ago. Pardon me if I grow reminiscent, but I can't help looking back to those days long ago when Charlie Clements and I were happy, careless boys—and now—! But we grew to manhood, and started in business together. We prospered till we were both quite well-to-do. During the days of the Civil War, when we had barely begun, we made a great deal of money. Our house continued in business for many years; you must know that I am not a young man, nor even a middle-aged one. I am getting old now, though a good constitution is helping me to keep off actual infirmities. Well, when Charlie Clements married, it was to the girl we both loved. That is the reason I never married, myself. But I remained his friend, and he mine, and time passed. They had three children, but two died, and only the youngest, Albert, "—I saw him shudder, and his eyes moved towards where that man must have been sitting then,—"only Albert was left. Then they came to this house at about the time Albert left college. The boy didn't go to work. He had evidently learned too much of the softer side of life, and his father, as some men will do who have had to work hard themselves, seemed never to make up his mind to compel his son to earn bis living. It was a fatal weakness. The boy grew willful and wild. What is the use of multiplying words? In time he became uncontrollable. It took perhaps five or six years to make him an utterly worthless, luxurious man about town—a rich man's son, whose father paid all his bills. There were some very heavy ones too. His parents idolized him, and so, no matter what he did, his father backed him up. I knew nothing of it—not then. Business seemed to go along the same as ever, though I did notice that my partner was getting old very fast. That, though, I thought was but the effects of a lifetime of overwork. Had I known what was taking place, I might have stopped it, or made the attempt, at least; or I might have protected my own capital, at all events. I could not imagine that my partner was using the firm's money; but he did come to do that in time, for his own was all gone. You see, his son spent so much that the old man went into Wall Street to recoup. But he only lost still more, with the result that he had nothing left of his own; and he had to have money in one way or another. I don't believe he ever meant to misuse mine, only we had been so long together, he must have come to regard everything

in the business as our common, property. Besides, he was getting old. Care was making inroads in his mental health as well, and he must have been desperate. Anyhow, he was drawing a lot of money constantly, and I never suspected that we were coming near to a crash, as I,—well, I have to blame myself too; a man should be alive to things, and I was not. It happens often to-day, and will happen often again. Well, after Albert Clements had gone on in this way for a number of years, he met a woman, one of those creatures for whom a man would go through the plagues of hell. You might expect that a man who had for years been accustomed to the society of women would be proof against the wiles of a creature whose charms, perhaps, lay in a brighter eye than the rest, or a redder mouth, or a quicker wit. The French people call it *diable au corps*. This woman certainly had it. I saw her once, only once. She was certainly beautiful, but the young man, having come under her influence, was beyond redemption. His excesses had been mild before compared to his habits now; and excesses, I believe, lead to insanity,—plain, unmistakable madness. I am sure Albert Clements had become insane. To have reasoned with him now would have been utterly futile. He was lost to shame, honor, decency,—everything. And so his poor father and invalid mother, after they had spent a fortune in paying his debts, were threatened with absolute beggary. Our business went under. I, too, was a poor man. Clements begged me on his knees to forgive him, and his wife nearly went mad before my eyes on that occasion. The boy—he was not at home—had been away with that woman for a week. They couldn't tell where he was. As for me, what could I do, or of what use was it to reproach this poor old dotard, the friend of my youth? I forbore, too, for his wife's sake. And that day I left their house, this house, with only a few dollars in my pocket, and my good name gone forever. Somehow, all the sense and reason in my nature, and also all the good, all the godliness in me, must have come to my aid then, for I braced up wonderfully, and went to work for ten dollars a week. I remember knowing a man who lost, in one day, one hundred thousand dollars in speculation. He is as happy to-day as a poor man as he ever was in affluence. Well, I lost sight of Clements for a few months, and what followed in this house I did not know, till one day he sent for me, and told me what had taken place, and what you and I have looked upon to-night.

"It seems the son had that room fitted up from some whim, as it was a dark inside room with no windows and only a small scuttle to ventilate it (I had been in it only once, by chance, and so knew nothing of its situation). He

used to come here to sleep, as he said it was a room to which no sound penetrated. This I did not know till Clements told me when he sent for me after we had parted, and up to to-night I did not know positively that it was this room he meant, as he did not describe it accurately, and from my having been in it only once before for a moment, I did not fix it in my mind. However, my former partner sent for me, as I said. He was nearly gone. He had left this house and moved to a dingy little place far up town, on the extreme West side. I found him lying on his bed, and knew he had not long to live. When I had seen him last he looked like an old, broken down man, but now he was literally drawing his last few breaths. His wife was dead—killed by the shock of her son's suicide. The young man (so Clements told me brokenly) had gone to this room after coming home at the end of that week when I had last been in the house. It was about three o'clock when he came in. He heard the story of the ruin he had caused. He saw what he had done; so, going to his room, without stopping to take his hat off, he deliberately shot himself dead. Horrible? Yes, it was. But it was Nemesis. I will not say he deserved his fate. I do not think any man deserves such an end. But he had brought it on himself. The old man, I suppose, was horror-stricken, and his mind gave way when his wife, rushing upstairs, opened the door, looked in, saw what—what we saw to-night, and fell dead on the door-sill. You may well say 'horrible' now."

He stopped; his eyes were full of tears; his whole body shook, and his head hung forward on his breast. After awhile he went on:—

"Clements must have been nearly maddened then. Surely he had become crazy. It was easy to understand. When I saw him, and while he was telling me this awful tale, he was certainly more mad than any madman I have ever seen. But he was a weak, powerless one, only his mind was gone, and I knew so, too, his life would soon be gone. He told me all, though, but he did not say in what room the young man had killed himself. He just said, 'in that room.'

" 'Joe,' he cried, clutching my arm, 'I buried her, my wife. But him—I walled him up. I buried him right there. And there he is now. Joe, do you hear? At the last trumpet call, he'll wake and know once more what he has done, for he'll see the pistol, and look in the mirror and see the hole in his head, and he'll see the clothes he wore that night, and he'll know it all. He's there yet, and there he'll remain till the end. No one knows. You won't tell, Joe, will you? No, no, not you. He wronged you, too. Do you forgive him,

Joe? I don't. No, no; Joe, Joe, I say, friend—Joe.' It was all he said. Charlie Clements was dead."

For at least a quarter of an hour I made no sound. I saw my friend bury his head in his arm, and heard him sob like a man who lived over again the saddest moment of his life. This man, who was alone in the world, with only the past to look back upon, whose history had been such a sad one—now, at the recollection of these strange and sad events, wept. And I, myself, felt the hot tears course down my face, and turned my head away. I heard the little clock tick, and a door slam somewhere below. But here there was silence. I could not speak a word.

At last he spoke again.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jones," he said, "it is too much for my composure, this going over these times once more. I cannot show you with half vividness enough these things as they really took place. To me, of course, nothing else can ever stand out so distinctly: However, I will finish my story. After burying my poor friend, and learning that he had absolutely nothing left in the world, not even the small equity in this house, which I had thought he had retained through everything, I went back to work. There was not very much for me in life. But I had fully decided on my course, having fought and conquered that battle with myself which all men who have had my experience must fight. And so I took up my life again, and bleak and barren as it was, I have been living it ever since,—sometimes very poor, never with more than enough. Often I thought of the suicide, but not with the idea of taking any steps to learn where his body was. Finally, however, after some years, I did decide to come here and engage board; not exactly with the purpose of searching for him, as I could not tell but what, in making some alterations, they had found his skeleton, though I always searched the papers every day, and never saw any account of it,—but in a vague way I felt interested enough to come here. My idea was to hire every room, successively, as it became vacant, and as my means permitted; though, had I found what I was thinking of, I do not know whether I should have made it known, and do not know, either, if I shall do so now."

"And I," I exclaimed, "shall do nothing at all. I leave it all to you, though I think it best for us to remain silent. What good can it do? I have no desire to gain notoriety, or perhaps get into trouble, if only for a short time. It might cost me my position, and I am poor."

Do you think I am selfish? Well, I know what three meals a day and a

living mean, and I know the other side of the picture too. I have experienced both.

My friend gazed at me for a moment.

