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Welcome to Schlock! the new webzine for science fiction, fantasy and horror.

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**Schlock! is an exciting new weekly webzine dedicated to short stories, flash fiction, serialised novels and novellas within the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror. We publish new and old works of pulp sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, dark fantasy and gothic horror. If you want to read quality works of schlock fantasy, science fiction or horror, Schlock! is the webzine for you!**

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**Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, reviews and art. Feel free to submit fiction, articles, art or links to your own site to [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@schlock.co.uk).**

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## **This Edition**

**Featured in this edition is a collection of stories, new and old.**

**This week's cover illustration is *Vampire Gene* by *Paul Mellino***

**State of Emergency - Part Four by David Christopher - 'It always looks like the country's sliding into a police state,' Geoff sneered. 'Especially if you're a liberal.'... SCIENCE FICTION**

**Schlock! Classic - The Gateway of the Monster by William Hope Hodgson - Carnacki the Ghost-Finder and his Electric Pentacle... OCCULT DETECTIVE**

**Super Duper - Part Seventeen by James Rhodes - In which Corrine is reunited with Smith... SCIENCE FICTION**

**Babbage Must Die - Part Sixteen by Gavin Chappell - Brian weathers the storm... SCIENCE FICTION**

**The Dark Place: Part Thirteen by James Talbot - The grisly, disturbing, penultimate episode... DARK FANTASY**

**Schlock! Classic Serial: Varney the Vampire: Part Twenty-One ascribed to Thomas Preskett Prest. *Before Twilight... before Nosferatu ... before Dracula... there was Varney...* GOTHIC HORROR**

**Schlock! Classic Serial: Brigands of the Moon (Part 16) by Ray Cummings - ... *The empty, silent deck was alternately dark with shadow patches and bright with blobs of starlight. A sheen of the Sun's corona was mingled with it; and from forward came the radiance of the asteroid's mellow silver glow....* SPACE OPERA**

**My Mystickal Childe Part One by Gavin Chappell – *The Little People...*  
Ninth in the Going Underground series. URBAN FANTASY**

**Schlock! Classic Serial: Carmilla - Part Fourteen by J. Sheridan  
LeFanu – *The Meeting...* GOTHIC HORROR**

STATE OF EMERGENCY Chapter Four: Liberty Park

To his annoyance, Will found Geoff had come home as well.

His brother was a captain in the Earl of Wessex's Own. If they'd been twins, the two would have quarrelled in the womb. Geoff was two years older than Will so this had been easily avoided, but as soon as Will had been born, Geoff had tried to make up for it. To say they didn't get on would be like suggesting Cain and Abel had the occasional bust-up. Of course, Geoff had followed in the family tradition, joining the Army, although his regiment was a new one, one of which their father – a former member of the Yorkshire Regiment – disapproved. But not nearly as much as he disapproved of Will's chequered career.

'Well,' said Will's mother, as they sat at the dining table in the family home. 'Isn't this nice? Everyone together; just like the old days! I'm so glad to see you back from London, Will. Are you going to stay?' She was a mousy-haired, mousy-natured woman. Her vague and quiet ways nevertheless kept her three men from brawling.

'London's a bad place to be in at the best of times,' his father grumbled. 'Particularly at the moment. Geoff's regiment was on standby all the time. All these rabble rousers.'

Geoff grinned. 'They gave me time off when things calmed down. That's all it takes to deal with these student radicals and intellectuals. Get one of their leaders in the cells and give him what he's had coming. They soon give up.'

'Geoff!' his mother exclaimed.

'Now, Geoff,' his father said. 'You know it was an accident. We don't do that kind of thing, not even overseas. Certainly not in this green and pleasant.'

Will looked around in some disgust. His mother was appalled by Geoff's cynicism, but his father's sympathies were entirely with the establishment. But it all made sense when Will considered the large house he'd grown up in, in Liberty Park, this security village in the suburbs, and his father's position among the great and the good of Leeds. This was everything he had been trying to get away from, the smugness, the complacency, the sterility. But when the first thing went wrong, he came running back home.

'We won't know if it was an accident until the enquiry's published,' he said. 'Er, I knew Professor Quigley.'

His mother stared at him, startled. 'Not that Professor Quigley? He was at Leeds. You liked him.'

'And look at the way he influenced Will,' Will's father said disapprovingly.

'He was just a rabble-rouser,' Geoff said, deliberately trying to goad Will by repeating their father's words. 'He got what was coming to him. He was trying to undermine national security! That's the last thing we need, with all these terrorists.'

Will shook his head. 'What terrorist groups?' he asked. 'How many terrorist attacks have there been in the last few years? And yet, how many times have the security forces done things like this?' He could still remember Tarrant's veiled threats, the Professor being beaten to the ground. 'They're the real terrorists.' His head pounded at the injustice of it all.

'Oh, Will...' his mother said, looking disappointed.

'Leftie drive! You've spent too long in London,' his father told him. 'You've got no idea about how it looks from "the provinces".' He had a chip on his shoulder a mile long about Leeds being a provincial town. 'All this sparring between the two sides is creating the situation, not dealing with it. Time both backed down.'

'But the National Security Bill...' Will began.

His mother rapped her plate with a spoon. 'That's enough!' she said firmly. 'Politics will not be discussed at my dinner table. Save it for tomorrow, when you go out shooting.'

At this reminder of tomorrow morning's entertainment, Will's spirits sank.

'Where's Caroline, anyway?' Geoff asked, looking at Will. 'You usually bring her with you.'

Will returned his gaze resentfully. 'She's left me,' he said. He started eating, ignoring everyone's stares.

'Well,' said his mother, after a while. 'Then surely there's nothing to keep you in London.'

'You can come back to *the provinces*,' his father said.

'Surely you can find a job in an off-licence round here,' said Geoff.

Will ignored them. They'd all hated Caroline, hated him living in London. But he had other reasons to go back there, once things settled down.

After the inquiry.

The next day they went out grouse shooting, up on the moors. This was a family ritual, the first shooting of the season, on the 'Glorious Twelfth.' Will's mother's absence was traditional, as was his father's constant bad language, 'away from the little woman.' He had first taken the boys out grouse shooting as soon as Geoff was eight. For Geoff, it had had the desired effect, a career in the Army - if only in a new regiment. For Will, illogically enough, it had driven him in the direction of political studies, and experiments with vegetarianism.

Geoff's gun boomed from Will's right and a grouse came tumbling down out of the air. One of the beaters ran forward to retrieve it. Will's father nodded curtly.

'Good shot,' he said. 'They teach you tolerably well in the Earl of Wessex's Own.' He turned to look at Will, who avoided his gaze. 'Come on, lad,' he said. 'You can do as well as your brother. Don't hide your light under a bushel.'

Will said nothing; unwillingly, he lifted the heavy gun to his shoulder, and concentrated on the distant dot of a flying grouse. He had no wish to kill the creature. He didn't even like the taste of grouse. When he had been living with Caroline, he'd developed a fondness for fish fingers, chips, and mushy peas out of a tin. No healthier than the rich fare his parents indulged in every night, in the womb-like security of their gated community. But at least no one had shot the mushy peas.

The black speck came closer. Will waited for that moment when it all came together. He hated this, but he was good at it. He didn't spend hours practising at a rifle range like his brother. He had no wish to. But if there was one thing he could get right, it was shooting. His finger squeezed almost automatically. The gun kicked in his grasp like a live thing, struggling to get away. The grouse's flight path altered

abruptly, and it plummeted like a kamikaze pilot, to vanish soundlessly into the heather. The beater ran forward.

Will's father clapped him on the shoulder.

'Good shot,' he said. 'If only you could put more effort into the rest of your life.'

'I didn't put any effort into it,' Will muttered sullenly. He saw the beater returning with the downed bird. 'I just pulled the trigger any old way.'

'Luck,' Geoff sneered.

They left the hide and strode away across the springy heather. The wind moaned among the far-off crags. Will's father seemed sunk in thought.

'I don't like what's going on in the cities these days,' he said, as they advanced. 'Everyone's squaring up against each other. All this talk of liberty is fine and well, but the people who use the word are the sort who want to see old traditions like this brought to an end. As for the security lobby, well! No one's putting CCTV cameras up in my community. We all trust each other; because we keep undesirable elements out.'

'You've *got* security,' Geoff commented. 'That's what everyone needs. Keep out the chavs. But Will doesn't think so. He goes to live cheek by jowl with them.'

'At least that's all over now,' said his father, looking at Will. As they crested the rise, Will halted. The wind sighed through the heather. He looked back the way they had come, towards the far-off tower blocks of the city.

All around him, the wilderness stretched, monotonous yet beautiful, wild yet preserved. It felt like it might have been like this since the dawn of prehistory, and yet he knew that millennia ago it had been productive farmland. It seemed to be an uncanny, alien landscape after years spent in cities, yet in many ways, it was home. Here was real liberty, in many ways. But it was a liberty known by a privileged few; the rest were fenced out, or was it they who were fenced in?

The beater had brought them their bag. Will looked queasily at the gory little corpses; in his imagination, he saw Professor Quigley dying in his own blood in a whitewashed police cell, surrounded by sneering, uniformed thugs. He shuddered. The savagery that lurked within walls was worse than the bestiality at liberty beyond the cities.

'Come on, Will,' said his father impatiently. 'You've seen a dead bird before.'

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'It always *looks* like the country's sliding into a police state,' Geoff sneered. 'Especially if you're a liberal.'

Will shook his head, and kept his eyes on the TV. After the anodyne panel show they were half-watching it would be the six o'clock news. The findings of the inquiry into Professor Quigley's death were likely to be headline news. Rumours had abounded in the leftwing press, and on the internet, some of them coming close to what Will strongly suspected – not without reason: that the Professor's death had involved the collusion of the security forces.

'That's what Professor Quigley said before he was killed,' Will said. 'And look what happened to him!'

'It was an accident,' Geoff replied, dismissively. 'I'd bet my bottom dollar they'll say that.'

Will looked at him. 'If they say that,' he said ominously, 'then I'll know it's a cover-up.'

Geoff shook his head. 'You've been watching too many X-Files repeats on Sky. You should...'

The booming chords of the six o'clock news theme tune pulsed out across the living room, and Will turned his attention back to the screen.

'... findings of the Jarvis Inquiry out today state no foul play is suspected with regards to the accidental death of Professor Quigley,' the presenter droned. 'Susan Verlaine, the home secretary, says she is happy with these findings, which also conclusively disprove any involvement of the security forces in the riots or Professor Quigley's unfortunate death.' The scene cut to footage of the home secretary at a press conference.

'Professor Quigley's death was a tragic circumstance,' she was saying in her usual even tones. 'The police should have paid more attention to his medical record; however, they were working under extreme pressure and the custody suite was full to overflowing with imprisoned rioters. We extend our deepest condolences to Professor Quigley's loved ones, family and friends, but remind them that he had received warnings prior to becoming foolishly involved in the riot. We would strongly advise others against similar involvement in future.'

After the programme was over, Will sat in silence. Geoff shrugged.

'See?' he said. 'An independent inquiry; and it exonerates the police. Your old teacher shouldn't have got involved. That's all. He had a heart condition...'

'Shut up!' Will said, white-faced. 'Just shut up.'

He breathed heavily. What Geoff was saying was nothing more than what he had said himself. But now he was certain of it. The Professor's death had been no accident. Quigley had been warned – Will knew this was true. He had been there when Tarrant warned the Professor. He had seen Tarrant drag the Professor away. The only thing he had not witnessed was the Professor's death in the custody suite. He felt anger and horror and loathing. He felt an urge to destroy, to smash things, to scream curses and threats.

Instead, he went out into the garden. He took out his mobile, and dialled the number Rex had given to him. He hoped that Daisy would answer. But when it answered, it was Rex's voice he heard.

'You've seen the news?'

'Yes,' Will whispered.

'Now do you believe me?'

'Direct action,' Will replied in a hollow voice.

'Come down to London,' Rex replied. He gave Will an address, and rang off.

Will went back inside, trying to find a reason to give his parents for returning to the capital.

## THE GATEWAY OF THE MONSTER by William Hope Hodgson

In response to Carnacki's usual card of invitation to have dinner and listen to a story, I arrived promptly at 427, Cheyne Walk, to find the three others who were always invited to these happy little times, there before me. Five minutes later, Carnacki, Arkright, Jessop, Taylor and I were all engaged in the "pleasant occupation" of dining.

"You've not been long away, this time," I remarked as I finished my soup; forgetting momentarily, Carnacki's dislike of being asked even to skirt the borders of his story until such time as he was ready. Then he would not stint words.

"That's all," he replied with brevity; and I changed the subject, remarking that I had been buying a new gun, to which piece of news he gave an intelligent nod, and a smile which I think showed a genuinely good-humoured appreciation of my intentional changing of the conversation.

Later, when dinner was finished, Carnacki snuggled himself comfortably down in his big chair, along with his pipe, and began his story, with very little circumlocution:

"As Dodgson was remarking just now, I've only been away a short time, and for a very good reason too - I've only been away a short distance. The exact locality I am afraid I must not tell you; but it is less than twenty miles from here; though, except for changing a name, that won't spoil the story. And it is a story too! One of the most extraordinary things I have ever run against.

"I received a letter a fortnight ago from a man I must call Anderson, asking for an appointment. I arranged a time, and when he came, I found that he wished me to investigate, and see whether I could not clear up a long standing and well - too well - authenticated case of what he termed 'haunting.' He gave me very full particulars, and finally, as the thing seemed to present something unique, I decided to take it up.

"Two days later, I drove to the house, late in the afternoon. I found it a very old place, standing quite alone in its own grounds. Anderson had left a letter with the butler, I found, pleading excuses for his absence, and leaving the whole house at my disposal for my investigations. The butler evidently knew the object of my visit, and I questioned him pretty thoroughly during dinner, which I had in rather lonely state. He is an old and privileged servant, and had the history of the Grey Room exact in detail. From him I learned more particulars regarding two things that Anderson had mentioned in but a casual manner. The first was that the door of the Grey Room would be heard in the dead of night to open, and slam heavily, and this even though the butler knew it was locked, and the key on the bunch in his pantry. The second was that the bedclothes would always be found torn off the bed, and hurled in a heap into a corner.

"But it was the door slamming that chiefly bothered the old butler. Many and many a time, he told me, had he lain awake and just got shivering with fright, listening; for sometimes the door would be slammed time after time - thud! thud! thud! - so that sleep was impossible.

"From Anderson, I knew already that the room had a history extending back over a hundred and fifty years. Three people had been strangled in it - an ancestor of his and his wife and child. This is authentic, as I had taken very great pains to discover, so that you can imagine it was with a feeling that I had a striking case to investigate, that I went upstairs after dinner to have a look at the Grey Room.

"Peter, the old butler, was in rather a state about my going, and assured me with much solemnity that in all the twenty years of his service, no one had ever entered that room



after nightfall. He begged me, in quite a fatherly way, to wait till the morning, when there would be no danger, and then he could accompany me himself.

"Of course, I smiled a little at him, and told him not to bother. I explained that I should do no more than look around a bit, and perhaps affix a few seals. He need not fear; I was used to that sort of thing. But he shook his head, when I said that.

"There isn't many ghosts like ours, sir,' he assured me, with mournful pride. And, by Jove! he was right, as you will see.

"I took a couple of candles, and Peter followed, with his bunch of keys. He unlocked the door; but would not come inside with me. He was evidently in a fright, and renewed his request, that I would put off my examination, until daylight. Of course, I laughed at him again, and told him he could stand sentry at the door, and catch anything that came out.

"It never comes outside, sir,' he said, in his funny, old, solemn manner. Somehow he managed to make me feel as if I were going to have the 'creeps' right away. Anyway, it was one to him, you know.

"I left him there, and examined the room. It is a big apartment, and well furnished in the grand style, with a huge four-poster, which stands with its head to the end wall. There were two candles on the mantelpiece and two on each of the three tables that were in the room. I lit the lot, and after that the room felt a little less inhumanly dreary; though, mind you, it was quite fresh, and well kept in every way.

"After I had taken a good look round I sealed lengths of baby ribbon across the windows, along the walls, over the pictures, and over the fireplace and the wall-closets. All the time, as I worked, the butler stood just without the door, and I could not persuade him to enter; though I jested with him a little, as I stretched the ribbons, and went here and there about my work. Every now and again, he would say: - 'You'll excuse me, I'm sure, sir; but I do wish you would come out, sir. I'm fair in a quake for you.'

"I told him he need not wait; but he was loyal enough in his way to what he considered his duty. He said he could not go away and leave me all alone there. He apologised; but made it very clear that I did not realise the danger of the room; and I could see, generally, that he was in a pretty frightened state. All the same, I had to make the room so that I should know if anything material entered it; so I asked him not to bother me, unless he really heard something. He was beginning to get on my nerves, and the 'feel' of the room was bad enough, without making it any nastier.

