

THE
HORROR
MEGAPACK



25
Modern
and
Classic
Horror
Stories

**H.P. Lovecraft · Robert E. Howard
Darrell Schweitzer · Henry Kuttner
William F. Nolan · Seabury Quinn
John Gregory Betancourt · more!**

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This is version 1.2, adding several minor corrections from previous editions.

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“Dagon,” by H.P. Lovecraft, originally appeared in *The Vagrant* (November, 1917).

“The Children of the Night,” by Robert E. Howard, originally appeared as a 2-part serial in *Weird Tales* magazine, April-May 1931.

“Mother of Pearl,” by Fitz-James O’Brien, originally appeared in *Harper’s Magazine* (February 1860)

“Sometimes You Have to Shout About It,” by Darrell Schweitzer originally appeared in *H. P. Lovecraft’s Magazine of Horror #4*, copyright © 2006 by Wildside Press. Reprinted by permission of the author.

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“The Lost Ghost,” by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, originally appeared in *The Wind in the Rose-Bush and Other Stories of the Supernatural* (1903).

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“The Man Who Found Out,” by Algernon Blackwood, originally appeared in *The Wolves of God and Other Fey Stories* (1921).

“Phantas,” by Oliver Onions, was originally published in *Widdershins* (1911).

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“Juke-Box,” by Henry Kuttner, originally appeared in *Clash By Night* in 1947.

“The Mummy’s Foot,” by Theophile Gautier, was translated into English in 1908 by Lafcadio Hearn.

“Small World,” by William F. Nolan, originally appeared in *Fantastic Universe*, August 1957.

“The Bell in the Fog,” by Gertrude Atherton, originally appeared in *The Bell in the Fog and Other Stories* (1905).

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—John Betancourt

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DAGON, by H.P. Lovecraft

I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more. Penniless and at the end of my supply of the drug which alone makes life endurable, I can bear the torture no longer; and shall cast myself from this garret window into the squalid street below. Do not think from my slavery to morphine that I am a weakling or a degenerate. When you have read these hastily scrawled pages you may guess, though never fully realise, why it is that I must have forgetfulness and death.

It was in one of the most open and least frequented parts of the broad Pacific that the packet-ship which I was supercargo fell a victim to the German sea-raider. The great war was then at its very beginning, and the ocean forces of the Hun had not completely sunk to their later degradation; so that our vessel was made a legitimate prize, whilst we of her crew were treated with all the fairness and consideration due us as naval prisoners. So liberal, indeed, was the discipline of our captors, that five days after we were taken I managed to escape alone in a small boat with water and provisions for a good length of time.

When I finally found myself adrift and free, I had but little idea of my surroundings. Never a competent navigator, I could only guess vaguely by the sun and stars that I was somewhat south of the equator. Of the longitude I knew nothing, and no island or coast-line was in sight. The weather kept fair, and for uncounted days I drifted aimlessly beneath the scorching sun; waiting either for some passing ship, or to be cast on the shores of some habitable land. But neither ship nor land appeared, and I began to despair in my solitude upon the heaving vastnesses of unbroken blue.

The change happened whilst I slept. Its details I shall never know; for my slumber, though troubled and dream-infested, was continuous. When at last I awaked, it was to discover myself half sucked into a slimy expanse of hellish black mire which extended about me in monotonous undulations as far as I could see, and in which my boat lay grounded some distance away.

Though one might well imagine that my first sensation would be of wonder at so prodigious and unexpected a transformation of scenery, I was in reality more horrified than astonished; for there was in the air and in the rotting soil a sinister quality which chilled me to the very core. The region was putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish, and of other less describable things which I saw protruding from the nasty mud of the unending plain. Perhaps I should not hope to convey in mere words the unutterable hideousness that can dwell in absolute silence and barren immensity. There was nothing within hearing, and nothing in sight save a vast reach of black slime; yet the very completeness of the stillness and the homogeneity of the landscape oppressed me with a nauseating fear.

The sun was blazing down from a sky which seemed to me almost black in its cloudless cruelty; though reflecting the inky marsh beneath my feet. As I crawled into the stranded boat I realised that only one theory could explain my position. Through some unprecedented volcanic upheaval, a portion of the ocean floor must have been thrown to the surface, exposing regions which for innumerable millions of years had lain hidden under unfathomable watery depths. So great was the extent of the new land which had risen beneath me, that I could not detect the faintest noise of the surging ocean, nor strain my ears as I might. Nor were there any sea-fowl to prey upon the dead things.

For several hours I sat thinking or brooding in the boat, which lay upon its side and afforded a slight shade as the sun moved across the heavens. As the day progressed, the ground lost some of its stickiness, and seemed likely to dry sufficiently for travelling purposes in a short time. That night I slept but little, and the next day I made for myself a pack containing food and water, preparatory to an overland journey in search of the vanished sea and possible rescue.

On the third morning I found the soil dry enough to walk upon with ease. The odour of the fish was maddening; but I was too much concerned with graver things to mind so slight an evil, and set off boldly for an unknown goal. All day I forged steadily westward, guided by a far-away hummock which rose higher than any other elevation on the rolling desert. That night I encamped, and on the following day still travelled toward the hummock, though that object seemed scarcely nearer than when I had first espied it. By the fourth evening I attained the base of the mound, which turned out to be much higher than it had appeared from a distance; an intervening valley setting it out in sharper relief from the general surface. Too weary to ascend, I slept in the shadow of the hill.

I know not why my dreams were so wild that night; but ere the waning and fantastically gibbous moon had risen far above the eastern plain, I was awake in a cold perspiration, determined to sleep no more. Such visions as I had experienced were too much for me to endure again. And in the glow of the moon I saw how unwise I had been to travel by day. Without the glare of the parching sun, my journey would have cost me less energy; indeed, I now felt quite able to perform the ascent which had deterred me at sunset. Picking up my pack, I started for the crest of the eminence.

I have said that the unbroken monotony of the rolling plain was a source of vague horror to me; but I think my horror was greater when I gained the summit of the mound and looked down the other side into an immeasurable pit or canyon, whose black recesses the moon had not yet soared high enough to illumine. I felt myself on the edge of the world; peering over the rim into a fathomless chaos of eternal night. Through my terror ran curious reminiscences of *Paradise Lost*, and of Satan's hideous climb through the unfashioned realms of darkness.

As the moon climbed higher in the sky, I began to see that the slopes of the valley were not quite so perpendicular as I had imagined. Ledges and outcroppings of rock afforded fairly easy foot-holds for descent, whilst after a drop of a few hundred feet, the declivity became very gradual. Urged on by an impulse which I cannot definitely analyse, I scrambled with difficulty down the rocks and stood on the gentler slope beneath, gazing into the Stygian deeps where no light had yet penetrated.

All at once my attention was captured by a vast and singular object on the opposite slope, which rose steeply about an hundred yards ahead of me; an object that gleamed whitely in the newly bestowed rays of the ascending moon. That it was merely a gigantic piece of stone, I soon assured myself; but I was conscious of a distinct impression that its contour and position were not altogether the work of Nature. A closer scrutiny filled me with sensations I cannot express; for despite its enormous magnitude, and its position in an abyss which had yawned at the bottom of the sea since the world was young, I perceived beyond a doubt that the strange object was a well-shaped monolith whose massive bulk had known the workmanship and perhaps the worship of living and thinking creatures.