"Perhaps you are right. I will see," he said. "At all events, I am going to take some time to think it over. I have discovered what I had in view so long, though before I expected it, and in a way I did not calculate on. It did not occur to me that there was a room unaccounted for on this landing. How did you find it out?"

"In the simplest way," I replied; and then gave an account of the chance by which I had discovered the disparity existing be tween the measurements of the hallway and the two large rooms, and the length to which my curiosity had led me.

"Had I known what I was about to look upon when I made those holes," I concluded, "nothing could have induced me to do it. When I did see it, well, I don't mind telling you, I fainted. Those eyes—heavens! How they came to be fixed exactly on the spot where I broke through, I don't know—but I couldn't stand it. I just rushed out and waited for you. If you hadn't come, I certainly would not have come up here again. Oh, it is horrible!"

As I finished I put my hands up to my eyes, as if to shut the dreadful sight out from my vision. But in vain. I can see it now as plainly as the first time that night. I always shall.

"It certainly is a marvelous occurrence," Mr. Flemming said. "I cannot, though, account for the gas burning all this time. I suppose the boy's father left it burning, so that at whatever moment the trumpet should sound, he could see himself as at the time of his death."

"And," I said, "I suppose, the room being air tight, the body has been preserved."

"But," said my friend, "a light cannot burn without air. Only, I presume, just air enough got in, some way, to permit of the existence of the flame, but not enough to corrupt the body, only just sufficient to dry the skin, and in a way mummify the corpse. Ah! it is strange. And when I look back—"

He did not finish, but became silent in thought. We had said all that was to be said, and now could only think in silence of this weird life story and its astonishing sequel.

All that night we remained together, sitting in my friend's room talking, in our chairs. The next day Mr. Flemming took the large room. In fact, we both took it, for I have found a lifelong friend in him whose fate was joined to

mine in so peculiar a way. Long since we moved out of that house, having removed every sign of the hole which had disclosed so much to us. But the discovery of the unknown and unsuspected mystery we leave to time and other men; for my friend will not undo the work or defy the wishes of the friend of his boyhood. And I—I am content."

"The Seaweed Room"
by Clarice Irene Clinghan

The Black Cat, No. 9, June 1896

"This is the seaweed room," announced the house keeper, putting a key into the lock; "it's been shut up for a long time, and will be a bit musty."

With this she threw open the stout oaken door, and we entered a square apartment, darkened by closed shutters, and heavy with a strong, pungent odor. As our guide raised a window and opened the blinds there was a rustling all about us as of the flight of pigeons. This was caused by the fluttering of quantities of dry seaweed which were festooned upon the walls, and over the doors and windows.

"That's nothing but common seaweed," said the good woman, noticing our interested glances. "It's used only as an ornament and to give character to the room. All the choice varieties are in these glass cases, and pressed in this pile of scrapbooks, with notes and explanations under 'em."

"Did Professor Linwood collect these specimens himself?" I asked.

"I suppose so. He used to go on long voyages to the tropics and come home laden with new varieties, and then he'd spend months classifying and arranging them. He was a diver in his younger days, and after that made contracts for lifting sunken vessels, or exploring old hulks that had money or merchandise on board. He'd put on his diving suit and go down with his men, I've heard tell, and many's the strange adventures he's had in ships at the bottom of the ocean—so he told me one day when he felt chatty. That's how he first took to collecting seaweeds; he ransacked the bottom of the sea to get specimens. But after his marriage he never seemed to care for it any more, But perhaps all this don't interest you—it's the seaweed you want. You can examine it as much as you like."

We did so and lingered long, held by the charm of this strange room, that was redolent with the mysteries of the great deep. We sat on a couch, talking in low tones and listening to the rustling seaweeds over our heads, our feet

resting on some of the same material, which had been fashioned into a rude mat that covered the floor and also the divan on which we were seated. The whole apartment was full of it in all forms and phases. A wreath of it surrounded the only portrait in the room—that of a young girl with frank pleasing eyes and a sweet mouth.

The housekeeper, who had excused herself for a few moments, now returned with tea and biscuits. As she poured the fragrant beverage into little fat cups we ventured to inquire who the original of the picture was.

"Mrs. Linwood, the professor's wife," replied the woman, giving a quick, apprehensive look at it over her shoulder.

"Then," replied my companion, "it's no wonder the professor took no more voyages after his marriage!"

"I said he collected no more seaweed, sir," responded the house keeper. "He made one voyage directly after his marriage, and took his bride with him. The vessel was wrecked in a terrific storm and only a few of the passengers were saved. Mrs. Linwood was among the lost."

"That was an odd coincidence—that she should be lost and he be saved," I said, half questioningly.

"Well, sir, that leads up to the most peculiar story you ever heard. As long as the professor lived I never dared breathe it, but now he's gone I might relate a strange circumstance in connection with this room."

We encouraged her so much that the good woman began im mediately.

"It was not until the professor was nearly sixty that he thought of taking a wife. Then he was very foolish, if I may be allowed to say it, for he fell in love with a little girl only eighteen, and he being rich, her parents favored the match, though she was much attached to a second cousin of hers, a young fellow in an importing house, poor, but with good prospects; and, as luck would have it, this cousin was on the same steamer that took the professor and his bride to China, he going there on business for his firm.

"It must have been hard for the two poor young things to be doomed to such a long voyage, under such circumstances, especially as the professor was of an intensely jealous disposition and forbade his wife to speak to her cousin.

"But, as I said, the vessel ran aground in a storm and sank almost immediately. Mrs. Linwood was drowned; and her husband came back a changed man, broken in mind and body. He had even lost his interest in his particular fad, and I have seen him shudder at the sight of a piece of seaweed.

He locked up this room and I never saw him enter it again except on one notable occasion."

"What was that?" inquired my companion.

"Well, you see, not having his scientific studies to take up his mind, the poor man became very lonesome and morbid. He never wanted to be alone, and must needs have a houseful of company the whole time. This was easy, for he had a great many nephews and nieces, and they, with their friends, kept us in a state of commotion, especially during the holidays and in summer vacations.

"One Christmas eve, his favorite nephew, Jack Newton, came late in the evening, and to save my soul I didn't know where to put him to sleep. He was a merry, rollicking lad of seventeen, and he said he'd sleep in the attic—anywhere so that he got a chance at the dinner next day—always thinking of his stomach, like any healthy boy.

"The attic was out of the question. Suddenly a thought came to me, and I asked him if he'd mind sleeping in the seaweed room?

" 'Just the thing—awfully jolly,' said the boy, giving me a squeeze that nearly broke my neck.

" 'Then not a word to your uncle,' I said, as soon as I could speak.

" 'Mum's the word,' said the boy with a wink.

"So I fixed him a bunk on this 'ere couch we're a-sitting on, and, as it was bitter cold, started a bit of fire in the grate. Then I locked him in and carried away the key, so if by some strange chance the professor should stray up there late in the evening he would find the key gone, and probably think it had been mislaid, for it usually hung on a nail beside the door.

"If I'd known the queer tricks of this room then as I do now, I'd never have locked the boy in.

"What happened during that night I got straight from Jack himself. It seems he went straight to sleep, and never woke till the faintest bit of daylight was stealing into his window. Then he was aroused, poor chap, by a low murmur of voices, and sitting up he saw on the hearth two figures talking together—one a girl with long black hair, and the other a young man who held her hands and was bending his face down to hers. Both of 'em was dripping wet, and he could hear the trickle of the water as it fell on the big stone hearth they were standing on. Their faces were turned from him, but in the girl's hair was tangled a quantity of seaweed.

"Did I tell you Jack was a plucky little fellow? He was, to the backbone.

He said to himself that what he saw was 'an optical delusion,' I believe he called it, that there was nobody but himself in the room—there couldn't be, because the door was locked. 'What do you want—who are you?' he cried, and with that jumped out of bed and came straight towards the two figures. As he advanced they retreated towards the window; and when he reached the window there wasn't anything there, though the window was shut except for a little space at the top.

"Well, Jack went back to bed and lay thinking it over for an hour, then fell asleep again. He was perfectly healthy, Jack was, and hadn't much idea of the supernatural.