"For a time further, I worked, stretching ribbons across the floor, and sealing them, so that the merest touch would have broken them, were anyone to venture into the room in the dark with the intention of playing the fool. All this had taken me far longer than I had anticipated; and, suddenly, I heard a clock strike eleven. I had taken off my coat soon after commencing work; now, however, as I had practically made an end of all that I intended to do, I walked across to the settee, and picked it up. I was in the act of getting into it when the old butler's voice (he had not said a word for the last hour) came sharp and frightened: - 'Come out, sir, quick! There's something going to

happen!' Jove! but I jumped, and then, in the same moment, one of the candles on the table to the left of the bed went out. Now whether it was the wind, or what, I do not know; but just for a moment, I was enough startled to make a run for the door; though I am glad to say that I pulled, up before I reached it. I simply could not bunk out, with the butler standing there, after having, as it were, read him a sort of lesson on 'bein' brave, y'know.' So I just turned right round, picked up the two candles off the mantelpiece, and walked across to the table near the bed. Well, I saw nothing. I blew out the candle that was still alight; then I went to those on the two other tables, and blew them out. Then, outside of the door, the old man called again: - 'Oh! sir, do be told! Do be told!'

"All right, Peter,' I said, and, by Jove, my voice was not as steady as I should have liked! I made for the door, and had a bit of work, not to start running. I took some thundering long strides, as you can imagine. Near the door, I had a sudden feeling that there was a cold wind in the room. It was almost as if the window had been suddenly opened a little. I got to the door and the old butler gave back a step, in a sort of instinctive way. 'Collar the candles, Peter!' I said, pretty sharply, and shoved them into his hands. I turned, and caught the handle, and slammed the door shut, with a crash. Somehow, do you know, as I did so, I thought I felt something pull back on it; but it must have been only fancy. I turned the key in the lock, and then again, double-locking the door. I felt easier then, and set-to and sealed the door. In addition, I put my card over the keyhole, and sealed it there; after which I pocketed the key, and went downstairs - with Peter; who was nervous and silent, leading the way. Poor old beggar! It had not struck me until that moment that he had been enduring a considerable strain during the last two or three hours.

"About midnight, I went to bed. My room lay at the end of the corridor upon which opens the door of the Grey Room. I counted the doors between it and mine, and found that five rooms lay between. And I am sure you can understand that I was not sorry. Then, just as I was beginning to undress, an idea came to me, and I took my candle and sealing-wax, and sealed the doors of all the five rooms. If any door slammed in the night, I should know just which one.

"I returned to my room, locked the door, and went to bed. I was waked suddenly from a deep sleep by a loud crash somewhere out in the passage. I sat up in bed and listened, but heard nothing. Then I lit my candle. I was in the very act of lighting it when there came the bang of a door being violently slammed, along the corridor. I jumped out of bed, and got my revolver. I unlocked my door, and went out into the passage, holding my candle high, and keeping the pistol ready. Then a queer thing happened. I could not go a step towards the Grey Room. You all know I am not really a cowardly chap. I've gone into too many cases connected with ghostly things, to be accused of that; but I tell you I funk'd it; simply funk'd it, just like any blessed kid. There was something precious unholy in the air that night. I backed into my bedroom, and shut and locked the door. Then I sat on the bed all night, and listened to the dismal thudding of a door up the corridor. The sound seemed to echo through all the house.

"Daylight came at last, and I washed and dressed. The door had not slammed for about an hour, and I was getting back my nerve again. I felt ashamed of myself; though in some ways it was silly, for when you're meddling with that sort of thing,

your nerve is bound to go, sometimes. And you just have to sit quiet and call yourself a coward until daylight. Sometimes it is more than just cowardice, I fancy. I believe at times it is something warning you, and fighting for you. But, all the same, I always feel mean and miserable, after a time like that.

"When the day came properly, I opened my door, and, keeping my revolver handy, went quietly along the passage. I had to pass the head of the stairs, on the way, and who should I see coming up, but the old butler, carrying a cup of coffee. He had merely tucked his nightshirt into his trousers, and he had an old pair of carpet slippers on.

"Hello, Peter!" I said, feeling suddenly cheerful; for I was as glad as any lost child to have a live human being close to me. "Where are you off to with the refreshments?"

"The old man gave a start, and slopped some of the coffee. He stared up at me and I could see that he looked white and done-up. He came on up the stairs and held out the little tray to me. 'I'm very thankful indeed, Sir, to see you safe and well,' he said. 'I feared, one time, you might risk going into the Grey Room, Sir. I've lain awake all night, with the sound of the Door. And when it came light, I thought I'd make you a cup of coffee. I knew you would want to look at the seals, and somehow it seems safer if there's two, Sir.'

"Peter,' I said, 'you're a brick. This is very thoughtful of you.' And I drank the coffee. 'Come along,' I told him, and handed him back the tray. 'I'm going to have a look at what the Brutes have been up to. I simply hadn't the pluck to in the night.'

"I'm very thankful, Sir,' he replied. 'Flesh and blood can do nothing, Sir, against devils; and that's what's in the Grey Room after dark.'

"I examined the seals on all the doors, as I went along, and found them right; but when I got to the Grey Room, the seal was broken; though the card, over the keyhole, was untouched. I ripped it off, and unlocked the door, and went in, rather cautiously, as you can imagine; but the whole room was empty of anything to frighten one, and there was heaps of light. I examined all my seals, and not a single one was disturbed. The old butler had followed me in, and, suddenly, he called out:- 'The bedclothes, Sir!'

"I ran up to the bed, and looked over; and, surely, they were lying in the corner to the left of the bed. Jove! you can imagine how queer I felt. Something had been in the room. I stared for a while, from the bed, to the clothes on the floor. I had a feeling that I did not want to touch either. Old Peter, though, did not seem to be affected that way. He went over to the bed-coverings, and was going to pick them up, as, doubtless, he had done every day these twenty years back; but I stopped him. I wanted nothing touched, until I had finished my examination. This, I must have spent a full hour over, and then I let Peter straighten up the bed; after which we went out and I locked the door; for the room was getting on my nerves.

"I had a short walk, and then breakfast; after which I felt more my own man, and so returned to the Grey Room, and, with Peter's help, and one of the maids, I had everything taken out except the bed, even the very pictures. I examined the walls,

floor and ceiling then, with probe, hammer and magnifying glass; but found nothing suspicious. And I can assure you, I began to realise, in very truth, that some incredible thing had been loose in the room during the past night. I sealed up everything again, and went out, locking and sealing the door, as before.

"After dinner that night, Peter and I unpacked some of my stuff, and I fixed up my camera and flashlight opposite to the door of the Grey Room, with a string from the trigger of the flashlight to the door. Then, you see, if the door were really opened, the flashlight would blare out, and there would be, possibly, a very queer picture to examine in the morning. The last thing I did, before leaving, was to uncap the lens; and after that I went off to my bedroom, and to bed; for I intended to be up at midnight; and to ensure this, I set my little alarm to call me; also I left my candle burning.

"The clock woke me at twelve, and I got up and into my dressing-gown and slippers. I shoved my revolver into my right side-pocket, and opened my door. Then, I lit my dark-room lamp, and withdrew the slide, so that it would give a clear light. I carried it up the corridor, about thirty feet, and put it down on the floor, with the open side away from me, so that it would show me anything that might approach along the dark passage. Then I went back, and sat in the doorway of my room, with my revolver handy, staring up the passage towards the place where I knew my camera stood outside the door of the Grey Room.

"I should think I had watched for about an hour and a half, when, suddenly, I heard a faint noise, away up the corridor. I was immediately conscious of a queer prickling sensation about the back of my head, and my hands began to sweat a little. The following instant, the whole end of the passage flicked into sight in the abrupt glare of the flashlight. Then came the succeeding darkness, and I peered nervously up the corridor, listening tensely, and trying to find what lay beyond the faint glow of my dark-lamp, which now seemed ridiculously dim by contrast with the tremendous blaze of the flash-powder.... And then, as I stooped forward, staring and listening, there came the crashing thud of the door of the Grey Room. The sound seemed to fill the whole of the large corridor, and go echoing hollowly through the house. I tell you, I felt horrible - as if my bones were water. Simply beastly. Jove! how I did stare, and how I listened. And then it came again - thud, thud, thud, and then a silence that was almost worse than the noise of the door; for I kept fancying that some brutal thing was stealing upon me along the corridor. And then, suddenly, my lamp was put out, and I could not see a yard before me. I realised all at once that I was doing a very silly thing, sitting there, and I jumped up. Even as I did so, I thought I heard a sound in the passage, and quite near me. I made one backward spring into my room, and slammed and locked the door. I sat on my bed, and stared at the door. I had my revolver in my hand; but it seemed an abominably useless thing. I felt that there was something the other side of that door. For some unknown reason I knew it was pressed up against the door, and it was soft. That was just what I thought. Most extraordinary thing to think.

"Presently I got hold of myself a bit, and marked out a pentacle hurriedly with chalk on the polished floor; and there I sat in it almost until dawn. And all the time, away up the corridor, the door of the Grey Room thudded at solemn and horrid intervals. It was a miserable, brutal night.

"When the day began to break, the thudding of the door came gradually to an end, and, at last, I got hold of my courage, and went along the corridor, in the half light, to cap the lens of my camera. I can tell you, it took some doing; but if I had not done so my photograph would have been spoilt, and I was tremendously keen to save it. I got back to my room, and then set-to and rubbed out the five-pointed star in which I had been sitting.

"Half an hour later there was a tap at my door. It was Peter with my coffee. When I had drunk it, we both went along to the Grey Room. As we went, I had a look at the seals on the other doors, but they were untouched. The seal on the door of the Grey Room was broken, as also was the string from the trigger of the flashlight; but the card over the keyhole was still there. I ripped it off and opened the door. Nothing unusual was to be seen until we came to the bed; then I saw that, as on the previous day, the bedclothes had been torn off, and hurled into the left-hand corner, exactly where I had seen them before. I felt very queer; but I did not forget to look at all the seals, only to find that not one had been broken.

"Then I turned and looked at old Peter, and he looked at me, nodding his head.

"Let's get out of here!" I said. 'It's no place for any living human to enter, without proper protection.'

"We went out then, and I locked and sealed the door, again.

"After breakfast, I developed the negative; but it showed only the door of the Grey Room, half opened. Then I left the house, as I wanted to get certain matters and implements that might be necessary to life; perhaps to the spirit; for I intended to spend the coming night in the Grey Room.

"I got back in a cab, about half-past-five, with my apparatus, and this, Peter and I carried up to the Grey Room, where I piled it carefully in the centre of the floor. When everything was in the room, including a cat which I had brought, I locked and sealed the door, and went towards my bedroom, telling Peter I should not be down to dinner. He said, 'Yes, sir, and went downstairs, thinking that I was going to turn in, which was what I wanted him to believe, as I knew he would have worried both me and himself, if he had known what I intended.

"But I merely got my camera and flashlight from my bedroom, and hurried back to the Grey Room. I locked and sealed myself in, and set to work, for I had a lot to do before it got dark.

"First I cleared away all the ribbons across the floor; then I carried the cat - still fastened in its basket - over towards the far wall, and left it. I returned then to the centre of the room, and measured out a space twenty-one feet in diameter, which I swept with a 'broom of hyssop.' About this I drew a circle of chalk, taking care never to step over the circle. Beyond this I smudged, with a bunch of garlic, a broad belt right around the chalked circle, and when this was complete, I took from among my stores in the centre a small jar of a certain water. I broke away the parchment and withdrew the stopper. Then, dipping my left forefinger in the little jar, I went round the circle again, making upon the floor, just within the line of chalk, the Second Sign

of the Saaamaaa Ritual, and joining each Sign most carefully with the left-handed crescent. I can tell you, I felt easier when this was done and the 'water-circle' complete. Then, I unpacked some more of the stuff that I had brought, and placed a lighted candle in the "valley" of each Crescent. After that, I drew a Pentacle, so that each of the five points of the defensive star touched the chalk circle. In the five points of the star I placed five portions of bread, each wrapped in linen, and in the five "vales," five opened jars of the water I had used to make the "water circle." And now I had my first protective barrier complete.

"Now, anyone, except you who know something of my methods of investigation, might consider all this a piece of useless and foolish superstition; but you all remember the Black Veil case, in which I believe my life was saved by a very similar form of protection, whilst Aster, who sneered at it, and would not come inside, died. I got the idea from the Sigsand MS., written, so far as I can make out, in the 14th century. At first, naturally, I imagined it was just an expression of the superstition of his time; and it was not until a year later that it occurred to me to test his 'Defense,' which I did, as I've just said, in that horrible Black Veil business. You know how that turned out. Later, I used it several times, and always I came through safe, until that Moving Fur case. It was only a partial "Defense" there and I nearly died in the pentacle. After that I came across Professor Garder's 'Experiments with a Medium.' When they surrounded the Medium with a current, in vacuum, he lost his power - almost as if it cut him off from the Immaterial. That made me think a lot; and that is how I came to make the Electric Pentacle, which is a most marvellous 'Defense' against certain manifestations. I used the shape of the defensive star for this protection, because I have, personally, no doubt at all but that there is some extraordinary virtue in the old magic figure. Curious thing for a Twentieth Century man to admit, is it not? But then, as you all know, I never did, and never will, allow myself to be blinded by a little cheap laughter. I ask questions, and keep my eyes open!

"In this last case I had little doubt that I had run up against a supernatural monster, and I meant to take every possible care; for the danger is abominable.

"I turned-to now to fit the Electric Pentacle, setting it so that each of its 'points' and 'vales' coincided exactly with the 'points' and 'vales' of the drawn pentagram upon the floor. Then I connected up the battery, and the next instant the pale blue glare from the intertwining vacuum tubes shone out.

"I glanced about me then, with something of a sigh of relief, and realised suddenly that the dusk was upon me, for the window was grey and unfriendly. Then round at the big, empty room, over the double barrier of electric and candle light. I had an abrupt, extraordinary sense of weirdness thrust upon me - in the air, you know; as it were, a sense of something inhuman impending. The room was full of the stench of bruised garlic, a smell I hate.

"I turned now to my camera, and saw that it and the flashlight were in order. Then I tested my revolver, carefully; though I had little thought that it would be needed. Yet, to what extent materialisation of an ab-natural creature is possible, given favourable conditions, no one can say, and I had no idea what horrible thing I was going to see, or feel the presence of. I might, in the end, have to fight with a materialised monster. I

did not know, and could only be prepared. You see, I never forgot that three people had been strangled in the bed close to me, and the fierce slamming of the door I had heard myself. I had no doubt that I was investigating a dangerous and ugly case.

"By this time the night had come; though the room was very light with the burning candles; and I found myself glancing behind me, constantly, and then all round the room. It was nervy work waiting for that thing to come. Then, suddenly, I was aware of a little, cold wind sweeping over me, coming from behind. I gave one great nerve-thrill, and a prickly feeling went all over the back of my head. Then I hove myself round with a sort of stiff jerk, and stared straight against that queer wind. It seemed to come from the corner of the room to the left of the bed - the place where both times I had found the heap of tossed bedclothes. Yet, I could see nothing unusual; no opening - nothing!...

"Abruptly I was aware that the candles were all a-flicker in that unnatural wind.... I believe I just squatted there and stared in a horribly frightened, wooden way for some minutes. I shall never be able to let you know how disgustingly horrible it was sitting in that vile, cold wind! And then, flick! flick! all the candles round the outer barrier went out; and there was I, locked and sealed in that room, and with no light beyond the weakish blue glare of the Electric Pentacle.

"A time of abominable tenseness passed, and still that wind blew upon me; and then, suddenly, I knew that something stirred in the corner to the left of the bed. I was made conscious of it, rather by some inward, unused sense, than by either sight or sound; for the pale, short-radius glare of the Pentacle gave but a very poor light for seeing by. Yet, as I stared, something began slowly to grow upon my sight - a moving shadow, a little darker than the surrounding shadows. I lost the thing amid the vagueness, and for a moment or two I glanced swiftly from side to side, with a fresh, new sense of impending danger. Then my attention was directed to the bed. All the coverings were being drawn steadily off, with a hateful, stealthy sort of motion. I heard the slow, dragging slither of the clothes; but I could see nothing of the thing that pulled. I was aware in a funny, subconscious, introspective fashion that the 'creep' had come upon me; yet I was cooler mentally than I had been for some minutes; sufficiently so to feel that my hands were sweating coldly, and to shift my revolver, half-consciously, whilst I rubbed my right hand dry upon my knee; though never, for an instant, taking my gaze or my attention from those moving clothes.

"The faint noises from the bed ceased once, and there was a most intense silence, with only the sound of the blood beating in my head. Yet, immediately afterwards, I heard again the slurring of the bedclothes being dragged off the bed. In the midst of my nervous tension I remembered the camera, and reached round for it; but without looking away from the bed. And then, you know, all in a moment, the whole of the bed-coverings were torn off with extraordinary violence, and I heard the flump they made as they were hurled into the corner.