Dazed and frightened, yet not without a certain thrill of the scientist's or archaeologist's delight, I examined my surroundings more closely. The moon, now near the zenith, shone weirdly and vividly above the towering steps that hemmed in the chasm, and revealed the fact that a far-flung body of water flowed at the bottom, winding out of sight in both directions, and almost lapping my feet as I stood on the slope. Across the chasm, the wavelets washed the base of the Cyclopean monolith; and whose surface I could now trace both inscriptions and crude sculptures. The writing was in a system of hieroglyphics unknown to me, and unlike anything I had ever seen in books; consisting for the most part of conventionalised aquatic symbols such as fishes, eels, octopi, crustaceans, molluscs, whales, and the like. Several characters obviously represented marine things which are unknown to the modern world, but whose decomposing forms I had observed on the ocean-risen plain.

It was the pictorial carving, however, that did most to hold me spellbound. Plainly visible across the intervening water on account of their enormous size, were an array of bas-reliefs whose subjects

would have excited the envy of a Doré. I think that these things were supposed to depict men—least, a certain sort of men; though the creatures were shewn disporting like fishes in the waters some marine grotto, or paying homage at some monolithic shrine which appeared to be under the waves as well. Of their faces and forms I dare not speak in detail; for the mere remembrance makes me grow faint. Grotesque beyond the imagination of a Poe or a Bulwer, they were damnably human in general outline despite webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips, glassy, bulging eyes and other features less pleasant to recall. Curiously enough, they seemed to have been chiselled badly out of proportion with their scenic background; for one of the creatures was shewn in the act of killing a whale represented as but little larger than himself. I remarked, as I say, their grotesqueness and strange size; but in a moment decided that they were merely the imaginary gods of some primitive fishing or seafaring tribe; some tribe whose last descendant had perished eras before the first ancestor of the Piltdown or Neanderthal Man was born. Awestruck at this unexpected glimpse into a past beyond the conception of the most daring anthropologist, I stood musing whilst the moon cast queer reflections on the silent channel before me.

Then suddenly I saw it. With only a slight churning to mark its rise to the surface, the thing slid into view above the dark waters. Vast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome, it darted like a stupendous monster of nightmares to the monolith, about which it flung its gigantic scaly arms, the while it bowed its hideous head and gave vent to certain measured sounds. I think I went mad then.

Of my frantic ascent of the slope and cliff, and of my delirious journey back to the stranded boat, I remember little. I believe I sang a great deal, and laughed oddly when I was unable to sing. I have indistinct recollections of a great storm some time after I reached the boat; at any rate, I know that I heard peals of thunder and other tones which Nature utters only in her wildest moods.

When I came out of the shadows I was in a San Francisco hospital; brought thither by the captain of the American ship which had picked up my boat in mid-ocean. In my delirium I had said much, but I found that my words had been given scant attention. Of any land upheaval in the Pacific, my rescuers knew nothing; nor did I deem it necessary to insist upon a thing which I knew they could not believe. Once I sought out a celebrated ethnologist, and amused him with peculiar questions regarding the ancient Philistine legend of Dagon, the Fish-God; but soon perceiving that he was hopeless and conventional, I did not press my inquiries.

It is at night, especially when the moon is gibbous and waning, that I see the thing. I tried morphine but the drug has given only transient surcease, and has drawn me into its clutches as a hopeless slave. So now I am to end it all, having written a full account for the information or the contemptuous amusement of my fellow-men. Often I ask myself if it could not all have been a pure phantasm—a mere freak of fever as I lay sun-stricken and raving in the open boat after my escape from the German man-of-war. This I ask myself, but ever does there come before me a hideously vivid vision in reply. I cannot think of the deep sea without shuddering at the nameless things that may at this very moment be crawling and floundering on its slimy bed, worshipping their ancient stone idols and carving their own detestable likenesses on submarine obelisks of water-soaked granite. I dream of a day when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind—of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium.

The end is near. I hear a noise at the door, as of some immense slippery body lumbering against it. I shall not find me. God, *that hand!* The window! The window!

THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT, by Robert E. Howard

There were, I remember, six of us in Conrad's bizarrely fashioned study, with its queer relics from all over the world and its long rows of books which ranged from the Mandrake Press edition of Boccaccio to a *Missale Romanum*, bound in clasped oak boards and printed in Venice, 1740. Cleman and Professor Kirowan had just engaged in a somewhat testy anthropological argument: Cleman upholding the theory of a separate, distinct Alpine race, while the professor maintained that this so-called race was merely a deviation from an original Aryan stock—possibly the result of an admixture between the southern or Mediterranean races and the Nordic people.

"And how," asked Clemants, "do you account for their brachycephalism? The Mediterraneans were as long-headed as the Aryans: would admixture between these dolichocephalic peoples produce a broad-headed intermediate type?"

"Special conditions might bring about a change in an originally long-headed race," snapped Kirowan. "Boaz has demonstrated, for instance, that in the case of immigrants to America, skull formations often change in one generation. And Flinders Petrie has shown that the Lombards changed from a long-headed to a round-headed race in a few centuries."

"But what caused these changes?"

"Much is yet unknown to science," answered Kirowan, "and we need not be dogmatic. No one knows, as yet, why people of British and Irish ancestry tend to grow unusually tall in the Darling district of Australia—Cornstalks, as they are called—or why people of such descent generally have thinner jaw-structures after a few generations in New England. The universe is full of the unexplainable."

"And therefore the uninteresting, according to Machen," laughed Taverel.

Conrad shook his head. "I must disagree. To me, the unknowable is most tantalizingly fascinating."

"Which accounts, no doubt, for all the works on witchcraft and demonology I see on your shelves," said Ketrick, with a wave of his hand toward the rows of books.

And let me speak of Ketrick. Each of the six of us was of the same breed—that is to say, a Briton or an American of British descent. By British, I include all natural inhabitants of the British Isles. We represented various strains of English and Celtic blood, but basically, these strains are the same after all. But Ketrick: to me the man always seemed strangely alien. It was in his eyes that this difference showed externally. They were a sort of amber, almost yellow, and slightly oblique. At times, when one looked at his face from certain angles, they seemed to slant like a Chinaman's.

Others than I had noticed this feature, so unusual in a man of pure Anglo-Saxon descent. The usual myths ascribing his slanted eyes to some pre-natal influence had been mooted about, and I remember Professor Hendrik Brooler once remarked that Ketrick was undoubtedly an atavism, representing a reversion of type to some dim and distant ancestor of Mongolian blood—a sort of freak reversion since none of his family showed such traces.

But Ketrick comes of the Welsh branch of the Cedrics of Sussex, and his lineage is set down in the *Book of Peers*. There you may read the line of his ancestry, which extends unbroken to the days of Canute. No slightest trace of Mongoloid intermixture appears in the genealogy, and how could there have been such intermixture in old Saxon England? For Ketrick is the modern form of Cedric, and though that branch fled into Wales before the invasion of the Danes, its male heirs consistently married with English families on the border marches, and it remains a pure line of the powerful Sussex Cedrics—almost pure Saxon. As for the man himself, this defect of his eyes, if it can be called a defect, is his only abnormality, except for a slight and occasional lisp of speech. He is high-

intellectual and a good companion except for a slight aloofness and a rather callous indifference which may serve to mask an extremely sensitive nature.

Referring to his remark, I said with a laugh: "Conrad pursues the obscure and mystic as some men pursue romance; his shelves throng with delightful nightmares of every variety."

Our host nodded. "You'll find there a number of delectable dishes—Machen, Poe, Blackwood, Maturin—look, there's a rare feast—Horrid Mysteries, by the Marquis of Grosse—the real Eighteenth Century edition."