"But now comes the strange part of it; for as he was dressing the next morning what did the boy find but a pool of salt water on the stone hearth, in that little hollow you can see from here that has been worn in it, and lying in it a bit of fresh seaweed, in which was tangled a long black hair! Then, as Jack told me, his own hair began to rise in good earnest, and he was scared.

"So that morning after breakfast he takes the bit of seaweed to his uncle and asks him if he'd ever seen any like it.

"The professor looked at the piece of wet weed, and his color went like the going out of a lighted taper. 'It's an uncommon variety,' he said, 'as it's never found except on the bodies of drowned people. Where did you get it, Jack?' And he looked at the boy wild-like, for I was a-watching of 'em from the passageway.

" 'I found it in my room,' blurted out the boy. 'There was a couple of people in there last night, uncle, dripping wet.'

" 'What do you mean?' gasped his uncle, looking at him strangely.

" 'Come and I'll show you,' he says, in spite of the fact that I was shaking my fist at him from the hallway. So together they went up to the seaweed room, I following to explain why I'd taken the liberty to lodge Jack there. But the professor never noticed me. He followed Jack into the room, white to the lips, and kneeling down examined the little pool of water on the hearth. 'It's sea water,' he whispered, after a moment. 'What did you see, boy? Tell me everything.'

" 'There's nothing much to tell, uncle,' went on Jack, in his straightforward way. 'The girl's hair was down her back all wet, and full of seaweed. And see! Here's a long black hair in the seaweed I found.'

"The professor looked, then gave a cry such as I hope never to hear again, and fell back on the floor unconscious. He came back to life, but never was

well after it, and he died six weeks afterward. Before he went he became communicative, and the secret of his wife's death came out. He and his wife were in a small boat, the last to leave the sinking vessel, together with a few other passengers and one sailor. The professor, being a man of authority and a well-known seaman, was in charge of the boat. Just as they were pushing off they saw a figure clinging to the mast just above the water. It was Mrs. Linwood's cousin and former lover. At this she cried to her husband to put back to the ship and rescue him, and took on so at his danger that the demon of jealousy entered her husband's soul, and he swore it would be impossible to go back, and that to take another person into the boat would sink it. At that moment the mast disappeared, and as it did so the young man sprang into the sea, waving a farewell to his cousin. Then, with one look at the professor that he never forgot to his dying day, she, too, jumped overboard and probably sank immediately—at least, the body could not be recovered.

"Yes, it was a strange thing, those two coming back—if it was them—to this room; those who have book-learning can make it clear, perhaps, but I'm only an ignorant old woman and don't understand these deep things; I can only tell it to you just as it happened. "

"The Reapers"
by Batterman Lindsay

The Black Cat, No. 12, September 1896

SOME YEARS AGO, WHEN THE BOOM was abroad in the land, it invaded the Northwest Territory with peculiar frenzy. Cities sprang up out of the prairie as by enchantment; not tent and shanty "cities," mind, but metropolises, with long, straight streets, and imposing brick and stone blocks which housed banks, real estate offices, hotels, real estate offices, saloons, and restaurants, and real estate offices, commercial establishments, real estate offices. Tram-car lines were projected, if not built, and electricity made night luminous. Presently, when the town lots were all sold, the speculators departed, and the investors settled down to business, and began eating each other while waiting for the country to settle up and railroads and commerce to arrive. When they had exchanged commodities with one another until their stocks were exhausted, or foreclosed by the wholesalers in Toronto, Victoria, or St. Paul, they silently stole away, one by one, without folding their tents, which remained as monuments of man's gullibility.

To one of these deserted cities, from which the Last Inhabitant had fled some time since, there came one afternoon in spring the Reapers, a man and woman. They came from the South, in on the a Concord coach, filled to its utmost capacity with their effects, and took possession of the town. They chose their domicile gayly, with reference to a convenient stable for their horses, of which they had four. Two they turned adrift to shift for them selves, and two they kept. The home of their choice was a Queen Anne cottage in the suburbs, where a few neglected rose bushes still survived in the garden.

"If we get tired of housekeeping, dear, you know we can go and live at the hotel," said the woman, and she laughed delight fully.

"Yes," said the man, "or we can take a suite of rooms and board at the

restaurant," and then they both laughed.

it was great larks, getting settled in their house. The woman, who was rosy, and plump, and dimpled, did not perform much of the hard work, but her laugh was an incentive. She sat about on boxes, with her skirts tucked up, and supervised, or on the verandah railing and watched the pruning of the rose-bushes, which she had a fancy for reclaiming. She was not much of a cook, but they managed between them, with many fugitive caresses, by the way, to prepare sufficient for their needs. Laughter, and song, and foolish badinage made the hours fleet. If there were a Past that it would have been burdensome to remember, neither remembered it. This was a new world, and they were primal creatures in it, beloved of the dew and the sun, the moon and the stars in their courses.

When the weather tempted, they rode about the country, exploring it. They hunted together, he teaching her to be expert with her small rifle; the hunting was pastime, but it was also needful to vary the larder. He planted and tended a garden, that they might have salads and green peas, and potatoes for the winter. (He had been a farmer's son before he was a bank president.) In the evenings, as they sat on the piazza, she played the mandolin and they sang college ditties together.

Theirs was an idyllic existence, and a moralist would have been incensed to observe how kindly was nature, and how little remorse preyed upon their minds. Everything was food for amusement. The pyramid of tins, of all shapes and sizes, that grew up in the back lot as the canned goods disappeared from their storeroom, in appeasement of their wonderful appetites, they called the Tower of Babel, because of the variety of languages that found representation on the labels.

They laughed at the acoustic effects which accompanied their footsteps through the empty streets. She said it was the Ghost of the Boom prowling around the haunts of his former triumphs.

They explored the deserted buildings, and rooted out all sorts of flotsam and jetsam. Once it was a bundle of love-letters left in a bureau drawer. They read them with shouts of mockery. Again it was a row of empty fruit jars, which they appropriated to put over their tomato plants. Another time it was a pile of advertising circulars setting forth in florid terms the advantages of their present place of residence.

"The advantage of its solitude was the one advantage they never thought of advertising; and now it is the only one that procures it the honor of our

society," said the man, and, as usual, they laughed.

Then it was a pile of old periodicals, that they carried away and devoured with avidity—which was a bad symptom, if they had stopped to think of it. They went into the rotunda of the hotel, and tried all sorts of vocal gymnastics to rouse the echoes in the tiers of empty rooms. They took Solitude by the ears, as it were, and made faces at it, and laughed always.

They got into the way of calling themselves Adam and Eve, and said to each other that they were happier outside the garden than ever they were within it.

"Is not this divine?" said Eve, as they sat one twilight hour on the steps of their little porch, her head upon his shoulder. "We thought it would be an exile, but it is heaven. I don't want ever to go back among people. Here we are all-sufficing to each other, but back in the world, some day, some one would find us out and point the finger at us."

The man tightened his clasp around her supple form. "You know,"" he replied gravely, "that we counted upon that. You thought you would be able to bear all that, and more, for love's dear sake."

"And so I can," she said; "but this is better."

"Well," he replied again, "we have the best part of a year before us, you know, for you to change your mind in. By the time the supplies have given out, I fancy you will want to see people, if only at a distance. Everybody will have given up looking for us by that time, and we can slip away to South America somewhere for awhile, and be as secluded as ever you please, and still within reach of human companionship, if we desire it. "

"Have you looked at the money lately?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Who would steal it?" he returned, laughing.

"Anyway, let's look at it," she persisted.

So they went inside, lit a lamp, and undid their boxes and examined the hoard. "It is not so much, after all," she said discontentedly. "You never can do anything with all those papers. Why not burn them? They are a great weight to carry about."

"No, they are of no value to me," he replied. "But they are of immense value to other fellows. Some day I shall be able to make terms with those, and then we can live where we please."

"Do you believe," she asked, drumming absently on the edge of a box with her taper fingers, and not looking at him, "do you believe, really believe in your heart, that you will be able to slip away so easily when we go out of

here—back again among people?"

"If I didn't believe it, I should not have undertaken it," he answered. "Don't you believe it, too? You did once."