"There was a time of absolute quietness then for perhaps a couple of minutes; and you can imagine how horrible I felt. The bedclothes had been thrown with such savageness! And then again, the brutal unnaturalness of the thing that had just been done before me!

"Abruptly, over by the door, I heard a faint noise - a sort of crickling sound and then a pitter or two upon the floor. A great nervous thrill swept over me, seeming to run up my spine and over the back of my head; for the seal that secured the door had just been broken. Something was there. I could not see the door; at least, I mean to say that it was impossible to say how much I actually saw, and how much my imagination supplied. I made it out only as a continuation of the grey walls.... And then it seemed to me that something dark and indistinct moved and wavered there among the shadows.

"Abruptly, I was aware that the door was opening, and with an effort I reached again for my camera; but before I could aim it the door was slammed with a terrific crash that filled the whole room with a sort of hollow thunder. I jumped, like a frightened child. There seemed such a power behind the noise; as though a vast, wanton Force were 'out.' Can you understand?

"The door was not touched again; but, directly afterwards, I heard the basket, in which the cat lay, creak. I tell you, I fairly pringled all along my back. I knew that I was going to learn definitely whether what was abroad was dangerous to Life. From the cat there rose suddenly a hideous caterwaul, that ceased abruptly, and then - too late - I snapped on the flashlight. In the great glare, I saw that the basket had been overturned, and the lid was wrenched open, with the cat lying half in, and half out upon the floor. I saw nothing else, but I was full of the knowledge that I was in the presence of some Being or Thing that had power to destroy.

"During the next two or three minutes, there was an odd, noticeable quietness in the room, and you must remember I was half-blinded, for the time, because of the flashlight; so that the whole place seemed to be pitchy dark just beyond the shine of the Pentacle. I tell you it was most horrible. I just knelt there in the star, and whirled round, trying to see whether anything was coming at me.

"My power of sight came gradually, and I got a little hold of myself; and abruptly I saw the thing I was looking for, close to the 'water-circle.' It was big and indistinct, and wavered curiously, as though the shadow of a vast spider hung suspended in the air, just beyond the barrier. It passed swiftly round the circle, and seemed to probe ever towards me; but only to draw back with extraordinary jerky movements, as might a living person if they touched the hot bar of a grate.

"Round and round it moved, and round and round I turned. Then, just opposite to one of the 'vales' in the pentacles, it seemed to pause, as though preliminary to a tremendous effort. It retired almost beyond the glow of the vacuum light, and then came straight towards me, appearing to gather form and solidity as it came. There seemed a vast, malign determination behind the movement, that must succeed. I was on my knees, and I jerked back, falling on to my left hand and hip, in a wild endeavour to get back from the advancing thing. With my right hand I was grabbing madly for my revolver, which I had let slip. The brutal thing came with one great sweep straight over the garlic and the 'water-circle,' almost to the vale of the pentacle. I believe I yelled. Then, just as suddenly as it had swept over, it seemed to be hurled back by some mighty, invisible force.



"It must have been some moments before I realised that I was safe; and then I got myself together in the middle of the pentacles, feeling horribly gone and shaken, and glancing round and round the barrier; but the thing had vanished. Yet I had learnt something, for I knew now that the Grey Room was haunted by a monstrous hand.

"Suddenly, as I crouched there, I saw what had so nearly given the monster an opening through the barrier. In my movements within the pentacle I must have touched one of the jars of water; for just where the thing had made its attack the jar that guarded the 'deep' of the 'vale' had been moved to one side, and this had left one of the 'five doorways' unguarded. I put it back, quickly, and felt almost safe again, for I had found the cause and the 'defense' was still good. And I began to hope again that I should see the morning come in. When I saw that thing so nearly succeed, I'd had an awful, weak, overwhelming feeling that the 'barriers' could never bring me safe through the night against such a Force. You can understand?

"For a long time I could not see the hand; but, presently, I thought I saw, once or twice, an odd wavering, over among the shadows near the door. A little later, as though in a sudden fit of malignant rage, the dead body of the cat was picked up, and beaten with dull, sickening blows against the solid floor. That made me feel rather queer.

"A minute afterwards, the door was opened and slammed twice with tremendous force. The next instant the thing made one swift, vicious dart at me, from out of the shadows. Instinctively I started sideways from it, and so plucked my hand from upon the Electric Pentacle, where - for a wickedly careless moment - I had placed it. The monster was hurled off from the neighbourhood of the pentacles; though - owing to my inconceivable foolishness - it had been enabled for a second time to pass the outer barriers. I can tell you, I shook for a time, with sheer funk. I moved right to the centre of the pentacles again, and knelt there, making myself as small and compact as possible.

"As I knelt, there came to me presently, a vague wonder at the two 'accidents' which had so nearly allowed the brute to get at me. Was I being influenced to unconscious voluntary actions that endangered me? The thought took hold of me, and I watched my every movement. Abruptly, I stretched a tired leg, and knocked over one of the jars of water. Some was spilled; but because of my suspicious watchfulness, I had it upright and back within the vale while yet some of the water remained. Even as I did so, the vast, black, half-materialised hand beat up at me out of the shadows, and seemed to leap almost into my face; so nearly did it approach; but for the third time it was thrown back by some altogether enormous, over-mastering force. Yet, apart from the dazed fright in which it left me, I had for a moment that feeling of spiritual sickness, as if some delicate, beautiful, inward grace had suffered, which is felt only upon the too near approach of the ab-human, and is more dreadful, in a strange way, than any physical pain that can be suffered. I knew by this, more of the extent and closeness of the danger; and for a long time I was simply cowed by the butt-headed brutality of that Force upon my spirit. I can put it no other way.

"I knelt again in the centre of the pentacles, watching myself with more fear, almost, than the monster; for I knew now that, unless I guarded myself from every sudden

impulse that came to me, I might simply work my own destruction. Do you see how horrible it all was?

"I spent the rest of the night in a haze of sick fright, and so tense that I could not make a single movement naturally. I was in such fear that any desire for action that came to me might be prompted by the Influence that I knew was at work on me. And outside of the barrier that ghastly thing went round and round, grabbing and grabbing in the air at me. Twice more was the body of the dead cat molested. The second time, I heard every bone in its body scrunch and crack. And all the time the horrible wind was blowing upon me from the corner of the room to the left of the bed.

"Then, just as the first touch of dawn came into the sky, that unnatural wind ceased, in a single moment; and I could see no sign of the hand. The dawn came slowly, and presently the wan light filled all the room, and made the pale glare of the Electric Pentacle look more unearthly. Yet, it was not until the day had fully come, that I made any attempt to leave the barrier, for I did not know but that there was some method abroad, in the sudden stopping of that wind, to entice me from the pentacles.

"At last, when the dawn was strong and bright, I took one last look round, and ran for the door. I got it unlocked, in a nervous, clumsy fashion; then locked it hurriedly, and went to my bedroom, where I lay on the bed, and tried to steady my nerves. Peter came, presently, with the coffee, and when I had drunk it, I told him I meant to have a sleep, as I had been up all night. He took the tray, and went out quietly; and after I had locked my door I turned in properly, and at last got to sleep.

"I woke about midday, and after some lunch, went up to the Grey Room. I switched off the current from the Pentacle, which I had left on in my hurry; also, I removed the body of the cat. You can understand I did not want anyone to see the poor brute. After that, I made a very careful search of the corner where the bedclothes had been thrown. I made several holes, and probed, but found nothing. Then it occurred to me to try with my instrument under the skirting. I did so, and heard my wire ring on metal. I turned the hook-end that way, and fished for the thing. At the second go, I got it. It was a small object, and I took it to the window. I found it to be a curious ring, made of some greyish metal. The curious thing about it was that it was made in the form of a pentagon; that is, the same shape as the inside of the magic pentacle, but without the "mounts" which form the points of the defensive star. It was free from all chasing or engraving.

"You will understand that I was excited, when I tell you that I felt sure I held in my hand the famous Luck Ring of the Anderson family; which, indeed, was of all things the one most intimately connected with the history of the haunting. This ring was handed on from father to son through generations, and always - in obedience to some ancient family tradition - each son had to promise never to wear the ring. The ring, I may say, was brought home by one of the Crusaders, under very peculiar circumstances; but the story is too long to go into here.

"It appears that young Sir Hulbert, an ancestor of Anderson's, made a bet, in drink, you know, that he would wear the ring that night. He did so, and in the morning his wife and child were found strangled in the bed, in the very room in which I stood. Many people, it would seem, thought young Sir Hulbert was guilty of having done the

thing in drunken anger; and he, in an attempt to prove his innocence, slept a second night in the room. He also was strangled. Since, as you may imagine, no one has spent a night in the Grey Room, until I did so. The ring had been lost so long, that it had become almost a myth; and it was most extraordinary to stand there, with the actual thing in my hand, as you can understand.

"It was whilst I stood there, looking at the ring, that I got an idea. Supposing that it were, in a way, a doorway - You see what I mean? A sort of gap in the world-hedge. It was a queer idea, I know, and probably was not my own, but came to me from the Outside. You see, the wind had come from that part of the room where the ring lay. I thought a lot about it. Then the shape - the inside of a pentacle. It had no 'mounts', and without mounts, as the Sigsand MS. has it: - 'Thee mownts wych are thee Five Hills of safetie. To lack is to gyve pow'r to thee daemon; and surlie to fayvor thee Evill Thyng.' You see, the very shape of the ring was significant; and I determined to test it.

"I unmade my pentacle, for it must be made afresh and around the one to be protected. Then I went out and locked the door; after which I left the house, to get certain matters, for neither 'yarbs nor fyre nor water' must be used a second time. I returned about seven-thirty, and as soon as the things I had brought had been carried up to the Grey Room, I dismissed Peter for the night, just as I had done the evening before. When he had gone downstairs, I let myself into the room and locked and sealed the door. I went to the place in the centre of the room where all the stuff had been packed, and set to work with all my speed to construct a barrier about me and the ring.

"I do not remember whether I explained to you. But I had reasoned that if the ring were in any way a 'medium of admission,' and it were enclosed with me in the Electric Pentacle' it would be, to express it loosely, insulated. Do you see? The Force, which had visible expression as a Hand, would have to stay beyond the Barrier which separates the Ab from the Normal; for the 'gateway' would be removed from accessibility.

"As I was saying, I worked with all my speed to get the barrier completed about me and the ring, for it was already later than I cared to be in that room 'unprotected.' Also, I had a feeling that there would be a vast effort made that night to regain the use of the ring. For I had the strongest conviction that the ring was a necessity to materialisation. You will see whether I was right.

"I completed the barriers in about an hour, and you can imagine something of the relief I felt when I saw the pale glare of the Electric Pentacle once more all about me. From then, onwards, for about two hours, I sat quietly, facing the corner from which the wind came. About eleven o'clock a queer knowledge came that something was near to me; yet nothing happened for a whole hour after that. Then, suddenly, I felt the cold, queer wind begin to blow upon me. To my astonishment, it seemed now to come from behind me, and I whipped round, with a hideous quake of fear. The wind met me in the face. It was blowing up from the floor close to me. I stared down, in a sickening maze of new frights. What on earth had I done now! The ring was there, close beside me, where I had put it. Suddenly, as I stared, bewildered, I was aware that there was something queer about the ring - funny shadowy movements and convolutions. I looked at them, stupidly. And then, abruptly, I knew that the wind was

blowing up at me from the ring. A queer indistinct smoke became visible to me, seeming to pour upwards through the ring, and mix with the moving shadows. Suddenly, I realised that I was in more than any mortal danger; for the convoluting shadows about the ring were taking shape, and the death-hand was forming within the Pentacle. My goodness! do you realise it! I had brought the 'gateway' into the pentacles, and the brute was coming through - pouring into the material world, as gas might pour out from the mouth of a pipe.

"I should think that I knelt for a moment in a sort of stunned fright. Then, with a mad, awkward movement, I snatched at the ring, intending to hurl it out of the Pentacle. Yet it eluded me, as though some invisible, living thing jerked it hither and thither. At last, I gripped it; yet, in the same instant, it was torn from my grasp with incredible and brutal force. A great, black shadow covered it, and rose into the air, and came at me. I saw that it was the Hand, vast and nearly perfect in form. I gave one crazy yell, and jumped over the Pentacle and the ring of burning candles, and ran despairingly for the door. I fumbled idiotically and ineffectually with the key, and all the time I stared, with a fear that was like insanity, toward the Barriers. The hand was plunging towards me; yet, even as it had been unable to pass into the pentacle when the ring was without, so, now that the ring was within, it had no power to pass out. The monster was chained, as surely as any beast would be, were chains rivetted upon it.

"Even then, I got a flash of this knowledge; but I was too utterly shaken with fright, to reason; and the instant I managed to get the key turned, I sprang into the passage, and slammed the door with a crash. I locked it, and got to my room, somehow; for I was trembling so that I could hardly stand, as you can imagine. I locked myself in, and managed to get the candle lit; then I lay down on the bed, and kept quiet for an hour or two, and so I got steadied.

"I got a little sleep, later; but woke when Peter brought my coffee. When I had drunk it I felt altogether better, and took the old man along with me whilst I had a look into the Grey Room. I opened the door, and peeped in. The candles were still burning, wan against the daylight; and behind them was the pale, glowing star of the Electric Pentacle. And there in the middle was the ring... the gateway of the monster, lying demure and ordinary.

"Nothing in the room was touched, and I knew that the brute had never managed to cross the Pentacles. Then I went out, and locked the door.

"After a sleep of some hours, I left the house. I returned in the afternoon in a cab. I had with me an oxy-hydrogen jet, and two cylinders, containing the gases. I carried the things to the Grey Room, and there, in the centre of the Electric Pentacle, I erected the little furnace. Five minutes later the Luck Ring, once the 'luck,' but now the 'bane,' of the Anderson family, was no more than a little solid splash of hot metal."

Carnacki felt in his pocket, and pulled out something wrapped in tissue paper. He passed it to me. I opened it and found a small circle of greyish metal, something like lead, only harder and rather brighter.

"Well?" I asked, at length, after examining it and handing it round to the others. "Did that stop the haunting?"

Carnacki nodded. "Yes," he said. "I slept three nights in the Grey Room, before I left. Old Peter nearly fainted when he knew that I meant to; but by the third night he seemed to realise that the house was just safe and ordinary. And, you know, I believe, in his heart, he hardly approved."

Carnacki stood up and began to shake hands. "Out you go!" he said, genially. And, presently, we went, pondering to our various homes.

SUPER DUPER by James Rhodes

## Chapter Seventeen

The trail of blood was becoming easier to follow. The only problem Corrine was having was the small matter of maintaining credulity that her boyfriend Smith had continued walking over the extended distance. She would have struggled to believe it even if he wasn't bleeding. The trail left the motorway, the slip road had a fair view of the local buildings and she guessed immediately that Smith had headed towards the police station that was visible across a field. She dug her foot into the pedal and tore up the mud beneath her. It bolted off the field and splattered her back. As one foot turned over the other, she felt the pattern of impact against her backside.

The field was muddier than she had expected, and traversing it proved a challenge, the wet grass wrapped itself around her tyres and ravelled itself in the chain of her bike. She could feel herself sweating as she powered forwards.

"Bloody Smith," she said aloud.

Then she spotted a two sets of footprints in the mud, one obviously belonging to Smith (she couldn't think of anyone else who would have attempted the journey in slippers); next to it was an indent as if someone had fallen heavily to their knee. Then she immediately felt guilty about cursing Smith. Her response to the guilt was to reiterate, "Bloody Smith." She said it more softly the second time; it was an affectionate cursing. She dug in harder and cut through the field like a plough. She felt the ground harden and her thighs release some of the lactic acid that was burning inside them.

She arrived in front of the police station by pulling up in one of those cool skids that I, as an author, have always been simultaneously impressed with and absolutely incapable of performing. Her thighs slipped over the saddle and she took the steps of the station two at a time. Corrine burst through the door with a soap opera level of dramatics. There was then a second interior door that had quite a fiddly handle, after some effort, she dramatically burst through that door also. She noticed, almost reassuringly, that there was blood between the two doors. That must have meant that Smith is close, she reasoned.

The station was empty, and furthermore, there was not a trace of blood to be seen. Not even a fleck. Corrine wondered if Smith had collapsed between the doors and had been removed. She entered the station and performed a cursory examination of the cells; much to her relief every last one was empty and deserted. She looked in the kitchen; there was UHT milk and teabags but no Smith. She walked back to what she assumed was the booking area and glanced around. Other than a large pile of coats, there was no sign of human life whatsoever.

Corrine whispered, "Smith."

Then, when Smith didn't answer, she said, "Smith."

After a few failed attempts with that, she began to shout, "SMITH!"