Taverel scanned the shelves. "Weird fiction seems to vie with works on witchcraft, voodoo and dark magic."

True; historians and chronicles are often dull; tale-weavers never—the masters, I mean. A voodoo sacrifice can be described in such a dull manner as to take all the real fantasy out of it, and leave merely a sordid murder. I will admit that few writers of fiction touch the true heights of horror—most of their stuff is too concrete, given too much earthly shape and dimensions. But in such tales as Poe's Fall of the House of Usher, Machen's Black Seal and Lovecraft's Call of Cthulhu—the three master horror-tales, to my mind—the reader is borne into dark and outer realms of imagination.

"But look there," he continued, "there, sandwiched between that nightmare of Huysmans', and Walpole's Castle of Otranto—Von Junzt's Nameless Cults. There's a book to keep you awake all night!"

"I've read it," said Taverel, "and I'm convinced the man is mad. His work is like the conversation of a maniac—it runs with startling clarity for awhile, then suddenly merges into vagueness and disconnected ramblings."

Conrad shook his head. "Have you ever thought that perhaps it is his very sanity that causes him to write in that fashion? What if he dares not put on paper all he knows? What if his vague suppositions are dark and mysterious hints, keys to the puzzle, to those who know?"

"Bosh!" This from Kirowan. "Are you intimating that any of the nightmare cults referred to by Von Junzt survive to this day—if they ever existed save in the hag-ridden brain of a lunatic poet and philosopher?"

"Not he alone used hidden meanings," answered Conrad. "If you will scan various works of certain great poets you may find double meanings. Men have stumbled onto cosmic secrets in the past and given a hint of them to the world in cryptic words. Do you remember Von Junzt's hints of 'a city in the waste'? What do you think of Flecker's line:

"'Pass not beneath! Men say there blows in stony deserts still a rose
But with no scarlet to her leaf—and from whose heart no perfume flows.'

"Men may stumble upon secret things, but Von Junzt dipped deep into forbidden mysteries. He was one of the few men, for instance, who could read the Necronomicon in the original Greek translation."

Taverel shrugged his shoulders, and Professor Kirowan, though he snorted and puffed viciously at his pipe, made no direct reply; for he, as well as Conrad, had delved into the Latin version of the book and had found there things not even a cold-blooded scientist could answer or refute.

"Well," he said presently, "suppose we admit the former existence of cults revolving about such nameless and ghastly gods and entities as Cthulhu, Yog Sothoth, Tsathoggua, Gol-goroth, and the like. I can not find it in my mind to believe that survivals of such cults lurk in the dark corners of the world today."

To our surprise Clemants answered. He was a tall, lean man, silent almost to the point of taciturnity and his fierce struggles with poverty in his youth had lined his face beyond his years. Like many another artist, he lived a distinctly dual literary life, his swashbuckling novels furnishing him

generous income, and his editorial position on *The Cloven Hoof* affording him full artistic expression. ~~The Cloven Hoof was a poetry magazine whose bizarre contents had often aroused the shocked interest of the conservative critics.~~

“You remember Von Junzt makes mention of a so-called Bran cult,” said Clemants, stuffing his pipe-bowl with a peculiarly villainous brand of shag tobacco. “I think I heard you and Taverel discussing it once.”

“As I gather from his hints,” snapped Kirowan, “Von Junzt includes this particular cult among those still in existence. Absurd.”

Again Clemants shook his head. “When I was a boy working my way through a certain university, I had for roommate a lad as poor and ambitious as I. If I told you his name, it would startle you. Though he came of an old Scotch line of Galloway, he was obviously of a non-Aryan type.

“This is in strictest confidence, you understand. But my roommate talked in his sleep. I began to listen and put his disjointed mumbling together. And in his mutterings I first heard of the ancient cult hinted at by Von Junzt; of the king who rules the Dark Empire, which was a revival of an older, darker empire dating back into the Stone Age; and of the great, nameless cavern where stands the Dark Mak Morn—the image of Bran Mak Morn, carved in his likeness by a master-hand while the great king yet lived—and to which each worshipper of Bran makes a pilgrimage once in his or her lifetime. Yes, that cult lives today in the descendants of Bran’s people—a silent, unknown current it flows on in the great ocean of life, waiting for the stone image of the great Bran to breathe and move with sudden life, and come from the great cavern to rebuild their lost empire.”

“And who were the people of that empire?” asked Ketrick.

“Picts,” answered Taverel, “doubtless the people known later as the wild Picts of Galloway were predominantly Celtic—a mixture of Gaelic, Cymric, aboriginal and possibly Teutonic elements. Whether they took their name from the older race or lent their own name to that race, is a matter yet to be decided. But when Von Junzt speaks of Picts, he refers specifically to the small, dark, garlic-eating peoples of Mediterranean blood who brought the Neolithic culture into Britain. The first settlers of that country, in fact, who gave rise to the tales of earth spirits and goblins.”

“I can not agree to that last statement,” said Conrad. “These legends ascribe a deformity and inhumanness of appearances to the characters. There was nothing about the Picts to excite such horror and repulsion in the Aryan peoples. I believe that the Mediterraneans were preceded by a Mongoloid type, very low in the scale of development, whence these tales—”

“Quite true,” broke in Kirowan, “but I hardly think they preceded the Picts, as you call them, in Britain. We find troll and dwarf legends all over the Continent, and I am inclined to think that both the Mediterranean and Aryan people brought these tales with them from the Continent. They must have been of extremely inhuman aspect, those early Mongoloids.”

“At least,” said Conrad, “here is a flint mallet a miner found in the Welsh hills and gave to me which has never been fully explained. It is obviously of no ordinary Neolithic make. See how small it is, compared to most implements of that age; almost like a child’s toy; yet it is surprisingly heavy and no doubt a deadly blow could be dealt with it. I fitted the handle to it, myself, and you would be surprised to know how difficult it was to carve it into a shape and balance corresponding with the head.”

We looked at the thing. It was well made, polished somewhat like the other remnants of the Neolithic I had seen, yet as Conrad said, it was strangely different. Its small size was oddly disquieting, for it had no appearance of a toy, otherwise. It was as sinister in suggestion as an Aztec sacrificial dagger. Conrad had fashioned the oaken handle with rare skill, and in carving it to fit the

head, had managed to give it the same unnatural appearance as the mallet itself had. He had even copied the workmanship of primal times, fixing the head into the cleft of the haft with rawhide.

“My word!” Taverel made a clumsy pass at an imaginary antagonist and nearly shattered a costly Shang vase. “The balance of the thing is all off-center; I’d have to readjust all my mechanics of poise and equilibrium to handle it.”

“Let me see it,” Ketrick took the thing and fumbled with it, trying to strike the secret of its proper handling. At length, somewhat irritated, he swung it up and struck a heavy blow at a shield which hung on the wall nearby. I was standing near it; I saw the hellish mallet twist in his hand like a live serpent and his arm wrenched out of line; I heard a shout of alarmed warning—then darkness came with the impact of the mallet against my head.

* * * *

Slowly I drifted back to consciousness. First there was dull sensation with blindness and total lack of knowledge as to where I was or what I was; then vague realization of life and being, and a hard something pressing into my ribs. Then the mists cleared and I came to myself completely.