"Did I?" she said. "No, I never looked so far ahead. I don't now, for that matter. The present is enough for me. Don't let's lose any more of it mooning over this horrid box. Come away."

As the autumn approached, life began to wear a less holiday aspect. Fuel must be provided for the long winter; the wild grass, growing rankly in the city streets, must be cut and cured for the horses; the potatoes must be dug and stored. Eve followed Adam about everywhere. Two is company, but one is a crowd, in a deserted place. Too many viewless things make themselves felt and heard under such circumstances.

"What were we thinking of, that we didn't fetch a dog?" said Eve one day. "He would have been a lot of company, and protection, too."

"Protection from what, the serpent?" asked Adam, and then they both laughed.

One night one of the horses was taken sick. The man came in after a lantern, and the woman followed him out. All night they worked over the animal, fomenting him with hot water, and dosing him like a Christian. In the morning he was better. "Dear," said Eve—then, not before, "what would become of us if anything were to happen to the horses?"

"We should have to invent a flying machine," the man answered lightly; but there were lines in his face that were not there the day before. With the first rain of autumn, their cottage leaked like a sieve. "We shall have to go to the hotel," they said simultaneously.

Accordingly, they moved as soon as the storm was over. They chose a sunny suite of rooms, with windows facing the south, transferred their belongings, and made themselves cozy for the winter. Of stoves and ranges, as well as many other bulky articles of furniture, they had their choice. It was while this flitting was in progress that a queer thing happened. Adam was away with the wagon, and Eve was alone in their apartment, arranging it with housewifely instinct; quite absorbed in her occupation, and humming softly to herself, she was not in the least startled just at first, when a little cooing voice behind her said, "Mamma!" "Yes, dear, what is it? " she answered, with her mouth full of tacks. Then, at the sound of her own voice in the empty room, she threw up her head and looked about her, aghast, breathless, beads of perspiration starting out on her face, suddenly grown pallid with the pallor

of a corpse. After an instant she cast her self on her knees, half beside, half over, a couch, and sobbed with the abandonment of despair. Thus Adam found her when he came back. It was the beginning of the end. He never left her alone again, longer than to go downstairs after an armful of wood, but even in the midst of conversation she would stop and say, "Listen! Now don't you hear it, the steps in the hallway?"

To be sure, the great empty building was full of whisperings and patterings, rustlings, and sighings, and moanings, enough to shake stronger nerves than hers. Often a low, intermittent hum went on, like the buzz of voices. At times they could all but make out the words of the conversation. That, he satisfied her, was a draft of air circling about in the rotunda. The footfalls he never could hear. The Voice she said nothing about; and in deed it was a good while before she heard it again.

But the footfalls and the whisperings were more than she could endure. "Let us go! Let us leave this dreadful place!" she murmured pleadingly at last.

"I am afraid it is too late," he replied, regarding her anxiously. " It is liable to snow any day now. But we will move. We will find some smaller, cozier house, where there are not so many noises and echoes. We will go and look for one right now."

They went out under a leaden sky, and found a residence in tolerable repair that gave promise of dry quarters; but the search had consumed the afternoon, and the moving must be deferred until the morrow When the morrow dawned, the snow was falling in a cloud, and any change of base was out of the question. So then they set themselves to endure with cheerfulness. Neither was a weakling. They kept themselves busy. He split wood and minded the horses, and she kept with him and helped him. She cooked and swept, and he helped her. They played the mandolin and sang, and beat one another at cards. Every day he promenaded her up and down the halls and long dining-room so many miles for a constitutional. He made a bow and arrows, and they practised archery. They played paper chase through the rooms, and, when hunted too closely, she would recall a childish accomplishment to her aid, and slide down the banisters! Out side the snow fell and drifted, and the silence of the summer became in their memories as the clatter of looms in comparison with this silence of winter, broken only by the fall of mimic avalanches from the eaves of some house, or the howl of a gray wolf drawn from afar by the scent of their beasts, stabled in the

basement.

Eve seemed well on the way to recovery from her temporary panic, when one day she heard the little Voice again. They were having a paper chase, and she was eagerly pursuing Adam through the empty rooms, when the Voice said, "Mamma!" and brought her up short. After that it spoke to her with increasing frequency; never when she was listening for it and dreading it, or (as she sometimes did) longing for it, but always when she was busy and absorbed in something else; or waking her up out of sleep, and bringing her upright in her bed, trembling like a leaf, and with wide eyes staring into the darkness. It never said aught but "Mamma!" or repeated it the second time; but she came to know at last, that from any momentary respite of self forgetfulness, or fragmentary happiness, the little Voice would call her back to her penance. Sometimes, after it had spoken, she could hear the patter of tiny feet in the hallway or on the stairs.

So the weeks went by over the dwellers in the abandoned city, until one night they were aroused by hearing one of the horses below stamping extraordinarily. Adam arose and went down hastily to see what was amiss. He could not discover that anything was, and returned, shivering, up the stairs. The bed was empty, and in a panic he searched about the rooms, lantern in hand. At length he found Eve cowering in a corner. "Eve! Eve! What is it?" he cried, afraid to touch her. She did not answer, and her eyes reflected the light from the lantern like an animal's. "What is the matter with you, dear? Don't you know me?" he asked again, pleadingly, raising the lantern on high, so that the light fell upon his face. Reason came back to her eyes slowly.

"Oh, is it you?" she said. "I did not know who you were at first." After that he grew in a manner accustomed to behold that strange film glaze her eyes, when for a moment, as she told him, her world grew strange to her, and each familiar object be came something never seen before.

One day, when he had been after an armful of wood, she had disappeared on his return. He sought her from room to room, through the echoing halls, opening every door, calling her name aloud at first; but ceasing finally, lest the echoes should add to her fright. At last, on the third floor, he came to a door that was locked.

Behind that she must be; and he knocked, and called, and be sought with phrases of love, that she would open to him, but there was neither word nor movement in response. Fearing to break the door in, lest she should fling

herself from the window; fearing, too, lest she should perish in the cruel cold of the unwarmed chamber, he framed a desperate resolution. He entered the room adjoining the locked one, and, softly raising the window, crept out upon a narrow ornamental cornice which ran around the building below this third tier of windows. It was coated with ice, and a chance as desperate as a man would care to take in any strait. But because he was reckless of consequences, he passed in safety the short distance separating the windows, and stood on the sill of the next in comparative safety. If he found the window fast, his daring were in vain; but it proved not to be.

He raised the sash with the heedfulness necessitated by his situation, and let himself into the room, but the woman there was oblivious to his presence. She was kneeling in the vacant room, upon the bare floor, surrounded by the empty white walls, with her head drooping, and arms moving gently back and forth as if swaying a cradle, while she smiled and crooned a soft lullaby. Noiselessly he turned the key in the lock and stole away; he returned presently with a blanket, and gently enwrapped that kneeling form, all unconscious of his touch, which had once had power by its lightest impress to send an answering thrill along every fiber of sensation throughout her frame. And then he left her to awake in her own time from a dream to which he never referred. But the day was one that deepened the lines that the year had graven on his forehead.

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At length there came, one eve, a strange wind out of the upper sky; all night it blustered, and raved, and raced through the empty streets with a noise as of marching battalions. And in the dawn, great masses of snow began to come thundering down from the roofs with rush and roar. A January thaw had set in, and the air was vocal with a thousand lispings, and tricklings, and tinklings, and gurglings, and cracklings, and creepings. The very joists in the wall seemed to be feeling the running of sap in their fibers; and a fine ear might almost have detected the dance of the atoms as they took new partners and arranged themselves in new combinations throughout the northern hemisphere.

"Now let us go! let us go!" cried Eve eagerly, as she woke and hearkened; "away from this awful place!" All day the strange wind blew, and under their eyes as they watched, the snow vanished, and the brown, wet earth steamed

in the sun.

On the second day they turned their faces southward, their wagon weighted with their scanty stores—and the treasure-box.

The prairie lay bare before them, but the man knew well that the mountain passes which rose between them and freedom were still choked with snow.

But the woman said, "Go! I must go, whatever comes of it!" and he made no further demur. So they wended onward, over the moisture-reeking land, with its swollen streams and myriad pools in every hollow of the plain.