Corrine ran from one side of the room to other as she began to panic at the idea that she might not find Smith and he would bleed to death. Suddenly, from the corner of her eye she noticed a small, almost imperceptible shift amongst the pile of coats. Corrine was convinced that it must be a rat or an animal of some type but she chose to investigate it anyway.

Creeping up carefully and reaching out her hand, she pulled the top coat away from the pile.

There was the most almighty screech Corrine had ever born witness to. It was as shrill and piercing as a pool lifeguard's whistle but had the volume of a large explosion. After jumping backwards in surprise and clasping her hands protectively over her ears, Corrine was amazed to discover that the source of the noise was a little girl. The girl was red faced and screaming incoherently. Although for the briefest second, Corrine imagined that she heard the girl say, "No bastard copper's going to take me alive."

"It's OK," said Corrine, "I'm come to help."

"No you haven't," screamed the girl in defiance, "You're the bloody pigs."

"I am bloody not!"

"Tell me who you are then?"

"I'm Corrine, I'm looking for my friend Smith."

"I'm looking after him," Ellie proudly declared.

Ellie pulled back one of the coats to reveal Smith's face. He had been carefully, some might have argued excessively, bandaged. The bleached white of the bandages was rather less pale than the hue of his cheeks. He didn't appear to be breathing.

Corrine leaned over him and placed her fingers on his neck, feeling for a pulse. She thought that she felt something but she couldn't be sure. She placed her ear over his heart and was relieved to hear a beat, faint but audible.

"How long has he been asleep?"

"Since we got here."

"When was that?"

"Just before I fell asleep."

"Have you any idea how many hours?"

"No."

Corrine took a deep breath. She felt sure that Smith needed to drink some water and eat something but she had no idea how she was going to manage to get him to do it.

She tried moving him but he weighed a good deal more than she expected. She slapped his cheek to try and wake him but it just made him lick his lips. She went to get a cup of water.

BABBAGE MUST DIE by Gavin Chappell

Chapter Sixteen

The sun rose over the rolling waves, its rays glancing off two battered hulks that limped across the grey waters. Both ships flew the Union Jack bravely, despite their battered appearance, but one had lost all masts while the other retained its mainsail and foresail but had very little rigging.

Brian was on the deck of the *Mars*, the only frigate to survive the storm, working alongside his shipmates as they struggled to replace the rigging. From here, the other surviving ship was visible; the supply ship that they had been guarding, now a battered, shapeless lump, lacking masts or rigging.

He saw the captain and officers appear on the quarterdeck, Martin glowering dourly at the scene that confronted him. At his side was Lieutenant Piper. Brian ducked his head down guiltily and returned his attention to the knot he was reefing.

The storm had blown itself out after about a day and a half, and since then they had been drifting in the middle of the Atlantic, where they had been blown, desperately trying to set things to rights. The word below decks was there was little hope for the supply ship, and that Captain Martin meant to take steps to secure its cargo. As for the fate of the other frigates, no one could say for sure, but it seemed likely that they had sunk or been blown even further off course. But what concentrated Brian's mind was the knowledge that Piper suspected him of... something. The storm had kept everyone busy, the first lieutenant more than anyone; he had surpassed even the captain with his heroic efforts to save the ship. But Brian was sure that Piper had not forgotten his suspicions; the lieutenant was that kind of conscientious, duty-bound guy who never made such elementary mistakes.

'All hands on deck!' came the order, and Brian and the other crewmen left their tasks and hurried to assemble before the quarterdeck. Captain Martin surveyed them grimly.

'As you know, we lost most of the convoy in the storm,' he began abruptly. 'We can only thank merciful Providence that the supply ship *Redcap* survived, and remained close to our own vessel. Unfortunately, she is little more than a hulk, and the hopes of getting her to Spain from our current position are low. We have calculated that we are now at a point midway between Ireland and Spain, and given favourable weather we will reach port in Bilbao in two days.'

Brian felt relief at this. His geography was shaky, but he could tell that this meant they weren't that far from England. The aftermath of the storm had depressed him, left him convinced that he would never get back to the cellar in time to return to his own time, that he would stay in what was, quite frankly, a horrendous period, for the rest of his life.

'However, considering the condition of the *Redcap* and the grave importance of her cargo for our efforts against the Frogs, the decision has been taken that we will take aboard the most important part of her cargo and leave her to return to port as best she can. It is vital that we bring the soldiers their pay, and we cannot allow sentiment to defeat us. Lieutenant Piper will now choose men to go with him to the *Redcap*.'

Piper strode down the steps with his hands behind his back, his cocked hat giving him the impression of some kind of fussy, authoritarian seabird.

‘McGee,’ he called, and the boatswain’s mate stepped forward. ‘Take six picked men and prepare the longboat. Oh, and take Wells with you,’ he added. Brian started guiltily. Piper favoured him with a cold stare. ‘I want you where I can see you, Wells,’ he added.

Brian gulped, and when McGee barked an order at him, hurried after the other sailors. To his concern, he saw that the only one of them he knew was Keane. He saw Boone staring worriedly at him from among the other crewmen, and gave him a shrug.

So Piper did remember! Brian remembered a time at school when he’d been seen bunking off a PE lesson on a Friday before the Bank Holiday weekend. He’d spent the next three days in a fit of worry that he’d be in trouble when he got back, and even though the PE teacher never mentioned the incident, Brian had felt vaguely guilty whenever he saw the man over the following two years.

This business with Piper felt much the same, except back at school even Mr Brewster had not had the authority to have you flogged with a cat o’ nine tails.

But it didn’t look like Piper had shared his suspicions with anyone, not the captain, not the boatswain. It was their little secret. Except Keane knew about it as well, of course. Piper was playing cat and mouse with Brian, it seemed, or maybe he was just waiting for him to crack and rat on his mates. Brian would quite happily betray the whole bastard lot of them if it would just get him off this doomed ship and back onto dry land. Dry land in England, that was.

They readied the longboat for the trip over to the *Redcap* and each man took an oar, while Lieutenant Forster settled in the stern, his telescope to his eye as he studied the lifeless-looking hulk behind them. At an order from McGee, they began to row.

Brian was soon sweating with exertion, despite the bone-chilling sea breeze, and he had a nasty feeling he was developing blisters he should have taken gloves, he thought, although he saw that none of the tough, hard-bitten men around him had any. Their palms must be tough as leather, he thought; one huge callous, like the sort you got on your fingertips if you played guitar.

He looked worriedly at Piper, still sitting in the stern, his attention fixed on their destination. Brian tried to look over his shoulder, caught a brief glimpse of the silent hulk, then lost his stroke and Keane cursed him, followed by McGee. Piper lowered his telescope and stared at him. Brian reddened and struggled to regain his stroke. He was trying to make himself unobtrusive, and look at him, drawing attention to himself!

It was with a very real sense of relief that he obeyed Piper’s order to ship oars. He turned to see that they were drifting alongside the *Redcap*. Piper hailed the ship.

‘Ahoy, the *Redcap*!’



After a short pause, a head popped over the rail.

‘Ahoy the boat!’ it called merrily. ‘What brings you to these waters?’

This was wrong. A chill crept surreptitiously down Brian’s back. The sailor was talking insubordinately to an officer. Not a survival characteristic in the Royal Navy. What was happening on the supply ship that such mutinous attitudes could prevail?

‘Where are your officers?’ Piper demanded. ‘We come from the *Mars*. We want to speak with your captain.’

A hand appeared beside the sailor’s grinning head, and in its hand was a tin mug, the sort that contained grog, in Brian’s recent experience. The sailor put it to his lips and drank it swiftly.

‘Ah, that’s good!’ he said in appreciation. Blearily, he regarded the crew of the longboat. ‘You want to speak with the skipper? Better speak with Davy Jones first, ahhh!’

Piper, looking briefly discomfited – he’d obviously never encountered such impudence while growing up at a country parsonage or wherever the stuck-up fuckhead had grown up – and his back stiffened.

‘I’ll have you flogged, sailor,’ he growled. ‘Let us aboard.’

‘Aye!’ the sailor slurred. ‘Come aboard. We’ve got lotsa rum!’

He vanished, but then a ladder came clanging down beside the boat. Piper rose but McGee put his hand on his arm.

‘What is it, man?’ Piper asked levelly.

‘Dere’s sumthin wrang ‘ere, sorr,’ the Irishman told him. ‘Woi in hivin’s noime wass da mariner speakin so disrespectful, loike?’

Grimly, Piper replied: ‘That’s what I intend to find out.’ He thrust away McGee’s restraining hand and began to ascend the ladder.

‘Foller da lootenant!’ McGee barked at the men. Keane was first to follow; Brian last, except for McGee, who brought up the rear, and the two men who were left to guard the boat.

Brian reached the deck quite quickly, where he found Piper, Keane and the rest staring around in shock at a rowdy scene of indiscipline. Two barrels of rum lay in the lea of the quarterdeck, both crudely broached, while around them lay several sailors in supine attitudes, their ting grog mugs clutched in their hands. Keane had the man who had answered Piper’s call pinned against the rail. Piper was interrogating him.

The man seemed unperturbed.

‘Cap’n’s gone to feed the fishes, sir,’ he explained carefully. ‘We’ve been celebratin’ our freedom.’

‘This is mutiny, you villainous dog,’ Piper replied. ‘Captain Martin has already decided that the survivors on board this vessel must make their own way to safety. We’re here to take your cargo.’

‘Take it and enjoy it,’ the sailor said. ‘But leave us the rum!’

Piper studied the man in disgust.

‘I’ve half a mind to send McGee here back to the *Mars* for the boatswain and his cat on’ nine tails,’ he said. ‘But we are pressed. We will take what we came for and leave you to your laxity.’

The sailor farted loudly and tittered.

Piper turned up his nose – unwise, Brian thought, in the current atmosphere – and gestured his crew towards the companionway.

‘We’ll have to go in and take it without authority,’ he said, and picked his fastidiously way through semi-somnolent bodies.

Brian remembered there had been a time when he’d liked Lieutenant Piper.

Still, he thought, as he followed the other sailors across the deck and into the gloom of the companionway, this was kinda cool. It was like being a pirate. They’d boarded the ship and now they were going to loot its riches; its pay chest. It would be even cooler if they could bury it on a desert island somewhere, but maybe that was asking too much...

Half an hour later, as he was helping his fellows lug the heavy army pay chest back up the companionway, he was feeling less giddy. God, it was heavy! Really heavy, like it was full to the brim with gold bullion. Couldn’t be; knowing the army, it was probably loaded with small change.

‘Put yer back into, Wellsy!’ Keane barked at him. The big man was slick with sweat himself, and anyway his attitude really wasn’t helping. Brian contented himself with giving him a withering glare, which Keane ignored.

Finally, they reached the side, where their longboat still bobbed up and down and the two men left behind looked up to gape at their heavy burden. Under Piper’s expert guidance, they rigged together a winch and pulley system from broken ratlines and lowered the chest into the longboat, scrambling after it down the rope ladder soon after.

The pay chest ballasted the boat so effectively that Brian was worried they might sink, but Piper pooh-poohed his fears, and Keane told him to shut his trap. They began to row away from the ship, leaving its drunken, mutinous, captainless crew to work out their own alcoholic salvation.

That night, Brian joined Boone and the other Americans.

‘He abandoned them?’ Boone was horrified. ‘Left them to die in the middle of the sea?’

Brian shrugged. ‘They seemed happy enough,’ he said quietly.

As usual, the Americans were shocked; they didn’t seem to get his irony. Retards.

‘We can’t go on like this,’ said one of Boone’s goons. ‘Look, Boone, look men. This must be time for the mutiny. The crew’s weak. They’ve lost men, marines included, in the storm. We could take over right now. Then – head back home!’

Boone nodded. ‘That’s right. Since the storm, the threat the marines posed has grown less. I reckon we could storm the armoury right away, head up to the gun deck, and break into the captain’s cabin. If we hold him ransom, we can negotiate from a position of strength.’

Brian sighed. Looked like this was it. ‘Come on, then,’ he said resignedly. ‘But don’t forget, you’re dropping me off in Ireland.’

‘Sure,’ said Boone.

They hurried down into the hold, where the armoury was kept. Two marines were dozing outside it. Boone shouted; ‘Now!’ and Brian and the others rushed down the passageway towards them. One man turned round, his mouth a perfect O, and lifted his musket. Panicking, Brian flung himself on the man, forcing the musket down but it went off, deafening Brian and sending him thudding into the nearby bulkhead. He hit the ground and lay there groaning as the Americans scuffled with the marines. Before he could get any sense of what was going on, Boone was dragging him to his feet.

‘Hey, Wellsy!’ the man was shouting. ‘I’ve never seen anyone do anything so brave.’

‘He shot me,’ Brian moaned. ‘The bastard shot me.’ He was sure he was bleeding. Sure his legs had been shattered by the musket ball. But Boone shook his head, puzzled.

‘He missed you,’ he said. ‘He missed you, Wellsy. Here!’ he thrust a musket into Brian’s hands. Shaking the haze of confusion and terror from his eyes, Brian saw that they all held muskets, primed and loaded.

‘Up to the gun deck,’ Boone told them. ‘Quickly, people will have heard that. We need to get there before the guard is called.’

They raced up the companionway. Distant sounds of shouting suggested that their fight had been heard; unsurprisingly, Brian thought, it had been a shambles. Brave!

Boone thought he was brave; it had seemed the only way to deal with the situation. He didn't really know what had got into him, to be honest.

They burst out into the gun deck. Cannons lay shrouded in gloom on either side. The captain's cabin was on this level, back aft. But as Boone led them in that direction, they heard a boom and a whistling of shot from outside, followed by a splash. Boone looked at Brian.

'Are we under attack?'

Brian shrugged. 'Don't ask me!' It would be the ultimate irony if they came under attack at the very moment that they were about to seize control of the ship.

A door opened at the far end, and light illuminated the dark passage. Captain Martin stood silhouetted, with a few others behind him.

'What's going on?' he roared. He saw the men with their weapons. 'Are we under attack? Who alerted you?'

'Sir, it was Lieutenant Piper,' Brian said. 'He thinks there's an enemy vessel out there.'

'What enemy would be attacking us in the middle of the blasted Atlantic?' Martin demanded. 'Get up aloft and report as soon as you know.'

'Come on,' Brian told Boone and the rest.

'What are we doing?' Boone wanted to know as they hurried aloft onto the upper deck. 'Why didn't we just take him there and then?'

'Too many of them,' Brian said. 'Better to bluff things, under the situation. Besides, I want to know....'

They burst out onto the deck and halted by the rail. A ship no larger than their frigate was broadside on to them, no more than a few hundred yards from the *Mars*. Men were rushing down from the ratlines, Lieutenant Piper among them.

'It appeared from the dark seconds ago, opened fire on us,' the lieutenant was shouting, his usual aplomb gone.

'Is it French?' Brian asked.

'No, Wellsy!' Boone leapt up and down and waving his hat. 'Look! Old Glory!'

Fluttering from the ship's mast was the Stars and Stripes.

Again, the ship opened fire on the frigate, and this time the deck shook with the impact.

## THE DARK PLACE

### Chapter 13

Reverend Michael Carey drove through the open gateway and proceeded up the driveway at the address Martin had given him. It had taken him longer than he thought to drive the relatively short distance from West Derby Village to Sandfield Park. There had been what looked like a serious accident at the junction of Central Drive and Eaton Road.

He had been forced to wait for almost half an hour as the police cleared the road and dragged what seemed to be a badly damaged Porsche onto the back of a breakdown truck. He had been unable to turn around as a queue had developed behind him within a short time of being stopped. This part of Central Drive was cordoned off as the police measured the road and they advised him to detour along Alder Road and enter Sandfield Park via South Drive before proceeding along Whinfell Road and eventually reaching Central Drive.

It was now almost 11.15. Michael Carey hoped that despite the late hour, and the night's events Martin and Isobel would not be too tired to see him now. He stopped his car in front of the Mercedes that was parked outside the house at the top of the drive and got out.

It was bitterly cold and Michael Carey was glad he had his overcoat on. He had the leather bound book under his arm and in his hand he carried the case containing the vials of holy water. With his free hand, Michael Carey pulled the collar of his coat closed across his neck as he walked towards the house. On reaching the front door, he was surprised to see it was slightly ajar.

'Hello,' he shouted as he eased the door open slightly with his foot but there was no answer from inside the house.

'Hello,' he shouted again but still there was no answer. Deciding on a different approach Michael Carey banged on the doorframe with his fist and shouted, 'Martin, are you there?' As he stood outside the front door, Michael Carey wondered what he should do and then he heard a telephone start ringing in the hallway.

Karen lifted her eyebrows and said, 'There's no answer,' as Tom looked questioningly at her.

'Maybe they've gone to bed?' he said. Karen had tried Isobel's number earlier but it had been engaged. She had left it for a while and now it was ringing but there was no answer.