I lay on my back half-beneath some underbrush and my head throbbed fiercely. Also my hair was caked and clotted with blood, for the scalp had been laid open. But my eyes traveled down my body and limbs, naked but for a deerskin loincloth and sandals of the same material, and found no other wound. That which pressed so uncomfortably into my ribs was my ax, on which I had fallen.

Now an abhorrent babble reached my ears and stung me into clear consciousness. The noise was faintly like language, but not such language as men are accustomed to. It sounded much like the repeated hissing of many great snakes.

I stared. I lay in a great, gloomy forest. The glade was overshadowed, so that even in the daytime it was very dark. Aye—that forest was dark, cold, silent, gigantic and utterly grisly. And I looked into the glade.

I saw a shambles. Five men lay there—at least, what had been five men. Now as I marked the abhorrent mutilations my soul sickened. And about clustered the—Things. Humans they were, of some sort, though I did not consider them so. They were short and stocky, with broad heads too large for their scrawny bodies. Their hair was snaky and stringy, their faces broad and square, with flat noses, hideously slanted eyes, a thin gash for a mouth, and pointed ears. They wore the skins of beasts, as did I, but these hides were but crudely dressed. They bore small bows and flint-tipped arrows, flint knives and cudgels. And they conversed in a speech as hideous as themselves, a hissing, reptilian speech that filled me with dread and loathing.

Oh, I hated them as I lay there; my brain flamed with white-hot fury. And now I remembered. We had hunted, we six youths of the Sword People, and wandered far into the grim forest which our people generally shunned. Weary of the chase, we had paused to rest; to me had been given the first watch, for in those days, no sleep was safe without a sentry. Now shame and revulsion shook my whole being. I had slept—I had betrayed my comrades. And now they lay gashed and mangled—killed and butchered while they slept, by vermin who had never dared to stand before them on equal terms. Aryara, had betrayed my trust.

Aye—I remembered. I had slept and in the midst of a dream of the hunt, fire and sparks had exploded in my head and I had plunged into a deeper darkness where there were no dreams. And now the penalty. They who had stolen through the dense forest and smitten me senseless, had not paused to mutilate me. Thinking me dead they had hastened swiftly to their grisly work. Now perhaps they had forgotten me for a time. I had sat somewhat apart from the others, and when struck, had fallen half-hidden under some bushes. But soon they would remember me. I would hunt no more, dance no more in the

dances of hunt and love and war, see no more the wattle huts of the Sword People.

But I had no wish to escape back to my people. Should I slink back with my tale of infamy and disgrace? Should I hear the words of scorn my tribe would fling at me, see the girls point the contemptuous fingers at the youth who slept and betrayed his comrades to the knives of vermin?

Tears stung my eyes, and slow hate heaved up in my bosom, and my brain. I would never bear the sword that marked the warrior. I would never triumph over worthy foes and die gloriously beneath the arrows of the Picts or the axes of the Wolf People or the River People. I would go down to death beneath a nauseous rabble, whom the Picts had long ago driven into forest dens like rats.

And mad rage gripped me and dried my tears, giving in their stead a berserk blaze of wrath. If such reptiles were to bring about my downfall, I would make it a fall long remembered—if such beasts had memories.

Moving cautiously, I shifted until my hand was on the haft of my ax; then I called on Il-marinen and bounded up as a tiger springs. And as a tiger springs I was among my enemies and mashed a flat skull as a man crushes the head of a snake. A sudden wild clamor of fear broke from my victims and for an instant they closed round me, hacking and stabbing. A knife gashed my chest but I gave no heed. A red mist waved before my eyes, and my body and limbs moved in perfect accord with my fighting brain. Snarling, hacking and smiting, I was a tiger among reptiles. In an instant they gave way and fled, leaving me bestriding half a dozen stunted bodies. But I was not satiated.

I was close on the heels of the tallest one, whose head would perhaps come to my shoulder, and who seemed to be their chief. He fled down a sort of runway, squealing like a monstrous lizard, and when I was close at his shoulder, he dived, snake-like, into the bushes. But I was too swift for him, and dragged him forth and butchered him in a most gory fashion.

And through the bushes I saw the trail he was striving to reach—a path winding in and out among the trees, almost too narrow to allow the traversing of it by a man of normal size. I hacked off my victim's hideous head, and carrying it in my left hand, went up the serpent-path, with my red ax in my right.

Now as I strode swiftly along the path and blood splashed beside my feet at every step from the severed jugular of my foe, I thought of those I hunted. Aye—we held them in so little esteem, we hunted by day in the forest they haunted. What they called themselves, we never knew; for none of our tribe ever learned the accursed hissing sibilances they used as speech; but we called them Children of the Night. And night-things they were indeed, for they slunk in the depths of the dark forests, and in subterranean dwellings, venturing forth into the hills only when their conquerors slept. It was at night that they did their foul deeds—the quick flight of a flint-tipped arrow to slay cattle, or perhaps the loitering human, the snatching of a child that had wandered from the village.

But it was for more than this we gave them their name; they were, in truth, people of night and darkness and the ancient horror-ridden shadows of bygone ages. For these creatures were very old, and they represented an outworn age. They had once overrun and possessed this land, and they had been driven into hiding and obscurity by the dark, fierce little Picts with whom we contested now, and whom we hated and loathed them as savagely as did we.

The Picts were different from us in general appearance, being shorter of stature and dark of hair, eyes and skin, whereas we were tall and powerful, with yellow hair and light eyes. But they were cast in the same mold, for all of that. These Children of the Night seemed not human to us, with their deformed dwarfish bodies, yellow skin and hideous faces. Aye—they were reptiles—vermin.

And my brain was like to burst with fury when I thought that it was these vermin on whom I was to glut my ax and perish. Bah! There is no glory slaying snakes or dying from their bites. All this rage

and fierce disappointment turned on the objects of my hatred, and with the old red mist waving front of me I swore by all the gods I knew, to wreak such red havoc before I died as to leave a dread memory in the minds of the survivors.

My people would not honor me, in such contempt they held the Children. But those Children that left alive would remember me and shudder. So I swore, gripping savagely my ax, which was of bronze, set in a cleft of the oaken haft and fastened securely with rawhide.

Now I heard ahead a sibilant, abhorrent murmur, and a vile stench filtered to me through the trees, human, yet less than human. A few moments more and I emerged from the deep shadows into a wide open space. I had never before seen a village of the Children. There was a cluster of earthen domes with low doorways sunk into the ground; squalid dwelling-places, half-above and half-below the earth. And I knew from the talk of the old warriors that these dwelling-places were connected by underground corridors, so the whole village was like an ant-bed, or a system of snake holes. And I wondered if other tunnels did not run off under the ground and emerge long distances from the villages.

Before the domes clustered a vast group of the creatures, hissing and jabbering at a great rate.

I had quickened my pace, and now as I burst from cover, I was running with the fleetness of my race. A wild clamor went up from the rabble as they saw the avenger, tall, bloodstained and blazing-eyed, leap from the forest, and I cried out fiercely, flung the dripping head among them and bounded like a wounded tiger into the thick of them.

Oh, there was no escape for them now! They might have taken to their tunnels but I would have followed, even to the guts of Hell. They knew they must slay me, and they closed around, a hundred strong, to do it.

There was no wild blaze of glory in my brain as there had been against worthy foes. But the old berserk madness of my race was in my blood and the smell of blood and destruction in my nostrils.

I know not how many I slew. I only know that they thronged about me in a writhing, slashing mass like serpents about a wolf, and I smote until the ax-edge turned and bent and the ax became no more than a bludgeon; and I smashed skulls, split heads, splintered bones, scattered blood and brains in one red sacrifice to Il-marinen, god of the Sword People.