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It was some weeks later that the Avenger found them, and when he found, his hand fell empty of its vengeance; for this was the manner of it: Frozen, standing upright in a huge snowdrift, where the blizzard had overtaken him, was the man. With his gloved hand shielding his brow, he was gazing southward, as if mapping out a path on the plain below. At his back gaped the portal of a mountain defile, a wintry chaos of glacier-riven rock and snow laden firs, drooping like weeping willows under their icy burden.

Passing his enemy by, the Avenger pressed on into the gorge; around its first turn, in a sheltered nook, he found her whom he sought. But his hand fell empty again, whether of vengeance or of pardon; for on her, too, the ice-king had breathed. She was crouched before the ashes of the extinct fire; around her lay scattered widely the contents of the treasure-box; while clutched close to her breast by her rigid fingers, as though she would shield it from the storm, lay a strange bundle—a faded shawl rolled into the semblance of the muffled form of a child. Upon the frozen whiteness of the icy wall behind her were traced with a blackened ember, in a woman's uncertain handwriting, these words:

"The Wages of Sin is Death."

Afar off in the wilderness the beasts of the wild prowl through a deserted city, moldering into decay while yet the timbers of its framing are unseasoned; and the Ghost of the Boom remains in undisturbed possession of his kingdom.

"The Guardian of Mystery Island" by Dr. Edmond Nolcini

The Black Cat, No. 12, September 1896

IN THE WHITE SLOPE OF the sandy beach at Orr, a company of fishermen, just in from the night's catch, were variously employed in loading, disposing of their traps, or mending their nets. There were two quiet figures in the picture outlined in the clear summer atmosphere between the shore and the sea. A young man, who marked three points ahead in the line of intellectual development, was standing beside an overturned boat, upon which was seated an old fisherman, engaged in mending his net, and conveying to the attentive ear of his companion some interesting bits of information concerning the surrounding islands of the bay. There were relative values an artist would have appreciated, afforded by the contrast in dress and person of the two men. The fair, sensitive face of the young man, with his lithe and elegant figure coolly clad in white flannel, was a complement to the burly form of the sailor, roughly clothed, and with weather-stained features composing a simple but kindly countenance, well shaded under an oilskin hat.

"No land twixt her en Spain, sir."

"A period between continents," interrupted the young man jocosely.

"En I wouldn't go anighst her fur all the gold en the mint. Thar's plenty of land twixt her en us, thank God! Ye ken see she's the furtherest out nor all the islands."

"Yes, I see, Tom," replied the young man, directing a quizzical glance toward a small dark spot between the two spaces of blue. "She must be ten miles out."

"Nigh onter it."

"Well, what is out there to prevent a man from visiting your 'Mystery Island,' if he wants to?"

"Fur one thing, sir, Kidd's gold ez buried out thar, but thar hain't a feller on this yer coast dar's to go anighst it. Cauz the cove, what's only a narrer cut twixt two cliffs thet crawls inter sarpent ledges under the warter, makes it a damned nasty place ter git inter, even ef it warn't guarded—"

Guarded? Guarded by whom?"

"A dorg, a confounded sperret dorg, with eyes like lighthouse lanterns, thet kin be seed ten miles out, whenever anything is goin' ter harpen. Whoever sees thet ar dorg might just's well make peace with God, fer he hain't likely ter stay round much longer mong men."

The young man, whose name was Lenartson,—Sam Lenartson,—laughed outright. It seemed the most ridiculous story he had ever heard credited by otherwise sensible men.

He determined at once to administer a rebuke to their foolish superstitions.

"Tom," he said, wheeling about impulsively, "give me a dory and a pair of oars, and I will go out there to-day and explode all your thrilling romance about the island."

"My God, sir!" Tom dropped his horny hands helplessly, an ashy pallor creeping over his face.

"Yer don't know, sir. Twenty years ago, sir, there was a party of young chaps from the city, who wouldn't hear to nuthin', went out there en never come back. Ye hain't lived round these parts en watched the signs. Thar's the awfullest rocket strikes this yer coast en a hurricane every time thet unarthly beast ez seed. 'Twould be like a helpin' ye to commit suicide; et's damned folly ter think uv et."

"Tom, you might just as well let me have your boat as to put me to the trouble of getting another, as I shall certainly go out to Mystery Island, and I should like to go this morning. solemnly to break the awful spell which has power over you only from your belief in it. And when I have entered the cove, braved the dog, and upset the kingdom of the devil supposed to be established there, not one of you fellows will dispute my right to Kidd's gold."

Tom's revolutions of thought were too slow to frame a new objection. Hypnotized by the spirit and energy of his companion, he rose from his seat, pointing doggedly at the boat.

"Ef ye will, ye will, I spoze; take her en go; ye don't go unwarned."

"Ye ken look out fur a squall," he shouted after the departing youth, who

flung up his hat like a person taking leave of a party of particular friends, as he paddled out.

Sam was not by nature over-cautious, so that the admonition regarding the weather gave him no concern of mind as he floated past the beautiful islands of Casco Bay. One after another they disappeared behind him, as the island for which his oars were bent loomed up more definitely before him. Suddenly, conscious of a chill penetrating the atmosphere, he looked up, to remark a marshaling force of clouds that, unperceived by him, had been marching up the heavenly plain for the last half hour, and were now rapidly darkening with a summer shower.

An ominous lash of the wind struck the bosom of the great deep. With a startled throb, it lifted the boat sharply. Sam looked around him with critical and troubled eyes.

He was not far from the little cove, which presented itself as a sharply inclined sand-bar displayed between the cliffs that rose precipitously upon either side of it.

But the ledges upon either side of the passage rendered it so narrow and dangerous that they were called the Black Snakes. Around them the seething tide boiled like a witch's pot, flinging the white foam of the angry billows high against the cliffs, that returned it with such force that a boat carried in this direction must have been doomed to certain destruction.

Just as Lenartson was about to breast the wave which should have carried him safely into the little harbor, a fierce gust of wind from an unexpected quarter seized upon his light craft, and before he could make an effort to resist it, he was whirled about broad side upon one of the rising breakers. In this position, half capsized and water logged, blinded by the falling rain, his face wet by the salt spray, he must have been borne to certain death had not the capricious wind, playing with the frail craft like a paper toy, suddenly reversed it. Thus it was set upon the crest of a falling breaker in such a direction as to be flung into the cove, landing with a sharp collision some twenty feet up the beach.

The shock threw Lenartson face forward, where he lay for a moment half stunned. Then, as a flash of light and crash of thunder aroused him to a sense of danger, he sprang out of the boat, dragging it up the incline just in time to save it from the returning wave. After finding a broken stake, to which he secured his boat, he fled to the trees, seeking shelter from the rain among the tall and serried columns of pine and fir, whose thick mat of interlaced

branches made the darkness almost impenetrable.

When, the shower ended, light through the breaking clouds penetrated the internal fastness, Lenartson discovered a rank growth of foliage not common to these islands nor the latitude in which they were located. Everywhere flowers and plants of variegated hues were massed in such rich profusion as to suggest the land of the deadly cobra, while even the more familiar trees had reached a height and breadth that seemed wholly foreign.

As he began to work his way through the thick undergrowth toward the interior, he came to the conclusion not only that the island was uninhabited, but that the place had not been marked by human footsteps for many years, as the small animals, and the birds that flew from cover, seemed quite fearless.

He had but just arrived at this conclusion when there rose upon the air the distinct bay of a dog, apparently not many feet away.

Evidently some one else had chosen the same day to pay a visit to the island.

Led by the sound of the animal's voice, he soon emerged upon what had been a small clearing, but at the present time was entirely covered with the second growth of trees, shooting up over an area of a hundred square feet. Here, amidst a medley of decayed stumps and underbrush, he saw a rude board hut, before which, with his nose in the air, sat the dog who had led him to question and investigation.

But, far from being the formidable creature of the fisherman's yarn, this noble wreck of the mastiff breed was ill fitted to hold midnight revels with hurricanes and to conjure with infernal powers, since every fiber of his poor old body seemed to call for a blanket and a kennel.