'Someone must have been there when I called earlier because it was engaged, so why aren't they answering now?'

Karen had finally decided that she needed to try to speak to Isobel. Karen was worried about her and knew she wouldn't be able to sleep that night unless she reassured herself that Isobel was all right and nothing had happened to her.

‘Come on,’ said Tom moving his head to one side. ‘It’s no use holding on to the phone if there’s no answer. You’ll get to work tomorrow and Isobel will be fine.’

Karen replaced the handset but immediately picked it up again.

‘I’ll just try once more.’ Karen dialled Isobel’s number and once more began listening to the ringing tone.

She was just about to give up when the phone clicked as someone picked it up and a male voice said, ‘Hello?’

‘Is that you, Martin?’ Karen asked, a look of surprise on her face.

Tom had immediately turned back towards Karen as she started speaking. He mouthed the words, ‘Who is it?’ towards Karen but all she could do was raise her eyebrows, lift her free hand towards the ceiling and shrug her shoulders in a gesture that conveyed that she had no idea.

Michael Carey walked into the hallway and looked around. The lights were on in the room leading off the hall, which he presumed was the lounge but there was no sign of Isobel or Martin. As he entered the house, the telephone had stopped ringing but now it resumed its shrill insistent call to be answered. Striding quickly across the hallway Michael Carey reached the telephone, which rested on an oak occasional table.

‘Hello,’ he said as he held the receiver to his ear.

A woman’s voice said, ‘Is that you, Martin?’

‘No,’ he answered. ‘My name is Michael Carey. Martin asked me to come to the house to see him and Isobel but there doesn’t appear to be anyone here.’

‘If there’s no one there, how did you get in?’ asked the woman.

‘The front door was open,’ he replied, before asking, ‘Who am I speaking to?’

‘My name is Karen Williams; I work for Isobel at her shop in Liverpool.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t know what to tell you, Karen,’ said Michael Carey. ‘I’ve just walked into the hall because no one answered me when I shouted hello. I thought that perhaps someone would come and answer the telephone but I was mistaken.’

‘Do you think you should call the police?’ asked Karen.

‘There doesn’t appear to be any sign of forced entry or damage so I wonder if that’s necessary,’ replied Michael Carey. ‘I think I’ll just have a quick look around and see if I can find out what’s going on,’ he said.

‘We’re coming over there right now,’ said Karen forcefully, before hanging up the telephone without giving Michael Carey time to answer.

Michael Carey smiled as he replaced the telephone handset. Karen Williams sounded like a woman who wouldn't take no for an answer, he thought. He looked around the hallway, the large oak sideboard looked impressive in the hall and there was no doubting the craftsmanship that had gone into its construction.

'Hello,' he called out as he walked slowly through the open doorway into the lounge. There was no one in the room even though the fire was burning brightly and table lamps around the room were switched on. Michael Carey was beginning to worry and he wondered if calling the police was not such a bad idea.

He walked out of the lounge and across the hallway towards the stairs and had one foot on the bottom stair but stopped suddenly when he heard a groan. Michael Carey looked slowly round but couldn't place exactly where the sound had come from. He opened his mouth slightly because he'd read somewhere that doing this would improve his hearing. He heard the noise again and realised it was coming from above him so ran quickly up the stairs to the landing above. All the doors on the landing were closed so once again he waited and listened for any sound.

'What's happening?' asked Tom as Karen replaced the telephone handset.

'Something's wrong over at Isobel's house,' Karen replied. 'Someone called Michael Carey answered the telephone. He said Martin had asked him to come over to the house but when he got there the front door was open and there was no sign of Isobel or Martin.'

'Has he called the police?' asked Tom.

'He said there wasn't any sign of the door being forced so he was going to have a look around before he did anything. I said we were coming over there right now,' Karen replied as she hastily began to put her coat on.

'Hang on a minute,' said Tom. 'We can't just go charging over there, maybe we should call the police?'

'What if there's nothing wrong over there?' Karen replied. 'We'd look pretty stupid if we call the police and all that's happened is they've left the front door open by mistake and the police turn up there to find them all sitting round drinking coffee and having a chat don't you think?'

'OK,' said Tom. 'I'll get my coat.'

Two minutes later Tom and Karen were driving slowly away from their house and heading towards Sandfield Park.

Michael Carey slowly began to walk along the landing listening for any sound from behind the closed doors. He wondered if the front door being open was, just a mistake and the thought caused him to stop in his tracks. What if Martin and Isobel were in bed and here he was creeping round in their house like some kind of aging peeping tom?

‘They knew I was on my way over here though,’ he thought, ‘so there’s no reason for them not to expect me. Yes, at the front door, his conscience argued, not upstairs in their house. Once again, Michael Carey called out, ‘Hello!’ and then added ‘Is anyone here?’ Silence answered him and he wondered again if he should simply go back to the telephone in the hall and call the police. As he contemplated his next move, the door handle on the room furthest away from him began to turn slowly.

Slowly Martin groped his way out of the black mist that filled his mind and fought his way back to consciousness. He groaned as his eyes opened and the full force of the pain thundering through his head hit him. He put his hand to the side of his head and felt the swelling that was there.

‘That’s twice I’ve bashed my head in the last couple of days,’ he thought, wincing with pain. ‘I’ll have to be more careful otherwise I’ll have no head left.’

Martin smiled in spite of the pain. Suddenly the full memory of how he had come to be in the bedroom and what had happened to him and Isobel came rushing back to him. He lurched to his feet and had to hold on to the end of the bed to stop himself from pitching forward to his knees as his head began to spin. Martin groaned again and steadied himself before moving towards the door, he had to help Isobel.

The door in front of Michael Carey opened and Martin stumbled out of the room onto the landing. He stopped suddenly as he saw Michael Carey.

‘How did you get in?’ he asked.

‘The front door was open. What has happened, Martin, where’s Isobel?’

‘I don’t know,’ Martin replied.

‘What do you mean, you don’t know?’ asked Michael Carey. ‘What has happened since I spoke to you earlier, Martin?’

‘It’s taken Isobel,’ Martin replied.

‘Tell me what happened,’ said Michael Carey.

Tom slowly drove the car up the driveway at Isobel’s house. They could see that there were already two cars parked outside the front door, a Mercedes coupe and a dark coloured saloon.

‘That Mercedes must be Martin’s car,’ said Karen. ‘The other car must belong to whoever Michael Carey is.’

‘Well, we’ll find out soon enough, won’t we,’ said Tom as he turned the ignition key and silenced the engine. Karen and Tom got out of the car and they both shivered in the cold night air.



‘Come on, let’s get this sorted out,’ said Tom as they walked towards the slightly open front door.

‘Hello,’ called Karen as she pushed the front door open. ‘Martin, are you here?’ she said as they walked into the hall.

As Tom and Karen walked into the house Martin and Michael Carey were coming down the stairs. Michael Carey was supporting Martin who looked grey and unsteady on his feet.

‘What has happened, Martin?’ asked Karen as she quickly moved across the hallway to the bottom of the stairs. ‘Where’s Isobel?’ Karen had hold of the banister and she had a worried look on her face. Tom was standing slightly behind her and he regarded both Martin and Michael Carey with suspicion.

‘I don’t know exactly,’ said Martin. ‘I can’t explain how it happened but it’s taken Isobel.’

‘What has taken Isobel?’ said Karen her voice sounding angry. ‘What have you done to her?’ she demanded.

‘I haven’t done anything to her,’ said Martin tiredly. He reached the bottom of the stairs and looked Karen in the face. ‘I don’t know how it happened,’ he said ‘but whatever it is that’s been making all the strange things happen to us over the last week has taken her.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Karen. ‘Taken her where?’

‘I don’t know where,’ said Martin with an air of resignation. ‘To the dark place where it exists, I suppose. Let’s go into the lounge and I’ll tell you what happened.’

Martin walked into the lounge followed by Michael Carey and Karen. Tom closed the front door and then followed the three of them. Martin sat down heavily on the settee and turned to face them.

‘Please take your coats off,’ he said. Karen unbuttoned her coat and Tom slipped his jacket off. Michael Carey took off his overcoat and Karen and Tom were surprised when they saw the white clerical collar at his throat.

‘I didn’t realise you were from the church,’ said Karen. ‘I’m sorry I was so rude to you on the phone,’ she finished apologetically.

‘Don’t worry,’ said Michael Carey, ‘there’s no way you could have known just from talking to me is there? The situation was certainly suspicious and I’m surprised you didn’t telephone the police yourself instead of rushing over here the way you have.’

‘We did think about it,’ said Tom. ‘Then we thought maybe we’d end up making fools of ourselves if the police turned up with their lights flashing and their sirens wailing to find you all sitting round having a chat and drinking coffee.’

Martin smiled in spite of the pain he was feeling from his head and the desperate worry he was feeling about Isobel. 'I'm really glad you're all here,' he said.

Isobel opened her eyes, at least she thought they were open, but in the complete blackness she found herself in it was hard to tell. She was lying against something hard and as she moved her hands around her body, she felt a rough surface with a texture like concrete beneath her. She carefully got to her feet and as she rose, the light level slowly increased.

She was in the centre of a road that seemed to disappear into the distance, as she looked each way along its length. On either side of her, the landscape was barren, black, and grey like the tones in a negative photograph. The few trees that had managed to grow in the grey lifeless ground were stunted and withered except for the tall tree that loomed to Isobel's right. Its bark was gnarled and its thick dark trunk was covered in blue-black ivy that gave off a noisome smell. The tree was tall but its upper branches were bare of leaves and it looked as though it were dead.

'Have you come to take me home?' said a voice at Isobel's side.

Isobel wasn't startled or frightened at the sudden appearance of the young girl. She had accepted without question her own presence in the strange nightmarish world she had found herself in and the sudden appearance of the child did not seem out of place. Isobel knelt on the road in front of the girl.

'I don't know where we are,' she said, 'so I don't know how to take you home.'

The girl lifted her head and looked towards Isobel with milky grey corpse like eyes without any iris or pupil. Isobel's gaze was drawn to the bloody mess that was the side of the girl's head but the girl didn't seem to even notice.

'I don't want to stay here,' said the girl. 'I want to go home.' The girl dropped her head towards her chest. It was as though the news that Isobel couldn't take her home had disappointed her. She suddenly cocked her head to one side as though she could hear something Isobel couldn't then raised her head and looked at Isobel with her pale eyes. 'She's going to come for you soon, Isobel.'

'How do you know my name?' asked Isobel.

'She told me,' said the girl. 'You're the reason she's here. All the others are dead and you're the last one. Once you're dead she can rest because the curse will be fulfilled and all the Stefanoviches will be dead.'

Martin looked across the room towards Michael Carey, Karen and Tom. They waited expectantly for him to begin to tell them what had happened.

'Earlier tonight, Isobel and I had a nightmare or a vision or something. Whatever it is that's been appearing in our dreams was here in this room. We both saw it. We'd fallen asleep on the settee and I woke up to see a shadow, which looked as though it was reaching towards Isobel with fingers that looked like smoke. I stood up and something I couldn't see took hold of me with an ice-cold grip. I was paralysed, I

couldn't move and I couldn't breathe. Isobel screamed and whatever it was that had me in its grip relaxed its hold and concentrated on her. As soon as it released me, I fell to the floor.

'Once I got my breath back I took the vial of water from my pocket, held it in front of my chest, and moved towards Isobel. She was sitting on the settee, her body was locked rigid with her eyes staring straight ahead, and her lips were pulled back from her teeth in a horrible grimace. It looked as though there was a cloud of darkness around her and it seemed to be entering her body through her nose and mouth as though she was inhaling the darkness and it was becoming part of her.

'As I moved towards Isobel, the shadow seemed to lose some of its substance and then it suddenly disappeared. Isobel was frozen stiff and it was as though she was rigid with shock. I wrapped my arms around her and tried to get some warmth into her and she slowly came round. It's the first time we've both seen whatever this thing is at the same time. We've both had separate experiences but this happened to us at the same time. We both saw it and we both heard it speak to us. It told Isobel that soon she would be in its world and that she would not be able to escape from it. It called her Isobel Stefanovich and said she was the last one alive.'

'You haven't told us everything, have you, Martin?' Karen asked.

Martin leant forward and put his head in his hands. He seemed to gather himself then sat up, ran his fingers through his hair and looked at Karen.

'No, I haven't. This whole night has been one bizarre thing after another. No sooner had we calmed down after what happened earlier then Aleksander, one of Isobel's suppliers shows up with an explanation about what started all this and then Jess and Steve arrive. Isobel had decided she wasn't going to be a victim, as she put it. She seemed fine and didn't mention to Steve and Jess what had happened. As soon as the three of them had left and we were alone, things got worse. Isobel went upstairs.

'I waited for about ten minutes and she hadn't come back so I went upstairs to see if something was wrong. I walked into the bedroom and Isobel was lying spread-eagled on the bed. Her arms and legs were being pulled tight by something I couldn't see but her eyes were closed as though she was asleep. I was so surprised I tried to move towards her and then the bedroom door slammed shut behind me with an almighty bang as though someone from outside had pulled the door closed. As I took a step forwards the rug I was standing on slipped on the polished floor and I fell forward and banged my head on the end of the bed.'

Martin fingered the large bump on the side of his head as he spoke.

'I must have blacked out for a little while and then when I came round Isobel had vanished. I came out of the bedroom and Reverend Carey was standing on the landing looking at me then you and Tom arrived.'

Michael Carey was the first to speak.

‘It all seems so improbable, Martin. First you start having these nightmares and then somehow you begin to suffer injuries in your dreams, which is impossible.’

‘Where is Isobel, Martin?’ Karen asked quietly.

Martin turned towards her with a look of anguish on her face. ‘I have no idea,’ he said.

Tom stood up and began to pace backwards and forwards across the floor.

‘If I’ve got this right you’ve been to this place, wherever it is, and have made it back haven’t you, Martin?’ Martin nodded towards Tom. ‘So it stands to reason that if Isobel has been taken to this place she can be brought back doesn’t it?’ Tom looked around the room seeking some kind of agreement from them but they all looked dubious. ‘Well, how else can Martin go there and come back? If you accept the reality of this place then it must be linked with here. You’re the only other person that’s been there Martin so you need to go there and bring Isobel back.’

Karen looked at Tom and then Martin. ‘What do you think, Martin?’

‘I don’t even know how to go there,’ he said. ‘It seems to happen when I’m asleep, but there’s no guarantee is there?’

‘What else would you suggest then?’ said Tom angrily ‘Just wait around and hope she comes back?’

‘We have to try, Martin,’ Karen pleaded.

Five minutes later Martin was lying on the couch his head propped up on cushions. They had dimmed the lights and had moved the armchairs out of Martin’s line of sight and turned up the gas fire. Martin had swallowed a large whisky in an effort to calm his frayed nerves and as he relaxed back against the cushions, the heat from the fire and the whisky began to have an effect and he felt tiredness start to seep into him.

Michael Carey, Karen and Tom were in the kitchen speaking softly in an effort to give Martin every chance to fall asleep. They’d searched the house again and could not find a trace of Isobel.

‘How long do you think we should wait?’ asked Tom.

Karen looked at Tom and then Michael Carey. ‘What if Martin manages to go to wherever Isobel is and he can’t bring her back?’ The thought that Martin could fail hadn’t occurred to either of them.

‘I think,’ began Michael Carey carefully, ‘that even if Martin does manage to sleep he might not be able to reach Isobel because this place, wherever it is, may only exist in his mind.’

‘So where is she then? We’ve looked all over the house and there’s no sign of her anywhere!’ Karen was angry and looked on the verge of bursting into tears.

Tom put his arm around her. 'Don't worry. We'll find some answers somewhere,' he said.

Michael Carey decided he wanted to check on Martin. He walked out of the kitchen and towards the lounge.

Karen put her head on Tom's shoulder. 'I keep thinking this is all just a bad dream. I wish I could just wake up and it would be over,' she said.

'Tom, Karen! Can you come here please?' shouted Michael Carey urgently.

They both ran to the lounge and looked through the open doorway. Michael Carey was standing in front of the settee but there was no sign of Martin.

Martin opened his eyes to find himself once more standing in the middle of the road in the strange monochrome world he had visited before. There was none of the stomach churning vertigo. As soon as he opened his eyes, there had been enough light for him to see by. Something was different but he couldn't make up his mind what it was. Slowly he turned and gazed across the barren landscape. In the distance, he saw the tree. That wasn't here last time Martin decided, maybe that's what's different.

'Hello,' said a voice at Martin's side. He looked down and the young girl had appeared at his side. 'She's got Isobel.' Martin dropped to one knee next to the girl. Her milky grey eyes were fathomless and Martin could gain no clues from looking into them. 'You'll have to hurry,' said the girl a sly grin spreading across her pallid features.

'Where are they?' Martin said urgently. The girl lifted her arm and pointed towards the tree in the distance then lifted her hand to cover her mouth and started to giggle as though she were engaged in a childish game.