Bleeding from half a hundred wounds, blinded by a slash across the eyes, I felt a flint knife sink deep into my groin and at the same instant a cudgel laid my scalp open. I went to my knees but reeled up again, and saw in a thick red fog a ring of leering, slant-eyed faces. I lashed out as a dying tiger strikes, and the faces broke in red ruin.

And as I sagged, overbalanced by the fury of my stroke, a taloned hand clutched my throat and a flint blade was driven into my ribs and twisted venomously. Beneath a shower of blows I went down again, but the man with the knife was beneath me, and with my left hand I found him and broke his neck before he could writhe away.

Life was waning swiftly; through the hissing and howling of the Children I could hear the voice of Il-marinen. Yet once again I rose stubbornly, through a very whirlwind of cudgels and spears. I could no longer see my foes, even in a red mist. But I could feel their blows and knew they surged about me. I braced my feet, gripped my slippery ax-haft with both hands, and calling once more on Il-marinen heaved up the ax and struck one last terrific blow. And I must have died on my feet, for there was no sensation of falling; even as I knew, with a last thrill of savagery, that slew, even as I felt the splintering of skulls beneath my ax, darkness came with oblivion.

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I came suddenly to myself. I was half-reclining in a big armchair and Conrad was pouring water over

me. My head ached and a trickle of blood had half-dried on my face. Kirowan, Taverel and Cleman were hovering about, anxiously, while Ketrick stood just in front of me, still holding the mallet, his face schooled to a polite perturbation which his eyes did not show. And at the sight of those cursed eyes a red madness surged up in me.

“There,” Conrad was saying, “I told you he’d come out of it in a moment; just a light crack. He’s taken harder than that. All right now, aren’t you, O’Donnel?”

At that I swept them aside, and with a single low snarl of hatred launched myself at Ketrick. Taken utterly by surprise he had no opportunity to defend himself. My hands locked on his throat and we crashed together on the ruins of a divan. The others cried out in amazement and horror and sprang to separate us—or rather, to tear me from my victim, for already Ketrick’s slant eyes were beginning to start from their sockets.

“For God’s sake, O’Donnel,” exclaimed Conrad, seeking to break my grip, “what’s come over you? Ketrick didn’t mean to hit you—let go, you idiot!”

A fierce wrath almost overcame me at these men who were my friends, men of my own tribe, and I swore at them and their blindness, as they finally managed to tear my strangling fingers from Ketrick’s throat. He sat up and choked and explored the blue marks my fingers had left, while I raged and cursed, nearly defeating the combined efforts of the four to hold me.

“You fools!” I screamed. “Let me go! Let me do my duty as a tribesman! You blind fools! I can do nothing for the paltry blow he dealt me—he and his dealt stronger blows than that against me, bygone ages. You fools, he is marked with the brand of the beast—the reptile—the vermin who exterminated centuries ago! I must crush him, stamp him out, rid the clean earth of his accursed pollution!”

So I raved and struggled and Conrad gasped to Ketrick over his shoulder: “Get out, quick! He’s out of his head! His mind is unhinged! Get away from him.”

Now I look out over the ancient dreaming downs and the hills and deep forests beyond and I ponder. Somehow, that blow from that ancient accursed mallet knocked me back into another age and another life. While I was Aryara I had no cognizance of any other life. It was no dream; it was a stray bit of reality wherein I, John O’Donnel, once lived and died, and back into which I was snatched across the voids of time and space by a chance blow. Time and times are but cogwheels, unmatched, grinding on oblivious to one another. Occasionally—oh, very rarely!—the cogs fit; the pieces of the plot snap together momentarily and give men faint glimpses beyond the veil of this everyday blindness we call reality.

I am John O’Donnel and I was Aryara, who dreamed dreams of war-glory and hunt-glory and feast-glory and who died on a red heap of his victims in some lost age. But in what age and where?

The last I can answer for you. Mountains and rivers change their contours; the landscapes alter; but the downs least of all. I look out upon them now and I remember them, not only with John O’Donnel’s eyes, but with the eyes of Aryara. They are but little changed. Only the great forest has shrunk and dwindled and in many, many places vanished utterly. But here on these very downs Aryara lived and fought and loved and in yonder forest he died. Kirowan was wrong. The little, fierce, dark Picts were not the first men in the Isles. There were beings before them—aye, the Children of the Night. Legend—why, the Children were not unknown to us when we came into what is now the isle of Britain. We had encountered them before, ages before. Already we had our myths of them. But we found them in Britain. Nor had the Picts totally exterminated them.

Nor had the Picts, as so many believe, preceded us by many centuries. We drove them before us as we came, in that long drift from the East. I, Aryara, knew old men who had marched on that century

long trek; who had been borne in the arms of yellow-haired women over countless miles of forest and plain, and who as youths had walked in the vanguard of the invaders.

As to the age—that I cannot say. But I, Aryara, was surely an Aryan and my people were Aryans—members of one of the thousand unknown and unrecorded drifts that scattered yellow-haired blue-eyed tribes all over the world. The Celts were not the first to come into western Europe. I, Aryara, was of the same blood and appearance as the men who sacked Rome, but mine was a much older strain. Of the language spoke, no echo remains in the waking mind of John O'Donnel, but I knew that Aryara's tongue was to ancient Celtic what ancient Celtic is to modern Gaelic.

Il-marinen! I remember the god I called upon, the ancient, ancient god who worked in metals—bronze then. For Il-marinen was one of the base gods of the Aryans from whom many gods grew; and he was Wieland and Vulcan in the ages of iron. But to Aryara he was Il-marinen.

And Aryara—he was one of many tribes and many drifts. Not alone did the Sword People come to dwell in Britain. The River People were before us and the Wolf People came later. But they were Aryans like us, light-eyed and tall and blond. We fought them, for the reason that the various drifts of Aryans have always fought each other, just as the Achaeans fought the Dorians, just as the Celts and Germans cut each other's throats; aye, just as the Hellenes and the Persians, who were once one people and of the same drift, split in two different ways on the long trek and centuries later met and flooded Greece and Asia Minor with blood.

Now understand, all this I did not know as Aryara. I, Aryara, knew nothing of all these world-wide drifts of my race. I knew only that my people were conquerors, that a century ago my ancestors had dwelt in the great plains far to the east, plains populous with fierce, yellow-haired, light-eyed people like myself; that my ancestors had come westward in a great drift; and that in that drift, when my tribesmen met tribes of other races, they trampled and destroyed them, and when they met other yellow-haired, light-eyed people, of older or newer drifts, they fought savagely and mercilessly according to the old, illogical custom of the Aryan people. This Aryara knew, and I, John O'Donnel, who know much more and much less than I, Aryara, knew, have combined the knowledge of these separate selves and have come to conclusions that would startle many noted scientists and historians.

Yet this fact is well known: Aryans deteriorate swiftly in sedentary and peaceful lives. Their proper existence is a nomadic one; when they settle down to an agricultural existence, they pave the way for their downfall; and when they pen themselves with city walls, they seal their doom. Why, I, Aryara, remember the tales of the old men—how the Sons of the Sword, on that long drift, found villages of white-skinned yellow-haired people who had drifted into the west centuries before and had quit their wandering life to dwell among the dark, garlic-eating people and gain their sustenance from the soil. And the old men told how soft and weak they were, and how easily they fell before the bronze blades of the Sword People.