His eyes, instead of appearing the baleful globes of fire that fishermen's fancies had made visible ten miles out at sea, were rather dim and piteous in their appeal for friendly recognition.

The poor creature had somehow missed his master—or such was Sam's conclusion—and in dog anguish thus lamented his misfortune.

"Hullo, old boy! have you lost him? Well, never mind, we'll set that straight directly."

Having convinced himself by a glance into the interior of the cabin, which was filled with spiders' webs and their crafty weavers, that it had not been used for many years, Lenartson turned once more to the dog.

"Come, Jack," he said, "let us go after your master."

With one of those peremptory barks that is interpreted as dog consent, the

great lion-like creature bounded into the thicket.

This action served to reveal what had at one time been a path, but now, like every other effort of man here, indicated a contention with, and partial subjection to, the native wildness of the woodland.

Through bramble and brier they pushed along the overgrown path, the dog still ahead, until a space of light suddenly penetrated the open branches of the trees. A moment later, they emerged upon a plot of ground, where was revealed to Lenartson's astonished gaze a stately old mansion, built of stone, and enclosed by neglected terraces and overgrown gardens, upon which, at some time, had been bestowed much expense and care.

Now, however, the sharp tooth of time had gnawed into the vitals of the old place, from the broken chimneys and sunken flags of the walks to the defaced and fallen fence, rotting away beneath the mold of the drifting leaves.

The deserted house conveyed an air of melancholy to all of its surroundings.

It seemed a little singular to the young man, as he came upon this scene, that no person at Orr had ever mentioned its builders and occupants to him.

"Why not?" he wondered.

The dog left him no time to consider this point at length. He bounded up the steps, ran across the stone veranda, and leaped through the wide door into the hall, at the entrance of which rose a flight of winding stone stairs.

As Lenartson made haste to follow him, he had time to notice that the curtains at the lower windows were rendered almost in visible from the outside by the thick veil of dust encrusting the glass panes. He further felt the chill of a damp and moldy house while ascending the stairs.

The upper hall presented a tableau in still life of open doors, dusty floor, and cobwebbed corners. His steps seemed to evoke a ghostly ring of answering echoes through the vacant halls. As the dog passed through one of the open doors leading off at the right of the staircase, Lenartson paused upon the threshold to listen to the labored breathing of a sick or dying person.

Another moment, and his singular quest had brought him to the bedside of an old woman, lying beneath a heap of worn silk quilts and battered blankets, tossed about her emaciated figure in utmost confusion. The lips, thin, seamed, and crossed by yellow wrinkles, were parted above toothless gums in an almost vain struggle for breath. The talon-like fingers clutched nervously at the worn coverlid, as the great creature at Lenartson's side leaped upon the bed, lapping the withered cheek of his mistress; then settled

down, with his head upon his paws, and his eyes fixed in appeal upon the stranger.

In bewilderment Lenartson glanced about the room, to observe, here as elsewhere, the absence of care denoted in the carpet of dust upon the oak floor, the array of cobwebs festooning the ceiling or woven across the brocade shades depending in sags from the four large windows of the room.

Here was a mystery of Mystery Island that made his blood boil with indignation. An old woman! Abandoned, it was evident, and dying thus, unattended except by a dog, her last earthly friend!

As he entered, she regarded him with no apparent recognition of a human presence, but turned the wandering glance of her wild, dark eyes toward a crucifix placed upon a table near the head of the bed. This crucifix was the only thing within reach of her vision to suggest solace to the dying, as there was neither bread upon the table to sustain her perishing frame, nor water to cool her parched lips.

"You are sick," affirmed the young man, with great pity vibrating in his voice; "what can I do for you?"

At the sound she sprang up in bed, and glared angrily upon him from dark and cavernous eyes. She stretched forth her long, lean arms, away from whose unlovely bones fell the tattered lace of her nightrobe.

"Pierre! Pierre!" she almost shrieked, as Lenartson shrank repulsed from the uninviting embrace. "At last! at last! Oh, my God, why did you leave me alone in this strange deserted land?"

She spoke in French, and Lenartson, understanding it well, thus discovered her lineage.

Then she had been deserted, this poor old creature,—a refugee from a sunny land, abandoned to a life of wretchedness on this forsaken isle.

"Madame," he interrupted in reverent sympathy, "I am not Pierre; I am a stranger, providentially brought to you in this hour of need. What can I give you, food or drink, and where can either be found?"

With a supreme effort she pulled herself forward, a movement that called his attention to the glittering rings that hung upon her yellow, shrivelled hands.

"Ah! you would deceive me, and to what purpose, I ask?"

She pointed in his face her old, skinny forefinger, an index of scorn shaken by wrath.

"Sir, I command you to leave me. If alone, well, so be it. If the King's

head has fallen, it is a pretty piece of business these dogs have done. Never fear, the end will find France restored to reason. We shall make another King. No, sir! I decline your assistance in this matter. We are not a race of cowards."

As these scenes unshadowed themselves, she used first this tone of haughty complacency, and then, when the full horror of some fearful situation made itself felt, she threw up her arms with a cry of terror.

"What are they doing, these brutes in the street? It is she, my dear lady. Quick, give my cloak—this way—we must not be seen. The Bastile has fallen! It is the Conciergerie where they would carry our innocent, woe-white queen! It is dark, my dear,—give me your hand,—we are suspected, but we are also protected. Let us fly! The nobles are in the winepress, the people are on top—blood flows, curses darken the air. This is not France, it is a pandemonium; it is a mad-house; it is hell!"

Through this hurried, breathless speech of terror, Lenartson stood as if rooted to the spot. At the close of it Madame sank, white with exhaustion, among the pillows. Then, as the dying candle fire flickered into a blaze, the old lips muttered:—

"Have mercy, my lord! Do not leave me with these rough fellows even for so short a time. Do you believe the weak hand of a woman can protect such immense treasure? The earth where it lies buried is but an open storehouse, when, by your absence, the lock is removed from silence, and that devil, cupidity, which I see in each man's eye is free to manifest itself.

"Ah! the weed—the devil-weed! I had not thought about it. Plant it to-morrow upon yonder ledge that will lift it to the sun and air. Superstition will stay their greedy clutch for your gold, sir count. It will live,—like the evil in men's hearts, it is too viperous to die."

She tossed herself uneasily. Great drops of perspiration stood upon her forehead.

"Pierre! Pierre!" she moaned, "it is not a devil-weed, it is a soul bound and restless; it is my soul shrieking silent maledictions to heaven.

"Ah, sir count, it was an awkward slip to take a woman from palaces and thrones to a hut in the woods; from association with princes to a company of thieves. But the gold tempted you, my poor count. For the promise of a title under the new régime we plotted—a pirate sold to you the secret of hidden treasure. He had sailed with the great captain; he knew it was here. We were an odd assemblage, I vow, but the house was built by stealth, of material

brought in the ship,—the treasure concealed. It was thought to be a secret, but when two have a secret it becomes public matter. Your devil-weed was planted to secure the gold. Your devil-weed—only a little evil, like the incipient causes of a revolution; the hand that cozened it into unholy life and nurtured its growth grew weak as the evil grew strong, to encompass the land. So, with the count's devil-plant, the treasure was no longer protected; it was buried and consumed by that thing which he brought from India,—a little curling, crawling weed, concealed in a golden box, a cousin to the breathing plant, but an apostate, a wretched outcast from the world of flowers, embodying all their passion of growth and reproduction, yet endowed with the cruel instincts and power of a viper."

What was she talking about? There seemed so little coherency in what she said.

From what he could patch together of this ragged information, it led him to suppose she was a refugee from the French Revolution, who had sought these shores in company with her son, or whoever Pierre or the count might have been; that in their flight they had fallen in with a company of buccaneers, who had piloted them to this spot, where now lay concealed beneath some monstrous growth their hidden treasure. But, hark! she spoke again, placing her hand on the dog's head.

"Ah, Rollin, is it you? You are more faithful than men. They left me alone here to die,—for I am dying,—but in death I will not lie in quiet amidst this savagery of nature.

"Would it be possible, if my body were bound to this accursed soil, that my spirit could abandon the scene of its torture? No! no! I should traverse the earth until the resurrection of the dead. Like yonder devil-plant, to which my feet have worn a path through the wilderness, I should writhe and creep and live, forever.