Martin lurched to his feet and started running towards the tree. He felt like he was pushing through treacle or some kind of thick oil. The very air seemed almost too thick to move through and he struggled to make any progress. Martin reached through the cloying air and into his pocket and closed his fingers around the vial of holy water. Its warmth seemed to flow into his hand and immediately he felt the pressure opposing him lessen slightly. Taking strength from the vial Martin drew it out of his pocket and held it above his head.

The light from the vial slowly spilled from above his head and lit up the colourless landscape with a brilliance that had never been seen there before. The shadows receded but while Martin began to move forward much easier, he seemed to be making little headway towards the tree. Lowering his arm gave Martin more balance and stability and made moving less effort but it did reduce the light around him.

Slowly Martin began to reduce the distance between him and the tree but the effort was taking a toll on his already tired body. The young girl appeared at his side again as he forced his way forward. She was walking casually along as though she didn't have a care in the world. Her childish face turned towards Martin and her pale

expressionless eyes seemed to look straight through him. She started to skip along as Martin laboured to maintain his pace.

‘Are you having a nice time, Martin? Do you think you’ll reach Isobel before she’s finished with her?’

Martin looked towards the girl, the distraction caused him to miss his footing, and he sprawled on his knees. The girl began to laugh uncontrollably as she skipped effortlessly away from him.

Michael Carey looked at Tom and Karen.

‘Where do you think he’s gone?’ asked Karen. Tom walked into the lounge and around the settee looking everywhere for a clue as to where Martin was.

‘It’s obvious, isn’t it? He’s gone to wherever this place is that he’s been visiting in his dreams. We’ll just have to hope he can do something to bring himself and Isobel back,’ he said as he stopped next to Michael Carey.

Michael Carey looked at Tom and then Karen before he spoke. ‘I hope you’re right Tom and that Martin can bring this to some kind of resolution.’

‘You still don’t believe him do you?’ asked Karen.

‘It’s not as simple as that, Karen. You must understand that while I was at theological college during my training the subject of ghosts, spirits, possession and exorcism was discussed, although it was given little credence. It was explained by mass hysteria, delusions and plain trickery. If Martin and Isobel are being menaced by some kind of spirit or malevolent force that is directing its power at them, it strikes at the very core of my belief system and the teachings of the church.’

‘If you can believe in the power of God, the church and religion surely there must be an opposite and opposing force to maintain the balance,’ said Tom. ‘I mean Lucifer was originally an angel, wasn’t he, before he was cast out of heaven.’

‘That’s too simple, Tom. The New Testament suggests the ‘adversary’ has many names but Lucifer is not amongst them. The literal translation of Lucifer is Daystar or Light-bringer, which would seem at odds with the harbinger of doom wouldn’t it? To maintain this balance you talk about suggests that evil regularly manifests itself in the real world and the power of God equally matches that evil and nullifies it. If we had that kind of evidence there would be no doubt about the existence of God and the church would be universally accepted as a power for good wouldn’t it?’

‘This is pointless!’ shouted Karen. Both men looked at her. ‘The pair of you are standing there arguing theoretical points of view when Isobel and Martin may be in some kind of terrible danger. We have no idea what’s happening to them, we don’t know how to help them and you’re both arguing instead of trying to work out what to do!’

Martin got to his feet and tried to think clearly and rationally about what he had to do. He held the vial of water above his head and the clear clean white light shone out from his hand. He took a step forward and found his progress relatively easy. He lowered the light to his side and immediately he felt the pressure of the air begin to close in on him again.

Taking heart from this discovery Martin held the vial of water above his head and walked purposely forward. The light from the vial of water seemed to clear a path for him and he moved quickly forward towards the tree. As he got closer, he could see that somebody was tied to the trunk of the tree. They were tied spread-eagled high up on the trunk just below the lowest branches. Martin doubled his effort to reach the tree.

As his worry for Isobel rose he found his progress began to slow, he had to struggle to move his feet forwards were before he was moving relatively easily. Martin had to stop and catch his breath. The effort required to keep moving forwards in the heavy thick air was taking a huge toll on him. Martin tried to picture Reverend Michael Carey in his mind as well as Steve, Jess, Karen, and Tom. The vision of his friends and Michael Carey filled him with new strength and the light from the vial of holy water grew stronger and even more brilliant. Martin brought the vial of water to his lips and kissed it.

‘I love you, Isobel,’ he said.

The vial of water responded with a flash of light of such intensity Martin had to close his eyes. Once again, Martin lifted the vial of water above his head and began to move forwards. His progress was much easier than before and he seemed to cover the ground towards the tree with increasing speed as though he was gliding across the ground. The girl appeared at his side again.

‘What are you going to do when you get there, Martin?’ Her child’s voice had been replaced by something that sounded full of anger and spite.

‘I’ll know when I get there,’ he said as he lowered his hand and moved his hand towards the girl.

‘He’ll know when he gets there,’ she said in an impossibly deep guttural voice before running away from the glare of the light as Martin brought his hand towards her.

As the young girl Isobel had encountered when she first arrived in this dark place finished talking, a wall of darkness approached them with frightening speed. Isobel stood erect to face whatever was approaching. The darkness had suddenly stopped and out of the shadows, a beautiful woman wearing peasant clothes walked. She had long blonde hair and the tight bodice of her dress did little to conceal the cleavage that strained the coarse material.

The temperature around Isobel began to plummet as the woman approached. She seemed untroubled by the biting cold that surrounded her. Isobel heard a soft gentle voice in her head speaking in a strange language.

‘Tere Isobel. Minu nimetama Vasilisa.’

At first, the words meant nothing to Isobel. Slowly the meaning formed in her mind, ‘Good evening, Isobel. My name is Vasilisa.’

The woman moved effortlessly towards Isobel and the cold intensified as she came near.

‘What do you want with me?’ Isobel asked.

‘You have to die,’ said the woman simply.

Isobel found her arms clamped to her side by a force she could not resist and as she tried to move, she felt herself lifted off her feet and towards the tree. A smell like rotting flesh surrounded her as she felt her back press against the bark of the tree through its ivy covering.

Her arms were suddenly pulled from her sides and the movement made her cry out with pain. Something tight bound itself around her wrists and arms and Isobel couldn’t move. Her feet were around six feet from the ground and the pressure exerted on her upper body by the force of being suspended in such a way was huge. Isobel couldn’t breathe properly and she wondered how long she could remain conscious in such a position.

Isobel could see the light approaching across the barren landscape from where she hung suspended against the tree. Somehow, she knew it was Martin and her heart was gladdened by the thought that he was coming to help her.

As Martin approached the tree, a beautiful woman began walking towards him. She stopped a few yards away and Martin felt more than heard the voice in his head.

‘You were warned, Martin. You cannot save her.’

‘Who are you?’ Martin shouted out loud, as he struggled against the voice in his head.

‘My name is Vasilisa,’ the reply came hissing into his head.

‘Why are you doing this?’ shouted Martin.

Suddenly Martin found himself in a clearing in a forest and he somehow knew that he was watching a replay of something that had happened years before. As he watched, two men brought a young woman into the clearing and threw her onto the floor before pushing a large branch under her arms and lashing her hands behind her back. One of the men slapped the woman across the face then moved towards her and took hold of her long blond hair. He dragged her to her feet and then pushed her backwards against one of the trees at the edge of the clearing.

Taking a knife from his belt he sliced the girl’s dress from the bottom of the skirt to the top of the bodice and pulled it away from her body, leaving her exposed. The second man tried to pull him away but he turned and struck the first man knocking



him to the floor. The girl tried to run but her bound hands, the branch under her arms and her shredded dress made escape impossible, and the man easily caught her. He dragged her back into the clearing and roughly ripped the remains of her clothing from her body leaving her naked.

The second man again tried to stop his companion but his efforts were useless. The man knocked him to the ground again before kicking him in the stomach and rendering him helpless. Turning back to the girl the man unfastened his trousers and cruelly raped and sodomised her. When he had finished he tied a rope around each end of the branch under her arms. Throwing the rope over one of the higher branches the man pulled the rope until the girl was dragged to her feet and suspended off the ground against the tree. The pressure on her shoulders and arms must have been unbearable thought Martin.

Somehow, Martin heard what the man said to the girl as the words whispered across time.

‘Do you renounce the foul blessings of Nikita Minin?’ he said, holding his lips close to the girl’s ear. She turned towards him and spat in his face. The man wiped the spittle from his cheek and then calmly drew his knife across the side of the girl’s neck severing her jugular. Martin turned his face away but something forced his head back and made him watch as the girl died. The man who had been rendered helpless was now on his knees, it looked as though he was praying. Again, Martin heard the words as they echoed across time.

‘You were a part of this, Vladimir, never forget that.’

The man took the girl’s body and dragged her to the lake’s edge where he threw her and her torn clothes into a small boat. The man gathered some large rocks from the lakeside and added these to the bottom of the boat before pushing the small craft out into the water. Once out on the lake he placed the rocks in the remains of the girl’s clothes and after tying, the bundle to her feet cast her body into the lake. The heavy rocks tied to her feet quickly took her beneath the water. The last sight the man had of her as she sank was of her long blonde hair drifting in the water as though it were being blown by the wind.

‘Now you know why she must die,’ said the voice inside Martin’s head as he once more found himself back in the monochrome world facing the blonde woman.

‘Why does Isobel have to suffer? She never did anything to you?’ pleaded Martin.

‘She is the last of the Stefanoviches and that is why,’ whispered the voice.

Martin lifted the vial of water above his head and started to walk towards the woman. The light blazed from his hand and the woman began to retreat then vanished. Martin reached the tree and almost recoiled from the stench that assailed his nostrils as he came close to it. Isobel raised her hand from where it rested against her chest. The pain in her arms was excruciating and she could hardly breathe.

‘Martin,’ she gasped as she faded in and out of consciousness, ‘I can’t breathe! Please get me down from here.’

Martin tried to see how Isobel was secured to the tree but the ivy hid her arms and hands and he could see nothing. She was out of his reach and he wondered frantically what he was going to do. There was nothing for it Martin slipped the vial of water into his pocket and took hold of the foul-smelling plant as he pulled himself upwards. The illumination in the surrounding landscape had returned to the pallid grey colour it was before Martin had taken the vial of water from his pocket. The leaves he held onto were oily and slippery and they left a thick black residue on his hands that smelled intolerably bad and burned his skin.

As Martin reached to grasp another clump of leaves, he felt a stabbing pain in his shoulders as a pair of black claw like hands gripped him and dragged him from the tree. The claw like hands cut cruelly into his flesh and he shouted out in pain as he fell. He landed on his back at the base of the tree and all the wind was knocked out of him.

As Martin struggled to get his breath, a dark figure hunched over him and its rank fetid breath clogged his nostrils. A dark hand as cold as ice closed around his throat. Martin felt his head begin to spin as his brain was starved of oxygen. Using the last reserves of his strength Martin reached into his pocket. Miraculously the small glass vial had remained unbroken after his fall to the hard earth and he dragged the vial of water from his pocket. The sudden brilliant illumination caused the dark figure hunched over Martin to scream but it did not relax its grip. Martin kicked and struggled with all his might and suddenly he was free. He managed to get to his feet and stared at the figure in front of him. The black creature he had been fighting had disappeared and the beautiful blonde girl once more stood in front of him. She looked towards Martin and smiled.

‘You are too late, Martin! The curse is fulfilled.’

Martin fell to his knees with an anguished cry that echoed across the dark landscape. Slowly the image of the blonde girl faded until it vanished. Martin remained on his knees sobbing. Eventually he looked up at the still figure of Isobel hanging motionless against the tree.

Martin got to his feet and began to pull himself up through the polluted ivy on the tree. He lifted Isobel’s chin and checked her pulse but he already knew it was a pointless gesture she was dead. Martin managed to free Isobel’s hands and lower her body to the ground. Martin sat on the hard ground next to Isobel and held her hand as tears ran unchecked down his cheeks.

VARNEY THE VAMPIRE ascribed to Thomas Preskett Prest

CHAPTER XL.

THE POPULAR RIOT.—SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S DANGER.—THE SUGGESTION AND ITS RESULTS.

Such, then, were the circumstances which at once altered the whole aspect of the affairs, and, from private and domestic causes of very deep annoyance, led to public results of a character which seemed likely to involve the whole country-side in the greatest possible confusion.

But while we blame Mr. Chillingworth for being so indiscreet as to communicate the secret of such a person as Varney the vampyre to his wife, we trust in a short time to be enabled to show that he made as much reparation as it was possible to make for the mischief he had unintentionally committed. And now as he struggled onward—apparently onward—first and foremost among the rioters, he was really doing all in his power to quell that tumult which superstition and dread had raised.

Human nature truly delights in the marvellous, and in proportion as a knowledge of the natural phenomena of nature is restricted, and unbridled imagination allowed to give the rein to fathomless conjecture, we shall find an eagerness likewise to believe the marvellous to be the truth.

That dim and uncertain condition concerning vampyres, originating probably as it had done in Germany, had spread itself slowly, but insidiously, throughout the whole of the civilized world.

In no country and in no clime is there not something which bears a kind of family relationship to the veritable vampyre of which Sir Francis Varney appeared to be so choice a specimen.

The ghoul of eastern nations is but the same being, altered to suit habits and localities; and the sema of the Scandinavians is but the vampyre of a more primitive race, and a personification of that morbid imagination which has once fancied the probability of the dead walking again among the living, with all the frightful insignia of corruption and the grave about them.

Although not popular in England, still there had been tales told of such midnight visitants, so that Mrs. Chillingworth, when she had imparted the information which she had obtained, had already some rough material to work upon in the minds of her auditors, and therefore there was no great difficulty in very soon establishing the fact.

Under such circumstances, ignorant people always do what they have heard has been done by some one else before them and in an incredibly short space of time the propriety of catching Sir Francis Varney, depriving him of his vampyre-like existence, and driving a stake through his body, became not at all a questionable proposition.

Alas, poor Mr. Chillingworth! as well might he have attempted King Canute's task of stemming the waves of the ocean as that of attempting to stop the crowd from proceeding to Sir Francis Varney's house.

His very presence was a sort of confirmation of the whole affair. In vain he gesticulated, in vain he begged and prayed that they would go back, and in vain he declared that full and ample justice should be done upon the vampyre, provided popular clamour spared him, and he was left to more deliberate judgment.

Those who were foremost in the throng paid no attention to these remonstrances while those who were more distant heard them not, and, for all they knew, he might be urging the crowd on to violence, instead of deprecating it.

Thus, then, this disorderly rabble soon reached the house of Sir Francis Varney and loudly demanded of his terrified servant where he was to be found.

The knocking at the Hall door was prodigious, and, with a laudable desire, doubtless, of saving time, the moment one was done amusing himself with the ponderous knocker, another seized it; so that until the door was flung open by some of the bewildered and terrified men, there was no cessation whatever of the furious demands for admittance.

"Varney the vampyre—Varney the vampyre!" cried a hundred voices. "Death to the vampyre! Where is he? Bring him out. Varney the vampyre!"

The servants were too terrified to speak for some moments, as they saw such a tumultuous assemblage seeking their master, while so singular a name was applied to him. At length, one more bold than the rest contrived to stammer out,—

"My good people, Sir Francis Varney is not at home. He took an early breakfast, and has been out nearly an hour."

The mob paused a moment in indecision, and then one of the foremost cried,—

"Who'd suppose they'd own he was at home? He's hiding somewhere of course; let's pull him out."

"Ah, pull him out—pull him out!" cried many voices. A rush was made into the hall and in a very few minutes its chambers were ransacked, and all its hidden places carefully searched, with the hope of discovering the hidden form of Sir Francis Varney.

The servants felt that, with their inefficient strength, to oppose the proceedings of an assemblage which seemed to be unchecked by all sort of law or reason, would be madness; they therefore only looked on, with wonder and dismay, satisfied certainly in their own minds that Sir Francis would not be found, and indulging in much conjecture as to what would be the result of such violent and unexpected proceedings.

Mr. Chillingworth hoped that time was being gained, and that some sort of indication of what was going on would reach the unhappy object of popular detestation sufficiently early to enable him to provide for his own safety.

He knew he was breaking his own engagement to be present at the duel between Henry Bannerworth and Sir Francis Varney, and, as that thought recurred to him, he

dreaded that his professional services might be required on one side or the other; for he knew, or fancied he knew, that mutual hatred dictated the contest; and he thought that if ever a duel had taken place which was likely to be attended with some disastrous result, that was surely the one.

But how could he leave, watched and surrounded as he was by an infuriated multitude—how could he hope but that his footsteps would be dogged, or that the slightest attempt of his to convey a warning to Sir Francis Varney, would not be the means of bringing down upon his head the very danger he sought to shield him from.

In this state of uncertainty, then, did our medical man remain, a prey to the bitterest reflections, and full of the direst apprehensions, without having the slightest power of himself to alter so disastrous a train of circumstances.