Look—is not the whole history of the Sons of Aryan laid on those lines? Look—how swiftly the Persian followed Mede; Greek, Persian; Roman, Greek; and German, Roman. Aye, and the Norseman followed the Germanic tribes when they had grown flabby from a century or so of peace and idleness and despoiled the spoils they had taken in the southland.

But let me speak of Ketrick. Ha—the short hairs at the back of my neck bristle at the very mention of his name. A reversion to type—but not to the type of some cleanly Chinaman or Mongol of recent times. The Danes drove his ancestors into the hills of Wales; and there, in what medieval century, and in what foul way did that cursed aboriginal taint creep into the clean Saxon blood of the Celtic line there to lie dormant so long? The Celtic Welsh never mated with the Children any more than the Picts did. But there must have been survivals—vermin lurking in those grim hills, that had outlasted the

time and age. In Aryara's day they were scarcely human. What must a thousand years of retrogression have done to the breed?

What foul shape stole into the Ketrick castle on some forgotten night, or rose out of the dusk to grasp some woman of the line, straying in the hills?

The mind shrinks from such an image. But this I know: there must have been survivals of that foul reptilian epoch when the Ketricks went into Wales. There still may be. But this changeling, this waif of darkness, this horror who bears the noble name of Ketrick, the brand of the serpent is upon him, and until he is destroyed there is no rest for me. Now that I know him for what he is, he pollutes the clear air and leaves the slime of the snake on the green earth. The sound of his lisp, his hissing voice fills me with crawling horror and the sight of his slanted eyes inspires me with madness.

For I come of a royal race, and such as he is a continual insult and a threat, like a serpent underfoot. Mine is a regal race, though now it is become degraded and falls into decay by continual admixture with conquered races. The waves of alien blood have washed my hair black and my skin dark, but I still have the lordly stature and the blue eyes of a royal Aryan.

And as my ancestors—as I, Aryara, destroyed the scum that writhed beneath our heels, so shall John O'Donnel, exterminate the reptilian thing, the monster bred of the snaky taint that slumbered so long unguessed in clean Saxon veins, the vestigial serpent-things left to taunt the Sons of Aryan. They say the blow I received affected my mind; I know it but opened my eyes. Mine ancient enemy walks often on the moors alone, attracted, though he may not know it, by ancestral urgings. And on one of these lonely walks I shall meet him, and when I meet him, I will break his foul neck with my hands, I, Aryara, broke the necks of foul night-things in the long, long ago.

Then they may take me and break my neck at the end of a rope if they will. I am not blind, if my friends are. And in the sight of the old Aryan god, if not in the blinded eyes of men, I will have kept my faith with my tribe.

MOTHER OF PEARL, by Fitz-James O'Brien

I

I met her in India, when, during an eccentric course of travel, I visited the land of palanquins and hookahs. She was a slender, pale, spiritual-looking girl. Her figure swayed to and fro when she walked, like some delicate plant brushed by a very gentle wind. Her face betokened a rare susceptibility of nervous organization. Large, dark-gray eyes, spanned by slender arches of black eyebrows; irregular and mobile features; a mouth large and singularly expressive, and conveying vague hints of a sensual nature whenever she smiled. The paleness of her skin could hardly be called paleness; it was rather a beautiful transparency of texture, through the whiteness of which one beheld the underglow of life, as one sees the fires of a lamp hazily revealed through the white ground-glass shade that envelops it. Her motions were full of a strange and subtle grace. It positively sent a thrill of an indefinable nature through me to watch her moving across a room. It was perhaps a pleasurable sensation at beholding her perform so ordinary an act in so unusual a manner. Every wanderer in the fields has been struck with delight on beholding a tuft of thistle-down floating calmly through the still atmosphere of a summer day. She possessed in the most perfect degree this aerial serenity of motion. With all the attributes of body, she seemed to move as if disembodied. It was a singular and paradoxical combination of the real and ideal, and therein I think lay the charm.

Then her voice. It was like no voice that I ever heard before. It was low and sweet; but how many hundreds of voices have I heard that were as low and just as sweet! The charm lay in something else. Each word was uttered with a sort of dovelike "coo,"—pray do not laugh at the image, for I am striving to express what after all is perhaps inexpressible. However, I mean to say that the harsh gutturals and hissing dentals of our English tongue were enveloped by her in a species of vocal plumage, so that they flew from her lips, not like pebbles or snakes, as they do from mine and yours, but like humming-birds, soft and round, and imbued with a strange fascination of sound.

We fell in love, married, and Minnie agreed to share my travel for a year, after which we were to repair to my native place in Maine, and settle down into a calm, loving country life.

It was during this year that our little daughter Pearl was born. The way in which she came to be named Pearl was this.

We were cruising in the Bay of Condatchy, on the west coast of Ceylon, in a small vessel which I had hired for a month's trip, to go where I listed. I had always a singular desire to make myself acquainted with the details of the pearl fishery, and I thought this would be a good opportunity; so with my wife and servants and little nameless child—she was only three months old—on whom, however, we showered daily a thousand unwritable love-titles, I set sail for the grounds of a celebrated pearl fishery.

It was a great although an idle pleasure to sit in one of the small coasting-boats in that cloudless and serene climate, floating on an unruffled sea, and watch the tawny natives, naked, with the exception of a small strip of cotton cloth wound around their loins, plunge into the marvellously clear waters, and after having shot down far beyond sight, as if they had been lead instead of flesh and blood, suddenly break above the surface after what seemed an age of immersion, holding in their hands a basket filled with long, uncouthly shaped bivalves, any of

which might contain a treasure great as that which Cleopatra wasted in her goblet. The oysters being flung into the boat, a brief breathing-spell was taken, and then once more the dark-skinned diver darted down like some agile fish, to recommence his search. For the pearl oyster is by no means to be found in the prodigal profusion in which his less aristocratic brethren, the mill-ponds and blue-pond

and chinkopins, exist. He is rare and exclusive, and does not bestow himself liberally. He, like a high-born caste, is not prolific.

Sometimes a fearful moment of excitement would overtake us. While two or three of the pearl divers were under water, the calm, glassy surface of the sea would be cleft by what seemed the thin blade of a sharp knife, cutting through the water with a slow, even, deadly motion. This we knew to be the dorsal fin of the man-eating shark. Nothing can give an idea of the horrible symbolism of that black fin. To a person utterly unacquainted with the habits of the monster, the silent, stealthy, resistless way in which that membranous blade divided the water would inevitably suggest a cruelty swift, unappeasable, relentless. This may seem exaggerated to any one who has not seen the spectacle I speak of. Every seafaring man will admit its truth. When this ominous apparition became visible, all on board the fishing-boats were instantly in a state of excitement. The water was beaten with oars until it foamed. The natives shouted aloud with the most unearthly yells; missiles of all kinds were flung at this Seeva of the ocean, and a relentless attack was kept up on him until the poor fellows groping below showed their mahogany faces above the surface. We were so fortunate as not to have been the spectators of any tragedy, but we knew from hearsay that it often happened that the shark—a fish, by the way, possessed of a rare intelligence—quietly bided his time until the moment the diver broke water, when there would be a lightning-like rush, a flash of the white belly as the brute turned on his side to snap, a faint cry of agony from the victim, and then the mahogany face would sink convulsed never to rise again, while a great crimson clot of blood would hang suspended in the calm ocean, the red memorial of a sudden and awful fatality.