"Back to France! O souls of the dead! if ye have ears for mortal complaint,—if ye bear in your spirits a kinship and sympathy for human woe, I call upon you to witness the last cry of my embodied spirit for the land of its nativity: Bear back to France!"

With a shriek of agony that made Lenartson's blood curdle, she threw her face, in the last desperate action of despair, forward upon her knees. Lay thus, with her features concealed, her arms stretched forth, and her hair straying loosely about her thin, white figure like a scant and shredded veil.

Lenartson, shocked and awakened from his trance, hastened to lift her so

as to give her air. Too late! The candle had flickered out. She was dead.

Gravely he composed the old limbs and worn features of the Grand Madame. What a sad romance. How singular that he should have witnessed the closing scenes of such a tragedy!

Having done what was possible, he determined to return to Orr, to give information of what had happened. And if it was true that treasure was concealed on this island, the final cry the departed soul should be answered. She should be carried back to France. First, however, he must solve the final mystery of the gold and the devil-plant.

After a short search he discovered what appeared to be an overgrown path, which led out of the garden toward the interior, directly opposite to the one by which he had entered, and began at once to make his way through it.

At length he arrived at an open space where, for half a mile, the trees were dwarfed at every point of the circle where they approached it. In the center of this enclosure of green earth, thus denuded of shrubs and trees, there was situated a long ledge, rising in some places to a height of thirty or forty feet. All about it the tall grass pliantly bent to the light touch of the wind. Covering the entire cliff, and often dripping to the ground along the face of it, was a peculiar mass, whose narrow, spiked leaves presented a living sea of green. The entire plant seemed to be endowed with voluntary motion, as without apparent cause it rose and fell like the jerky hunch of an inch worm, or the ceaseless motion of the waves of the sea.

Some of the limbs of the plant dropping over the head of the boulder were as large as the body of an anaconda. They were clothed in smooth, mottled bark somewhat resembling the skin of that reptile in color. The limbs and stems were set about with a glossy corolla of leaves, about four inches between each cluster. From their centers depended a bunch of tendril and a cluster of flame-like, star-shaped blossoms. Long, and dank, and dark, this beautiful devil-plant swung to and fro. At an interval of about ten seconds the limbs and tendrils contracted in such a manner as to bring all of the leaves together so as to entirely conceal the branches upon which they grew, then stretched forth again.

It was this singular motion, somewhat like that of the breathing plant, which caused the heaving, crawling motion of the whole mass above and the tremulous vibration of the limbs below.

Curiously fascinated, Lenartson crept somewhat nearer, hoping to determine something of the character of the plant’s malign influence without

perilous adventure.

As he approached nearer and nearer, fixing his eyes upon the plant with the suspicion of watching for an enemy in ambush, he kept pushing his foot cautiously through the long grass. "Was it here?" he speculated, "or over yonder, directly beneath that restless sea of leaves, the great treasure was buried?"

Suddenly he struck something concealed in the grass that leaped upon him, coiling with such a sharp, unexpected pressure about his feet and ankles, that, thus entangled, he was jerked from his feet, falling backward upon the earth. In this position, before he had time to struggle to his knees, he felt himself being rapidly drawn toward the cliff, upon which grew the great mass of the devil-plant, a limb of which, serpent-like, coiled and concealed in the grass, had caught his wary feet and was now rapidly coiling up his body, to bear him with angry jerks toward the great monster plant that, to Lenartson's horrified eyes, appeared to rise and approach him, full of malignant life. At that moment he remembered a fish knife which he happened to have in his pocket, and, seizing it, he commenced a desperate attack upon the vine as he struggled to his knees.

It was a short, sharply contested battle, in which the man realized that, once within the grasp of the great mass of deadly limbs and viperous tendrils of the great plant, there would be no more to-morrows for him upon the earth.

He succeeded none too soon in freeing himself from the obnoxious embrace of the fearful thing, whose wounded part continued by jerky hunches to retire toward the main body, trembling to receive it into its umbrageous bosom; while the severed portion about his legs, with a faint quiver as of departing life, uncoiled itself and dropped, with the soft thud of dead material, lengthwise upon the grass.

Filled with a great sense of gratitude and relief, not unmixed with horror, he made haste to beat a retreat toward the woodland, moving backward with his white face set suspiciously toward the enemy. When once assured that safe distance had been placed between them, he stood for some minutes watching the heaving body of green with its serpent arms flung over the cliff. He was deeply impressed by Madame's characterization.

"It is not a plant! It is my soul shrieking maledictions to heaven."

What was it? He could not classify it as other than a rare specimen from a prehistoric period—a monstrous growth and prophecy in plant life of the mighty powers of intelligence destined to inherit and subdue the earth,

significantly saved to this age for the study and wonder of man. In the unreckoned ages of its existence it had survived the sweep of universal conflagration; it had beheld the God-abandoned race perishing in the carburetted atmosphere, smothered in subterranean caverns, plunged in boiling oceans, or buried beneath mounds of burning cinders that followed the trail of the red serpent of the air. It had witnessed the age of darkness and cold, and now, a living chronicle of disaster, it had been captured by the daring hand of man and transplanted to a foreign shore.

It was five o'clock when Lenartson set out on his homeward journey. The sky was clear, the sea was calm, so that nothing occurred to withdraw his mind from meditating deeply upon ways and means by which the devil-plant might be overcome, the gold secured, and Madame's body returned to France.

He concluded that he would not speak to the people at Orr about the later portion of his adventure, as it would be likely to open inquiries that would lead to the discovery of the gold, secret that he did not wish at present to reveal to them.

Late as he arrived, for it was after sunset, he found Bill Maynard awaiting him. The old fisherman greeted him with surprise and emotion, and on hearing a portion of the story, hastened to bear the tidings from house to house. In consequence, Lenartson found himself an hour later besieged at the hotel by a crowd of curious people, to whom he rehearsed the tale of the finding of the dog, his pursuit to the deserted house, and the impressive death-bed scene of the Grand Madame.

The kerosene lamp upon the clerk's desk made a narrow circle of light around the room. In the center of it Lenartson occupied a wooden chair. He frequently changed his position as he talked.

Each strong-featured lad or bearded and weather-stained man kept his face attentively set toward the narrator. Each sharply silhouetted ghost upon the white-plastered wall showed scarcely a tremor of the immobile figures that surrounded him. Lenartson represented all the action of the company at the center.

The young man being unpleasantly conscious of the profound impression made upon his own high-wrought sensibilities, attempted to assume an air of carelessness.

To cover a slight tremor of his limbs, which he could not wholly repress, he would push himself up on the back legs of his chair, and sit thus, with his hands in his pockets, talking almost waggishly. Then, almost irresistibly

overcome by the in tensity of his feelings, he would drop suddenly forward, with a tragic earnestness that made itself felt in every heart.

They comprehended at once how cruel superstition had made them to this poor old creature, the harrowing scenes of whose death-bed lost nothing by Lenartson's tragic recital, excepting her connection with the concealed gold and the devil-plant.

Finally, they agreed that a company of twenty men should accompany Lenartson in the morning to Mystery Island, for the purpose of bringing Madame's body to Orr, where for a time, at least, it should remain, peacefully interred.

They did not separate until about one o'clock, and then, few of them who had listened to the story slept much for the night. As for Lenartson, he threw himself dressed upon the bed, from which he frequently started up to pace the floor.

All night he was haunted by the cry of Madame's departed spirit for the land of its nativity.

It lay upon him, a fearful injunction he could but obey. The devil-plant must in some way be overcome, the vast treasure unearthed, and Madame's embalmed body returned to the dear, sunny land of her birth.

As the yacht was launched, he moved among them, a strangely silent figure, with set lips and pallid cheek, his hat pulled low over his brow, his gaze abstracted from present scenes, his soul filled in all its chambers of sense with that piteous cry.

When they arrived at Mystery Island the mid-day sun had plowed his passage to the zenith without a cloud to vex his progress. They made haste to secure their boats, then dropped into Indian file, twenty men behind their leader, pushing and breaking their way through the overgrown path toward the old house in the woods.