Dissatisfied with their non-success, the crowd twice searched the house of Sir Francis Varney, from the attics to the basement; and then, and not till then, did they begin reluctantly to believe that the servants must have spoken the truth.

"He's in the town somewhere," cried one. "Let's go back to the town."

It is strange how suddenly any mob will obey any impulse, and this perfectly groundless supposition was sufficient to turn their steps back again in the direction whence they came, and they had actually, in a straggling sort of column, reached halfway towards the town, when they encountered a boy, whose professional pursuit consisted in tending sheep very early of a morning, and who at once informed them that he had seen Sir Francis Varney in the wood, half way between Bannerworth Hall and his own home.

This event at once turned the whole tide again, and with renewed clamours, carrying Mr. Chillingworth along with them, they now rapidly neared the real spot, where, probably, had they turned a little earlier, they would have viewed the object of their suspicion and hatred.

But, as we have already recorded, the advancing throng was seen by the parties on the ground, where the duel could scarcely have been said to have been fought; and then had Sir Francis Varney dashed into the wood, which was so opportunely at hand to afford him a shelter from his enemies, and from the intricacies of which—well acquainted with them as he doubtless was,—he had every chance of eluding their pursuit.

The whole affair was a great surprise to Henry and his friends, when they saw such a string of people advancing, with such shouts and imprecations; they could not, for the life of them, imagine what could have excited such a turn out among the ordinarily industrious and quiet inhabitants of a town, remarkable rather for the quietude and steadiness of its population, than for any violent outbreaks of popular feeling.

"What can Mr. Chillingworth be about," said Henry, "to bring such a mob here? has he taken leave of his senses?"

"Nay," said Marchdale; "look again; he seems to be trying to keep them back, although ineffectually, for they will not be stayed."

"D——e," said the admiral, "here's a gang of pirates; we shall be boarded and carried before we know where we are, Jack."

"Ay ay, sir," said Jack.

"And is that all you've got to say, you lubber, when you see your admiral in danger? You'd better go and make terms with the enemy at once."

"Really, this is serious," said Henry; "they shout for Varney. Can Mr. Chillingworth have been so mad as to adopt this means of stopping the duel?"

"Impossible," said Marchdale; "if that had been his intention, he could have done so quietly, through the medium of the civil authorities."

"Hang me!" exclaimed the admiral, "if there are any civil authorities; they talk of smashing somebody. What do they say, Jack? I don't hear quite so well as I used."

"You always was a little deaf," said Jack.

"What?"

"A little deaf, I say."

"Why, you lubberly lying swab, how dare you say so?"

"Because you was."

"You slave-going scoundrel!"

"For Heaven's sake, do not quarrel at such a time as this!" said Henry; "we shall be surrounded in a moment. Come, Mr. Marchdale, let you and I visit these people, and ascertain what it is that has so much excited their indignation."

"Agreed," said Marchdale; and they both stepped forward at a rapid pace, to meet the advancing throng.

The crowd which had now approached to within a short distance of the expectant little party, was of a most motley description, and its appearance, under many circumstances, would cause considerable risibility. Men and women were mixed indiscriminately together, and in the shouting, the latter, if such a thing were possible, exceeded the former, both in discordance and energy.

Every individual composing that mob carried some weapon calculated for defence, such as flails, scythes, sickles, bludgeons, &c., and this mode of arming caused them to wear a most formidable appearance; while the passion that superstition had called up was strongly depicted in their inflamed features. Their fury, too, had been excited

by their disappointment, and it was with concentrated rage that they now pressed onward.

The calm and steady advance of Henry and Mr. Marchdale to meet the advancing throng, seemed to have the effect of retarding their progress a little, and they came to a parley at a hedge, which separated them from the meadow in which the duel had been fought.

"You seem to be advancing towards us," said Henry. "Do you seek me or any of my friends; and if so, upon what errand? Mr. Chillingworth, for Heaven's sake, explain what is the cause of all this assault. You seem to be at the head of it."

"Seem to be," said Mr. Chillingworth, "without being so. You are not sought, nor any of your friends?"

"Who, then?"

"Sir Francis Varney," was the immediate reply.

"Indeed! and what has he done to excite popular indignation? of private wrong I can accuse him; but I desire no crowd to take up my cause, or to avenge my quarrels."

"Mr. Bannerworth, it has become known, through my indiscretion, that Sir Frances Varney is suspected of being a vampyre."

"Is this so?"

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob. "Down with the vampyre! hurrah! where is he? Down with him!"

"Drive a stake through him," said a woman; "it's the only way, and the humanest. You've only to take a hedge stake and sharpen it a bit at one end, and char it a little in the fire so as there mayn't be no splinters to hurt, and then poke it through his stomach."

The mob gave a great shout at this humane piece of advice, and it was some time before Henry could make himself heard at all, even to those who were nearest to him.

When he did succeed in so doing, he cried, with a loud voice,—

"Hear me, all of you. It is quite needless for me to inquire how you became possessed of the information that a dreadful suspicion hangs over the person of Sir Francis Varney; but if, in consequence of hearing such news, you fancy this public demonstration will be agreeable to me, or likely to relieve those who are nearest or dearest to me from the state of misery and apprehension into which they have fallen, you are much mistaken."

"Hear him, hear him!" cried Mr. Marchdale; "he speaks both wisdom and truth."

"If anything," pursued Henry, "could add to the annoyance of vexation and misery we have suffered, it would assuredly be the being made subjects of every-day gossip, and every-day clamour."

"You hear him?" said Mr. Marchdale.

"Yes, we does," said a man; "but we comes out to catch a vampyre, for all that."

"Oh, to be sure," said the humane woman; "nobody's feelings is nothing to us. Are we to be woke up in the night with vampyres sucking our bloods while we've got a stake in the country?"

"Hurrah!" shouted everybody. "Down with the vampyre! where is he?"

"You are wrong. I assure you, you are all wrong," said Mr. Chillingworth, imploringly; "there is no vampyre here, you see. Sir Francis Varney has not only escaped, but he will take the law of all of you."

This was an argument which appeared to stagger a few, but the bolder spirits pushed them on, and a suggestion to search the wood having been made by some one who was more cunning than his neighbours, that measure was at once proceeded with, and executed in a systematic manner, which made those who knew it to be the hiding-place of Sir Francis Varney tremble for his safety.

It was with a strange mixture of feeling that Henry Bannerworth waited the result of the search for the man who but a few minutes before had been opposed to him in a contest of life or death.

The destruction of Sir Francis Varney would certainly have been an effectual means of preventing him from continuing to be the incubus he then was upon the Bannerworth family; and yet the generous nature of Henry shrank with horror from seeing even such a creature as Varney sacrificed at the shrine of popular resentment, and murdered by an infuriated populace.

He felt as great an interest in the escape of the vampyre as if some great advantage to himself had been contingent upon such an event; and, although he spoke not a word, while the echoes of the little wood were all awakened by the clamorous manner in which the mob searched for their victim, his feelings could be well read upon his countenance.

The admiral, too, without possessing probably the fine feelings of Henry Bannerworth, took an unusually sympathetic interest in the fate of the vampyre; and, after placing himself in various attitudes of intense excitement, he exclaimed,—

"D—n it, Jack, I do hope, after all, the vampyre will get the better of them. It's like a whole flotilla attacking one vessel—a lubberly proceeding at the best, and I'll be hanged if I like it. I should like to pour in a broadside into those fellows, just to let them see it wasn't a proper English mode of fighting. Shouldn't you, Jack?"

"Ay, ay, sir, I should."



"Shiver me, if I see an opportunity, if I don't let some of those rascals know what's what."

Scarcely had these words escaped the lips of the old admiral than there arose a loud shout from the interior of the wood. It was a shout of success, and seemed at the very least to herald the capture of the unfortunate Varney.

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Henry, "they have him."

"God forbid!" said Mr. Marchdale; "this grows too serious."

"Bear a hand, Jack," said the admiral: "we'll have a fight for it yet; they sha'n't murder even a vampyre in cold blood. Load the pistols and send a flying shot or two among the rascals, the moment they appear."

"No, no," said Henry; "no more violence, at least there has been enough—there has been enough."

Even as he spoke there came rushing from among the trees, at the corner of the wood, the figure of a man. There needed but one glance to assure them who it was. Sir Francis Varney had been seen, and was flying before those implacable foes who had sought his life.

He had divested himself of his huge cloak, as well as of his low slouched hat, and, with a speed which nothing but the most absolute desperation could have enabled him to exert, he rushed onward, beating down before him every obstacle, and bounding over the meadows at a rate that, if he could have continued it for any length of time, would have set pursuit at defiance.

"Bravo!" shouted the admiral, "a stern chase is a long chase, and I wish them joy of it—d——e, Jack, did you ever see anybody get along like that?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You never did, you scoundrel."

"Yes, I did."

"When and where?"

"When you ran away off the sound."

The admiral turned nearly blue with anger, but Jack looked perfectly imperturbable, as he added,—

"You know you ran away after the French frigates who wouldn't stay to fight you."

"Ah! that indeed. There he goes, putting on every stitch of canvass, I'll be bound."

"And there they come," said Jack, as he pointed to the corner of the wood, and some of the more active of the vampyre's pursuers showed themselves.

It would appear as if the vampyre had been started from some hiding-place in the interior of the wood, and had then thought it expedient altogether to leave that retreat, and make his way to some more secure one across the open country, where there would be more obstacles to his discovery than perseverance could overcome. Probably, then, among the brushwood and trees, for a few moments he had been again lost sight of, until those who were closest upon his track had emerged from among the dense foliage, and saw him scouring across the country at such headlong speed. These were but few, and in their extreme anxiety themselves to capture Varney, whose precipitate and terrified flight brought a firm conviction to their minds of his being a vampyre, they did not stop to get much of a reinforcement, but plunged on like greyhounds in his track.

"Jack," said the admiral, "this won't do. Look at that great lubberly fellow with the queer smock-frock."

"Never saw such a figure-head in my life," said Jack.

"Stop him."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The man was coming on at a prodigious rate, and Jack, with all the deliberation in the world, advanced to meet him; and when they got sufficiently close together, that in a few moments they must encounter each other, Jack made himself into as small a bundle as possible, and presented his shoulder to the advancing countryman in such a way, that he flew off it at a tangent, as if he had run against a brick wall, and after rolling head over heels for some distance, safely deposited himself in a ditch, where he disappeared completely for a few moments from all human observation.

"Don't say I hit you," said Jack. "Curse yer, what did yer run against me for? Sarves you right. Lubbers as don't know how to steer, in course runs agin things."

"Bravo," said the admiral; "there's another of them."

The pursuers of Varney the vampyre, however, now came too thick and fast to be so easily disposed of, and as soon as his figure could be seen coursing over the meadows, and springing over road and ditch with an agility almost frightful to look upon, the whole rabble rout was in pursuit of him.

By this time, the man who had fallen into the ditch had succeeded in making his appearance in the visible world again, and as he crawled up the bank, looking a thing of mire and mud, Jack walked up to him with all the carelessness in the world, and said to him,—

"Any luck, old chap?"

"Oh, murder!" said the man, "what do you mean? who are you? where am I? what's the matter? Old Muster Fowler, the fat crowner, will set upon me now."

"Have you caught anything?" said Jack.

"Caught anything?"

"Yes; you've been in for eels, haven't you?"

"D—n!"

"Well, it is odd to me, as some people can't go a fishing without getting out of temper. Have it your own way; I won't interfere with you;" and away Jack walked.

The man cleared the mud out of his eyes, as well as he could, and looked after him with a powerful suspicion that in Jack he saw the very cause of his mortal mishap: but, somehow or other, his immersion in the not over limpid stream had wonderfully cooled his courage, and casting one despairing look upon his begrimed apparel, and another at the last of the stragglers who were pursuing Sir Francis Varney across the fields, he thought it prudent to get home as fast he could, and get rid of the disagreeable results of an adventure which had turned out for him anything but auspicious or pleasant.

Mr. Chillingworth, as though by a sort of impulse to be present in case Sir Francis Varney should really be run down and with a hope of saving him from personal violence, had followed the foremost of the rioters in the wood, found it now quite impossible for him to carry on such a chase as that which was being undertaken across the fields after Sir Francis Varney.

His person was unfortunately but ill qualified for the continuance of such a pursuit, and, although with the greatest reluctance, he at last felt himself compelled to give it up.

In making his way through the intricacies of the wood, he had been seriously incommoded by the thick undergrowth, and he had accidentally encountered several miry pools, with which he had involuntarily made a closer acquaintance than was at all conducive either to his personal appearance or comfort. The doctor's temper, though, generally speaking, one of the most even, was at last affected by his mishaps, and he could not restrain from an execration upon his want of prudence in letting his wife have a knowledge of a secret that was not his own, and the producing an unlooked for circumstance, the termination of which might be of a most disastrous nature.

Tired, therefore, and nearly exhausted by the exertions he had already taken, he emerged now alone from the wood, and near the spot where stood Henry Bannerworth and his friends in consultation.

The jaded look of the surgeon was quite sufficient indication of the trouble and turmoil he had gone through, and some expressions of sympathy for his condition were dropped by Henry, to whom he replied,—

"Nay, my young friend, I deserve it all. I have nothing but my own indiscretion to thank for all the turmoil and tumult that has arisen this morning."

"But to what possible cause can we attribute such an outrage?"

"Reproach me as much as you will, I deserve it. A man may prate of his own secrets if he like, but he should be careful of those of other people. I trusted yours to another, and am properly punished."

"Enough," said Henry; "we'll say no more of that, Mr. Chillingworth. What is done cannot be undone, and we had better spend our time in reflection of how to make the best of what is, than in useless lamentation over its causes. What is to be done?"

"Nay, I know not. Have you fought the duel?"

"Yes; and, as you perceive, harmlessly."

"Thank Heaven for that."

"Nay, I had my fire, which Sir Francis Varney refused to return; so the affair had just ended, when the sound of approaching tumult came upon our ears."

"What a strange mixture," exclaimed Marchdale, "of feelings and passions this Varney appears to be. At one moment acting with the apparent greatest malignity; and another, seeming to have awakened in his mind a romantic generosity which knows no bounds. I cannot understand him."

"Nor I, indeed," said Henry; "but yet I somehow tremble for his fate, and I seem to feel that something ought to be done to save him from the fearful consequences of popular feeling. Let us hasten to the town, and procure what assistance we may: but a few persons, well organised and properly armed, will achieve wonders against a desultory and ill-appointed multitude. There may be a chance of saving him, yet, from the imminent danger which surrounds him."

"That's proper," cried the admiral. "I don't like to see anybody run down. A fair fight's another thing. Yard arm and yard arm—stink pots and pipkins—broadside to broadside—and throw in your bodies, if you like, on the lee quarter; but don't do anything shabby. What do you think of it, Jack?"

"Why, I means to say as how if Varney only keeps on sail as he's been doing, that the devil himself wouldn't catch him in a gale."

"And yet," said Henry, "it is our duty to do the best we can. Let us at once to the town, and summons all the assistance in our power. Come on—come on!"

His friends needed no further urging, but, at a brisk pace, they all proceeded by the nearest footpaths towards the town.

It puzzled his pursuers to think in what possible direction Sir Francis Varney expected to find sustenance or succour, when they saw how curiously he took his flight across the meadows. Instead of endeavouring, by any circuitous path, to seek the shelter of his own house, or to throw himself upon the care of the authorities of the town, who must, to the extent of their power, have protected him, he struck across the fields, apparently without aim or purpose, seemingly intent upon nothing but to distance his pursuers in a long chase, which might possibly tire them, or it might not, according to their or his powers of endurance.

We say this seemed to be the case, but it was not so in reality. Sir Francis Varney had a deeper purpose, and it was scarcely to be supposed that a man of his subtle genius, and, apparently, far-seeing and reflecting intellect, could have so far overlooked the many dangers of his position as not to be fully prepared for some such contingency as that which had just now occurred.

Holding, as he did, so strange a place in society—living among men, and yet possessing so few attributes in common with humanity—he must all along have felt the possibility of drawing upon himself popular violence.

He could not wholly rely upon the secrecy of the Bannerworth family, much as they might well be supposed to shrink from giving publicity to circumstances of so fearfully strange and perilous a nature as those which had occurred amongst them. The merest accident might, at any moment, make him the town's talk. The overhearing of a few chance words by some gossiping domestic—some ebullition of anger or annoyance by some member of the family—or a communication from some friend who had been treated with confidence—might, at any time, awaken around him some such a storm as that which now raged at his heels.

Varney the vampire must have calculated this. He must have felt the possibility of such a state of things; and, as a matter of course, politicly provided himself with some place of refuge.

After about twenty minutes of hard chasing across the fields, there could be no doubt of his intentions. He had such a place of refuge; and, strange a one as it might appear, he sped towards it in as direct a line as ever a well-spiced arrow flew towards its mark.