One breathless day we were floating in our little boat at the pearl fishery, watching the diving. “We means my wife, myself, and our little daughter, who was nestled in the arms of her “ayah,” or colored nurse. It was one of those tropical mornings the glory of which is indescribable. The sea was so transparent that the boat in which we lay, shielded from the sun by awnings, seemed to hang suspended in air. The tufts of pink and white coral that studded the bed of the ocean beneath were as distinct as if they were growing at our feet. We seemed to be gazing upon a beautiful parterre of variegated candytuft. The shores, fringed with palms and patches of a gigantic species of cactus which was then in bloom, were as still and serene as if they had been painted on glass. Indeed, the whole landscape looked like a beautiful scene beheld through a glorified stereoscope;—eminently real as far as detail went, but fixed and motionless as death. Nothing broke the silence save the occasional plunge of the divers into the water, or the noise of the large oysters falling into the bottom of the boats. In the distance, on a small, narrow point of land, a strange crowd of human beings was visible. Oriental pearl merchants, Fakirs selling amulets, Brahmins in their dirty white robes, all attracted to the spot by the prospect of gain (as fish collect round a handful of bait flung into a pond), bargaining, cheating, and strangely mingling religion and lucre. My wife and I lay back on the cushions that lined the after part of our little skiff, languidly gazing on the sea and the sky by turns. Suddenly our attention was aroused by a great shout, which was followed by a volley of shrill cries from the pearl fishing boats. On turning in that direction, the greatest excitement was visible among the different crews. Hands were pointed, white teeth glittered in the sun, and every dusky form was gesticulating violently. Then two or three blacks seized some long poles and commenced beating the water violently. Others flung gourds and calabashes and odd pieces of wood and stones in the direction of a particular spot that lay between the nearest fishing-boat and ourselves. The only thing visible in that spot was a black, sharp blade, thin as the blade of a pen-knife, that appeared, slowly and evenly cutting through the still water. No surgical instrument ever glided through human flesh with a more silent and cruel calm. It needed not the cry of “Shark! shark!” to tell us what it was. In a moment we had a vivid

picture of that unseen monster, with his small, watchful eyes, and his huge mouth with its double row of fangs, presented to our mental vision. There were three divers under water at this moment, who directly above them hung suspended this remorseless incarnation of death. My wife clasped my hand convulsively, and became deathly pale. I stretched out the other hand instinctively, and grasped the revolver which lay beside me. I was in the act of cocking it when a shriek of unutterable agony from the ayah burst on our ears. I turned my head quick as a flash of lightning, and beheld her, with empty arms, hanging over the gunwale of the boat, while down in the calm sea I saw a tiny little face swathed in white, sinking—sinking—sinking!

What are words to paint such a crisis? What pen, however vigorous, could depict the pallid, convulsed face of my wife, my own agonized countenance, the awful despair that settled on the dark face of the ayah, as we three beheld the love of our lives serenely receding from us forever in the impassable, transparent ocean? My pistol fell from my grasp. I, who rejoiced in a vigor of manhood such as few attain, was struck dumb and helpless. My brain whirled in its dome. Every outward object vanished from my sight, and all I saw was a vast, translucent sea and one sweet face, rosy as a sea-shell, shining in its depths—shining with a vague smile that seemed to bid me a mute farewell as it floated away to death! I was roused from a trance of anguish by the flitting of a dark form through the clear water, cleaving its way swiftly toward that darling little shape, that grew dimmer and dimmer every second as it settled in the sea. We all saw it, and the same thought struck us all. That terrible, deadly back fin was the key of our sudden terror. The shark! A simultaneous shriek burst from our lips.

I tried to jump overboard, but was withheld by some one. Little use had I done so, for I could not swim a stroke. The dark shape glided on like a flash of light. It reached our treasure. In an instant all we loved on earth was blotted from our sight! My heart stood still. My breath ceased; life trembled on my hips. The next moment a dusky head shot out of the water close to our boat—a dusky head whose parted lips gasped for breath, but whose eyes shone with the brightness of a superhuman joy. The second after, two tawny hands held a dripping white mass above water, and the dark head shouted to the boatmen. Another second, and the brave pearl-diver had clambered in and laid my little daughter at her mother's feet. This was the shark! This the man-eater! This hero in sun-burned hide, who, with his quick, aquatic sight, had seen our dear one sinking through the sea, and had brought her up to us again, pale and dripping, but still alive!

What tears and what laughter fell on us three by turns as we named our gem rescued from the ocean "Little Pearl".

II

I had been about a year settled at my pleasant homestead in Maine, when the great misfortune of my life fell upon me.

My existence was almost exceptional in its happiness. Independent in circumstances; master of a beautiful place, the natural charms of which were carefully seconded by art; married to a woman whose refined and cultivated mind seemed to be in perfect accord with my own; and the father of the loveliest little maiden that ever tottered upon tiny feet—what more could I wish for? the summer-time we varied the pleasant monotony of our rustic life by flying visits to Newport and Nahant. In the winter, a month or six weeks spent in New York, party-going and theatre-going, surfeited us with the rapid life of a metropolis, but gave us food for conversation for months to come. The intervals were well filled up with farming, reading, and the social intercourse into which we naturally fell with the old residents around us.

I said a moment ago that I was perfectly happy at this time. I was wrong. I was happy, but not perfectly happy. A vague grief overshadowed me. My wife's health gave me at times great concern. Charming and spirituelle as she was on most occasions, there were times when she seemed a prey to brooding melancholy. She would sit for hours in the twilight, in what appeared to be a state of mental apathy, and at such times it was almost impossible to rouse her into even a moderate state of conversational activity. When I addressed her, she would languidly turn her eyes on me, droop the eyelids over the eyeballs, and gaze at me with a strange expression that, I knew not why, sent a shudder through my limbs. It was in vain that I questioned her to ascertain if she suffered. She was perfectly well, she said, but weary. I consulted my old friend and neighbor, Doctor Melony, but, after a careful study of her constitution, he proclaimed her, after his own fashion, to be "Sound as a bell, sir! sound as a bell!"

To me, however, there was a funereal tone in this bell. If it did not toll of death, it at least proclaimed disaster. I cannot say why those dismal forebodings should have possessed me. Let what will explain the many presentiments of good and bad fortune which waylay men in the road of life, the witches used to waylay the traveller of old, and rise up in his path prognosticating or cursing.

At times, though, Minnie, as if to cheat speculation, displayed a gayety and cheerfulness beyond all expectation. She would propose little excursions to noted places in our neighborhood, and no eyes at the party would be brighter, no laugh more ringing than hers. Yet these bright spots were but checkers on a life of gloom;—days passed in moodiness and silence; nights of restless tossing on the coach; and ever and anon that strange, furtive look following me as I went to and fro!

As the year slowly sailed through the green banks of summer into the flaming scenery of the fall, I resolved to make some attempt to dissipate this melancholy under which my wife so obviously labored.

"Minnie," I said to her, one day, "I feel rather dull. Let us go to New York for a few weeks."

"What for!" she answered, turning her face around slowly until her eyes rested on mine—eyes still filled with that inexplicable expression "What for? To amuse ourselves? My dear Gerald, how can New York amuse you? We live in a hotel, each room of which is a stereotyped copy of the other. We get the same bill of fare—with a fresh date—every day for dinner. We go to parties that are a repetition of the parties we went to last year. The same thin-legged young man leads 'the German' and one could almost imagine that the stewed terrapin which you got for supper had been kept over since the previous winter. There is no novelty—no nothing."