The sharp clink of their stout heels sprang up behind them in startling echoes along the wide hall and stone stairway.

Upon the threshold of the room Lenartson had left yesterday, so full of tragic pictures memory would ever recall, he stopped a moment, looking over his shoulder into the pale and kindly faces behind him.

"Poor old Madame! It was here, boys, I left her yesterday after all was over.

Thus remarking, he turned his face inward and approached the bed. He stood before it aghast; the bed was empty! There was the yellow, crumpled

linen, there were the soiled blankets and tattered coverlid which the long, thin, bejeweled fingers had plucked at yesterday. But she and the dog were gone!

For the space of ten seconds each man stood staring in helpless silence. Then one of them ventured to suggest that he had made a mistake in the room. No one thought of doubting him. His face was too plain an index of his astonishment.

"That's it," concluded Bill Maynard. "You gut addled. Let's try another room."

Lenartson, continuing to gaze in a bewildered way at the bed, shook his head. "No, it was right here, and no other place, that I passed through the experience I have related to you. There must be some other person on the premises, and all that talk about being deserted was Madame's lunacy. Let's look about. "

As they commenced their investigation, the noise of their approach and departure startled the bats from their corners in the empty rooms. Everything was covered with dust and mold; even the chairs and floors were thickly encrusted. Through the holes in the roof the rain had beaten unchecked and the resulting fungus life consumed, as it grew, the wooden sills and doorways. Cobwebs hung in festoons from the ceiling, and cut in elaborate patterns of gray lace the corners of the rooms, in one of which a rabbit had made her nest and was rearing her young. Across the threshold of another a serpent slipped into the golden shimmer of the outer sunshine.

In a cupboard was found a china service, and a silver or pewter pot so black with long exposure to the air and moisture, its true metal could not at once be determined. And everywhere was the all-recording dust, covering the entire house like a pall cloth upon the face of the dead. There was no food, nor evidence of recent occupancy in the entire house.

Once again they looked at each other, and then to Lenartson, the question trembling upon each man’s lips he feared to utter.

Superstition repossessed them. Lenartson, dazed and distressed, placed his hand against his forehead, struggling to think.

Ah! the devil-weed and the treasure! If these things existed in reality, it would establish the fact of his having spoken with a dying woman yesterday.

"Boys, I must leave you for half an hour. Will you wait for me here?

"Out there," they consented gruffly, pointing to the garden. No man cared to remain within.

In feverish impatience he darted away from them, tearing his way along the gloomy woodland path toward the spot where that terrible thing grew.

At the point where the opening would reveal the cliff, he stopped short, struck by a chill of horror. Great drops of perspiration rolled over his face. His heart beat with stifling throbs in his bosom, while his hands clenched themselves unconsciously.

In this mood, appalled by awful doubt, he dashed out into the open space, —then stopped short, an exclamation of joy bursting from his fevered lips. Thank God, it was there, and she had been!

Steeped in the still sunshine of the upper air, that monster plant still crawled over the gray head of the great boulder, emitting fiery sparks from its bosom, as with each lift of its huge body the round rings of its red blossoms flashed into view. The long, gray, snake-like limbs, bristling with their gay corolla of spiked leaves, swung, contracted, and lengthened, exactly as he had seen them yesterday.

Cautiously he crept forward, his nervous fingers clutching the handle of his knife, treading carefully through the long grass which appeared to grow here like some dangerous accomplice of the enemy.

Now he understood why no shrub or tree grew near the boulder. The devil-plant had, as it grew, grasped, one after another, every living thing which could afford resistance to its malignant clutch. It had made itself a supreme evil in the garden of God, annihilating all living beauty excepting the long, pliant grass, through which it might creep and glide towards the object to be destroyed.

Not a wonder Madame, who knew its nature, moaned, "It will encompass the land" And the treasure beneath it—Ugh! the whole thing grew uncanny. He commenced to feel that any attempt to recover a treasure upon which rested the curse of Madame's passion-withered lips would prove fatal. He could almost see the ghastly glistening of dead men's bones impaled in the meshes of that fearful thing. An accursed root had sprung out of the practical Maine soil, engrafted upon it from some kin dom of the damned.

A shadow crossed the sun, followed by another and still an other in quick succession, like the swift lifting of gigantic wings.

The trees shivered. The air leaped at once into strong currents, gathering velocity and darkness as they traveled. The sky lowered with a blaze of fury, followed by deafening thunder and accompanied by the roar of the sea.

Lenartson felt himself raised bodily by the wind and dashed down again

like chaff. In terror, lest the mighty breath of the tempest make him the plaything of yonder devil-weed, now tossing forward and flinging up its long, crawling arms into the sulphurous air, he grasped the trunk of a tree with his arms, and flung him self face down upon the ground.

Ships went down everywhere along the coast that day; Their own boat dragged her anchor and was driven upon the rocks. Houses were unroofed and blown about like paper toys. It was a day of doom. It was like the passionate protest of the dead in league with the elements.

"I would haunt the land forever. I will not lie on this accursed soil. Bear me back to France!"

Pale, and shaken, and drenched by the pitying floods of the sky, Lenartson crept back, when the tempest was past, to the old house, where he met a company of stern, white faces.

"Boys," he said brokenly, "I cannot talk of what has happened on this mysterious island. I only ask to be taken away. Bill Maynard, give me your hand, old boy. I am no longer able to jeer at your superstitions."

None seemed inclined to talk.

When at last they swung out upon the broad, blue breast of the ocean, under a sunny sky, every man thanked God he had left the place forever.

And although at times some bold lad dares to steer his skift beneath the haunted cliff, where he declares the dog Rollin may still be seen on watch at the cove, there has been none other ambitious to investigate the mystery of Mystery Island.

The old house in the woods remains untenanted and unvisited. Dank and dark the devil-weed swings in the undisturbed silence of its green oasis.

The treasure buried upon the island is to many but a vague speculation. To Lenartson there appears no doubt as to the reality of the concealed treasure, and the Grand Madame is to him one of the most marvelous mysteries of life. Who was the Grand Madame? What was it that he saw at the old house? What did he hear? He had not slept and dreamed. Was it a visitation from the other world? A disturbed and earthbound soul enacting the closing scene of its mortality? If not, what? Where did the Grand Madame and the dog Rollin disappear?

About the Authors

Of the nine authors included in this anthology, I could only find some biographical or bibliographical information on five of them. Interestingly, these five authors are the woman writers included in this volume and René Bache, whose legacy seems to have been maintained by his sister-in-law. – Editor

Julia Magruder

Born in Charlottesville, VA, September 14, 1854, Julia Magruder contributed several stories to *The Black Cat*, though only one is included in this anthology. Her career as an author extended into other periodicals as well twenty novels. She was honored by the French Academie with the "Order of the Palms" before her death in 1907.

René Bache

René Bache (1861–1933), the great-great-great grandson of Benjamin Franklin, might be better known for his contributions to *Scientific American*, but his sister-in-law Violet Biddle did anthologize his ghost stories as well as publishing his biography.

Clarice Irene Clinghan

Clarice Irene Clinghan was also a repeat contributor to *The Black Cat* (two of them making the cut here) and wrote the novel *The Girl from Bogota*.

Alice Turner Curtis

Alice Turner Curtis, born in Sullivan, Maine in 1860, had a very long career writing dozens of historical fiction books with young girl protagonists, such as A Little Maid of Province Town and *A Yankee Girl at Fort Sumter*.

(Annie) Batterman Lindsay

Annie Batterman Lindsay wrote stories focused on California and the West. She was on the editorial staff of *The Land of Sunshine* and *Out West* magazines and one anthology, *Derelicts of Destiny*.

About the Editor

Katherine Nabity lives in the Tempe, AZ with her husband, author Eric Nabity. In addition to editing/formatting classic works and writing her own fiction, she plays ultimate frisbee whenever she can and loves reading about early 20th century stage magic.

Works as author:
Bounded in a Nutshell
Lucinda at the Window
Luck for Hire (with Eric Nabity)
Model Species (with Eric Nabity)

Works as an editor:
Our Past in the Uncanny Valley
David P. Abbott in The Open Court
Mephisto, the Marvellous Automaton