"There is a novelty, my dear," I said, although I could not help smiling at her languid dissection of the New York season. "You love the stage, and a new, and, as I am told, a great actress, has appeared there. I, for my part, want to see her."

"Who is she? But, before you answer, I know perfectly well what a great American dramatic novelist is. She has been gifted by nature with fine eyes, a good figure, and a voice which has a tolerable scale of notes. Some one, or something, puts it into her head that she was born into this world for the special purpose of interpreting Shakespeare. She begins by reciting to her friends in a little village, and, owing to their encouragement, determines to take lessons from some broken-down actor, who ekes out an insufficient salary by giving lessons in elocution. Under his tuition—as she would under the instruction of any professor of that abominable art known as 'elocution'—she learns how to display her voice at the expense of the sense of the author. She thinks of nothing but rising and falling inflections, swimming entrances and graceful exits. Her idea of great emotion is hysterics, and her acme of by-play is to roll her eyes at the audience. You listen in vain for a natural intonation of the voice. You look in vain on the painted—over-painted—face for a single reflex of the emotion

depicted by the dramatist;—emotions that, I am sure, when he was registering them on paper, flitted over his countenance, and thrilled his whole being as the auroral lights shimmer over the heavens, and scud a vibration through all nature! My dear husband, I am tired of your great American actresses. Please go and buy me half a dozen dolls.”

I laughed. She was in her cynical mood, and none could be more sarcastic than she. But I was determined to gain my point.

“But,” I resumed, “the actress I am anxious to see is the very reverse of the too truthful picture you have painted. I want to see Matilda Heron.”

“And who is Matilda Heron?”

“Well, I can’t very well answer your question definitely, Minnie; but this I know, that she has come from somewhere, and fallen like a bomb-shell in New York. The metaphor is not too pronounced. Her appearance has been an explosion. Now, you blasé critic of actresses, here is a chance for a sensation. Will you go!”

“Of course I will, dear Gerald. But if I am disappointed, call on the gods to help you. I will punish you, if you mislead me, in some awful manner. I’ll—write a play, or—go on the stage myself.”

“Minnie,” said I, kissing her smooth white forehead, “if you go on the stage, you will make a most miserable failure.”

III

We went to New York. Matilda Heron was then playing her first engagement at Wallack’s Theatre. The day after I arrived I secured a couple of orchestra seats, and before the curtain rose Minnie and I were installed in our places—I full of anticipation, she, as all prejudging critics are, determined to be terribly severe if she got a chance.

We were too well bred, too well brought up, too well educated, and too cosmopolitan, to feel any qualms about the morality of the play. We had read it in the French under the title of *La Dame aux Camélias*, and it was now produced in dramatic form under the title of “*Camille*.”

If my wife did not get a chance for criticism, she at least got a sensation. Miss Heron’s first entrance was wonderfully unconventional. The woman dared to come in upon that painted scene as if it really was the home apartment it was represented to be. She did not slide in with her face to the audience and wait for the mockery that is called “a reception.” She walked in easily, naturally, unwitting of any outside eyes. The petulant manner in which she took off her shawl, the commonplace conversational tone in which she spoke to her servant, were revelations to Minnie and myself. Here was a daring reality. Here was a woman who, sacrificing for the moment all conventional prejudices, dared to play the lorette as the lorette herself plays her dramatic life, with all her whims, her passion, her fearlessness of consequences, her occasional vulgarities, her impertinence, her tenderness and self-sacrifice.

It was not that we did not see faults. Occasionally Miss Heron’s accent was bad, and had a savor of Celtic origin. But what mattered accent, or what mattered elocution, when we felt ourselves in the presence of an inspired woman!

Miss Heron’s *Camille* electrified both Minnie and myself. My wife was particularly bouleversée. The artist we were beholding had not in a very marked manner any of those physical advantages which Minnie had predicated in her onslaught on the dramatic stars. It is true that Miss Heron’s figure was commanding, and there was a certain powerful light in her eyes that startled and thrilled; but there was not the beauty of the “favorite actress.” The conquest that she achieved was purely intellectual and magnetic.

Of course we were present at the next performance. It was "Medea." We then beheld the great actress under a new phase. In *Camille* she died for love; in *Medea* she killed for love. I never saw a human being so rocked by emotion as was my wife during the progress of this tragedy. Her countenance was a mirror of every incident and passion. She swayed to and fro under those gusts of indignant love that the actress sent forth from time to time, and which swept the house like a storm. When the curtain fell she sat trembling—vibrating still with those thunders of passion that the swift lightnings of genius had awakened. She seemed almost in a dream, as I took her to the carriage, and during the drive to our hotel she was moody and silent. It was in vain that I tried to get her to converse about the play. That the actress was great, she acknowledged in the briefest possible sentence. Then she leaned back and seemed to fall into a reverie from which nothing would arouse her.

I ordered supper into our sitting-room, and made Minnie drink a couple of glasses of champagne in the hope that it would rouse her into some state of mental activity. All my efforts, however, were without avail. She was silent and strange, and occasionally shivered as if penetrated with a sudden chill. Shortly after, she pleaded weariness and retired for the night, leaving me puzzled more than ever by the strangeness of her case.

An hour or two afterward, when I went to bed, I found Minnie apparently asleep. Never had she seemed more beautiful. Her lips were like a bursting rosebud about to blow under the influence of a perfumed wind, just parted as they were by the gentle breath that came and went. The long, dark lashes that swept over her cheek gave a pensive charm to her countenance, which was heightened by a riotous stray of nutty hair that swept loosely across her bosom, tossed in the restlessness of slumber. I printed a light kiss upon her forehead, and, with an unuttered prayer for her welfare, lay down to rest.

I know not how long I had been asleep when I was awakened from a profound slumber by one of those indescribable sensations of mortal peril which seem to sweep over the soul, and with as it were the thrill of its passage call louder than a trumpet, Awake ! arouse ! your life hangs by a hair ! That this strange physical warning is in all cases the result of a magnetic phenomenon I have not the slightest doubt. To prove it, steal softly, ever so softly, to the bedside of a sleeper, and, although no noise betrays your presence, the slumberer will almost invariably awaken, aroused by a magnetic perception of your proximity. How much more powerfully must the stealthy approach of one who harbors sinister designs affect the slumbering victim ! An antagonistic magnetism hovers near ; the whole of the subtle currents that course through the electrical machine known as man are shocked with a powerful repulsion, and the sentinel mind whose guard has just been relieved, and which is slumbering in its quarters, suddenly hears the rappel beaten and leaps to arms.

In the midst of my deep sleep I sprang with a sudden bound upright, with every faculty alert. By one of those unaccountable mysteries of our being, I realized, before my eyes could be by any possibility alive to external objects, the presence of a great horror. Simultaneously with this conviction, following it so quickly as to be almost twin with it, I beheld the vivid flash of a knife, and felt an acute pain in my shoulder. The next instant all was plain, as if the scene, instead of passing in a half-illuminated bedroom, had occurred in the full sunlight of the orient. My wife was standing by my bedside, her hands firmly pinioned in mine, while on the white coverlet lay a sharp table-knife reeking with the blood which was pouring from a deep wound in my shoulder. I had escaped death by a miracle. Another instant and the long blade would have been driven through my heart.

I never was so perfectly self-possessed as on that terrible occasion. I forced Minnie to sit on the bed while I looked calmly into her face. She returned my gaze with a sort of serene defiance.

"Minnie," I said, "I loved you dearly. Why did you do this?"

"I was weary of you," she answered, in a cold, even voice—a voice so level that it seemed to

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