That place of refuge, to the surprise of every one, appeared to be the ancient ruin, of which we have before spoken, and which was so well known to every inhabitant of the county.

Truly, it seemed like some act of mere desperation for Sir Francis Varney to hope there to hide himself. There remained within, of what had once been a stately pile, but a few grey crumbling walls, which the hunted have would have passed unheeded, knowing that not for one instant could he have baffled his pursuers by seeking so inefficient a refuge.

And those who followed hard and fast upon the track of Sir Francis Varney felt so sure of their game, when they saw whither he was speeding, that they relaxed in their haste considerably, calling loudly to each other that the vampire was caught at last, for

he could be easily surrounded among the old ruins, and dragged from amongst its moss-grown walls.

In another moment, with a wild dash and a cry of exultation, he sprang out of sight, behind an angle, formed by what had been at one time one of the principal supports of the ancient structure.

Then, as if there was still something so dangerous about him, that only by a great number of hands could he be hoped to be secured, the infuriated peasantry gathered in a dense circle around what they considered his temporary place of refuge, and as the sun, which had now climbed above the tree tops, and dispersed, in a great measure, many of the heavy clouds of morning, shone down upon the excited group, they might have been supposed there assembled to perform some superstitious rite, which time had hallowed as an association of the crumbling ruin around which they stood.

By the time the whole of the stragglers, who had persisted in the chase, had come up, there might have been about fifty or sixty resolute men, each intent upon securing the person of one whom they felt, while in existence, would continue to be a terror to all the weaker and dearer portions of their domestic circles.

There was a pause of several minutes. Those who had come the fleetest were gathering breath, and those who had come up last were looking to their more forward companions for some information as to what had occurred before their arrival.

All was profoundly still within the ruin, and then suddenly, as if by common consent, there arose from every throat a loud shout of "Down with the vampyre! down with the vampyre!"

The echoes of that shout died away, and then all was still as before, while a superstitious feeling crept over even the boldest. It would almost seem as if they had expected some kind of response from Sir Francis Varney to the shout of defiance with which they had just greeted him; but the very calmness, repose, and absolute quiet of the ruin, and all about it, alarmed them, and they looked the one at the other as if the adventure after all were not one of the pleasantest description, and might not fall out so happily as they had expected.

Yet what danger could there be? there were they, more than half a hundred stout, strong men, to cope with one; they felt convinced that he was completely in their power; they knew the ruins could not hide him, and that five minutes time given to the task, would suffice to explore every nook and corner of them.

And yet they hesitated, while an unknown terror shook their nerves, and seemingly from the very fact that they had run down their game successfully, they dreaded to secure the trophy of the chase.

One bold spirit was wanting; and, if it was not a bold one that spoke at length, he might be complimented as being comparatively such. It was one who had not been foremost in the chase, perchance from want of physical power, who now stood forward, and exclaimed,—

"What are you waiting for, now? You can have him when you like. If you want your wives and children to sleep quietly in their beds, you will secure the vampyre. Come on—we all know he's here—why do you hesitate? Do you expect me to go alone and drag him out by the ears?"

Any voice would have sufficed to break the spell which bound them. This did so; and, with one accord, and yells of imprecation, they rushed forward and plunged among the old walls of the ruin.

Less time than we have before remarked would have enabled any one to explore the tottering fabric sufficient to bring a conviction to their minds that, after all, there might have been some mistake about the matter, and Sir Francis Varney was not quite caught yet.

It was astonishing how the fact of not finding him in a moment, again roused all their angry feelings against him, and dispelled every feeling of superstitious awe with which he had been surrounded; rage gave place to the sort of shuddering horror with which they had before contemplated his immediate destruction, when they had believed him to be virtually within their very grasp.

Over and over again the ruins were searched—hastily and impatiently by some, carefully and deliberately by others, until there could be no doubt upon the mind of every one individual, that somehow or somewhere within the shadow of those walls, Sir Francis Varney had disappeared most mysteriously.

Then it would have been a strange sight for any indifferent spectator to have seen how they shrunk, one by one, out of the shadow of those ruins; each seeming to be afraid that the vampyre, in some mysterious manner, would catch him if he happened to be the last within their sombre influence; and, when they had all collected in the bright, open space, some little distance beyond, they looked at each other and at the ruins, with dubious expressions of countenance, each, no doubt, wishing that each would suggest something of a consolatory or practicable character.

"What's to be done, now?" said one.

"Ah! that's it," said another, sententiously. "I'll be hanged if I know."

"He's given us the slip," remarked a third.

"But he can't have given us the slip," said one man, who was particularly famous for a dogmatical spirit of argumentation; "how is it possible? he must be here, and I say he is here."

"Find him, then," cried several at once.

"Oh! that's nothing to do with the argument; he's here, whether we find him or not."

One very cunning fellow laid his finger on his nose, and beckoned to a comrade to retire some paces, where he delivered himself of the following very oracular sentiment:—

"My good friend, you must know Sir Francis Varney is here or he isn't."

"Agreed, agreed."

"Well, if he isn't here it's no use troubling our heads any more about him; but, otherwise, it's quite another thing, and, upon the whole, I must say, that I rather think he is."

All looked at him, for it was evident he was big with some suggestion. After a pause, he resumed,—

"Now, my good friends, I propose that we all appear to give it up, and to go away; but that some one of us shall remain and hide among the ruins for some time, to watch, in case the vampyre makes his appearance from some hole or corner that we haven't found out."

"Oh, capital!" said everybody.

"Then you all agree to that?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very good; that's the only way to nick him. Now, we'll pretend to give it up; let's all of us talk loud about going home."

They did all talk loud about going home; they swore that it was not worth the trouble of catching him, that they gave it up as a bad job; that he might go to the deuce in any way he liked, for all they cared; and then they all walked off in a body, when, the man who had made the suggestion, suddenly cried,—

"Hilloa! hilloa!—stop! stop! you know one of us is to wait?"

"Oh, ay; yes, yes, yes!" said everybody, and still they moved on.

"But really, you know, what's the use of this? who's to wait?"

That was, indeed, a knotty question, which induced a serious consultation, ending in their all, with one accord, pitching upon the author of the suggestion, as by far the best person to hide in the ruins and catch the vampyre.

They then all set off at full speed; but the cunning fellow, who certainly had not the slightest idea of so practically carrying out his own suggestion, scampered off after them with a speed that soon brought him in the midst of the throng again, and so, with fear in their looks, and all the evidences of fatigue about them, they reached the town to spread fresh and more exaggerated accounts of the mysterious conduct of Varney the vampyre.

BRIGANDS OF THE MOON by Ray Cummings



## XVI

She came. I suppose it was no more than an hour: It seemed an eternity of apprehension. There was the slight hissing of the seal of my door. The panel slid. I had leaped from my bunk where in the darkness I was lying tense.

"Prince?" I did not dare say "Anita."

"Gregg."

Her voice. My gaze swept the deck as the panel opened. Neither Coniston nor anyone else was in sight, save Anita's dark-robed figure which came into my room.

"You got it?" I asked in a low whisper.

I held her for an instant, kissed her. But she pushed me away with quick hands. She was breathless.

"Yes, I have it. Give us a little light—we must hurry!"

In the blue dimness I saw that she was holding one of the Martian cylinders. The smaller size: it would paralyze but not kill.

"Only one, Anita?"

"Yes. And this—"

The invisible cloak. We laid it on my grid, and I adjusted its mechanism. I donned it and drew its hood, and threw on its current.

"All right, Anita?"

"Yes."

"Can you see me?"

"No." She had stepped back a foot or two. "Not from here. But you must let no one approach too close."

Then she came forward, put out her hand, fumbled until she found me.

It was our plan to have me follow her out. Anyone observing us would see only the robed figure of the supposed George Prince, and I would escape unnoticed.

The situation about the ship was almost unchanged. Anita had secured the weapon and the cloak and slipped away to my cubby without being observed.

"You're sure of that?"

"I think so, Gregg. I was careful."

Moa was now in the lounge, guarding the passengers. Hahn was asleep in the chart room. Coniston was in the turret. Coniston would be off duty presently, Anita said, with Hahn taking his place. There were lookouts in the forward and stern watch towers, and a guard upon Snap in the radio room.

"Is he inside the room, Anita?"

"Snap? Yes."

"No—the guard."

"The guard was sitting on the spider bridge at the door."

This was unfortunate. That guard could see all the deck clearly. He might be suspicious of George Prince wandering around: it would be difficult to get near enough to assail him. This cylinder, I knew, had an effective range of only some twenty feet.

"Coniston is the sharpest, Gregg. He will be the hardest to get near."

"Where is Miko?"

The brigand leader had gone below a few moments ago, down into the hull corridor. Anita had seized the opportunity to come to me.

"We can attack Hahn in the chart room first," I whispered. "And get the other weapons. Are they still there?"

"Yes. But the forward deck is very bright, Gregg."

We were approaching the asteroid. Already its light, like a brilliant moon, was brightening the forward deck space. It made me realize how much haste was necessary.

We decided to go down into the hull corridors. Locate Miko. Fell him and hide him. His nonappearance back on deck would very soon throw the others into confusion, especially now with our impending landing upon the asteroid. And, under cover of this confusion, we would try to release Snap.

We were ready. Anita slid my door open. She stepped through, with me soundlessly scurrying after her. The empty, silent deck was alternately dark with shadow patches and bright with blobs of starlight. A sheen of the Sun's corona was mingled with it; and from forward came the radiance of the asteroid's mellow silver glow.

Anita turned to seal my door; within my faintly humming cloak I stood beside her. Was I invisible in this light? Almost directly over us, close under the dome, the lookout sat in his little tower. He gazed down at Anita.

Amidships, high over the cabin superstructure, the radio room hung dark and silent. The guard on its bridge was visible. He too, looked down.

A tense instant. Then I breathed again. There was no alarm. The two guards answered Anita's gesture.

Anita said aloud into my empty cubby: "Miko will come for you presently, Haljan. He told me that he wants you at the turret controls to land us on the asteroid."

She finished sealing my door and turned away; started forward along the deck. I followed. My steps were soundless in my elastic-bottomed shoes. Anita swaggered with a noisy tread. Near the door of the smoking room a small incline passage led downward. We went into it.

The passage was dimly blue lit. We descended its length, came to the main corridor, which ran the length of the hull. A vaulted metal passage, with doors to the control rooms opening from it. Dim lights showed at intervals.

The humming of the ship was more apparent here. It drowned the light humming of my cloak. I crept after Anita; my hand under the cloak clutched the ray weapon.

A steward passed us. I shrank aside to avoid him.

Anita spoke to him. "Where is Miko, Ellis?"

"In the ventilator room, Miss. Prince. There was difficulty with the air renewal."

Anita nodded and moved on. I could have felled that steward as he passed me. Oh, if I only had, how different things might have been!

But it seemed needless. I let him go, and he turned into a nearby door which led to the galley.

Anita moved forward. If we could come upon Miko alone! Abruptly she turned and whispered, "Gregg, if other men are with him, I'll draw him away. You watch your chance."

What little things can overthrow one's careful plans! Anita had not realized how close to her I was following. And her turning so unexpectedly caused me to collide with her sharply.

"Oh!" She exclaimed it involuntarily. Her outflung hand had unwittingly gripped my wrist, caught the electrode there. The touch burned her, and short-circuited my robe. There was a hiss. My current burned out the tiny fuses.

My invisibility was gone! I stood, a tall, blackhooded figure, revealed to the gaze of anyone who might be near!

The futile plans of humans! We had planned so carefully! Our calculations, our hopes of what we could do, came clattering now in a sudden wreckage around us.

"Anita! Run!"

If I were seen with her, then her own disguise would probably be discovered. That above everything, would be disaster.

"Anita, get away from me! I must try it alone!"

I could hide somewhere, repair the cloak perhaps. Or, since now I was armed, why could not I boldly start an assault?

"Gregg, we must get you back to your cubby!" She was clinging to me in panic.

"No. You run! Get away from me! Don't you understand? George Prince has no business here with me! They'll kill you!"

"Gregg, let's get back to the deck."

I pushed at her, both of us in confusion.

From behind me there came a shout. That accursed steward! He had returned, to investigate perhaps what George Prince was doing in this corridor. He heard our voices. His shout in the silence of the ship sounded horribly loud. The white-cloaked shape of him was in the nearby doorway. He stood stricken with surprise at seeing me. And then turned to run.

I fired my paralyzing cylinder through my cloak. Got him! He fell. I shoved Anita violently.

"Run! Tell Miko to come—tell him you heard a shout. He won't suspect you!"

"But, Gregg—"

"You mustn't be found out. You're our only hope, Anita! I'll hide, fix the cloak, or get back to my cubby. We'll try again."

It decided her. She scurried down the corridor. I whirled the other way. The steward's shout might not have been heard.

Then realization flashed to me. That steward would be revived. He was one of Miko's men. He would be revived and tell what he had seen and heard. Anita's disguise would be revealed.

A cold-blooded killing, I do protest, went against me. But it was necessary. I flung myself upon him. I beat his skull with the metal of my cylinder.

I stood up. My hood had fallen back from my head. I wiped my bloody hands on my useless cloak. I had smashed the cylinder.

"Haljan!"

Anita's voice! A sharp note of horror and warning. I became aware that in the corridor, forty feet down its dim length, Miko had appeared with Anita behind him. His bullet projector was leveled. It spat at me. But Anita had pulled at his arm.

The explosive report was sharply deafening in the confined space of the corridor. With a spurt of flame the leaden pellet struck over my head against the vaulted ceiling.

Miko was struggling with Anita. "Prince, you idiot!"

"Miko, it's Haljan! Don't kill him—"

The turmoil brought members of the crew. From the shadowed oval near me they came running. I flung the useless cylinder at them. But I was trapped in the narrow passage.

I might have fought my way out. Or Miko might have shot me. But there was the danger that, in her horror, Anita would betray herself.

I backed against the wall. "Don't kill me! See, I will not fight!"

I flung up my arms. And the crew, emboldened and courageous under Miko's gaze, leaped on me and bore me down.

The futile plans of humans! Anita and I had planned so carefully. And in a few brief minutes of action it had come only to this!

MY MYSTICKAL CHILDE by Gavin Chappell

1

'How deep in t' earth are we?'

Osborne's voice came hoarsely through the gloom. Siân glanced up the tunnel towards him. The biker sounded as terrified as Nick, who was trembling right beside her.

'Didn't you guys say you've been down here already?' she asked scornfully.

They must have come a mile by now, mostly at a steep and slippery incline, their passage lit only by the fitful, dying light of Nick's pen-torch and Eloise's Zippo. To conserve these, their only sources of light, the travellers were frequently forced to traverse the tunnels in darkness, illuminating their descent every minute to make sure nothing untoward had happened.

'That's why I'm shit-scared,' Nick said, chewing absently on one of his dreadlocks. 'Aren't you?'

'No...' said Siân quietly. 'No.' She couldn't remember so much as going down Y Pwll Ddu mine, but the tunnels woke strange, atavistic memories within her. She was strangely happy here... At ease...

'I think we can rest,' Menyw boomed from up ahead. 'Eloise?'

A weak, flickering lighter flame illuminated the rock chamber that opened up ahead, revealing the druid, Hamish and Eloise beside them, holding the Zippo aloft.

She looked around doubtfully at the three tunnels that wound away from the cramped chamber.

‘Which way next?’ she murmured.

Menyw sat down gingerly on a projecting rock. He huffed and puffed and mopped his brow.

‘I think we can work that out when we’ve had a rest,’ he replied, as the others slithered up to sit with them.

‘Och, fuck that!’ Hamish snarled. The skinhead had been impatiently silent until then. ‘Ah want to get after ma spear. Where the fuck did those bawbags go?’

Osborne shook his head.

‘We couldn’t tell where Kohl and Anghelides went when they reached t’ bottom of t’ shaft,’ he said. There had been no sign of the black magician and the Neo-Nazi who were their quarry. ‘We don’t even know if we’re following t’ right tunnel.’

‘We are,’ said Siân involuntarily.

The rest turned to look at her. She gulped. Menyw smiled and nodded slightly.

‘Listen to Siân,’ he said. ‘She knows.’

‘How do you know?’ asked Nick, moving closer. ‘You said you’ve never been down here before!’

Siân felt confused and hid it in aggression.

‘Piss off, Scouser,’ she said, pushing him back. ‘I just know, okay? I... I think me mam came down here once.’

Eloise looked at her oddly.

‘Your mum?’ she asked. ‘What...?’

‘Quiet!’ Hamish barked, scowling towards the central tunnel.

‘You be quiet,’ Eloise snapped. ‘This is important. Siân, what’s this about your mother?’

The girl looked up and Eloise was startled to see her eyes glinting in the flickering Zippo light.

‘I think my da’ lives down here.’ The girl’s voice was choked.

‘Shut up, you stupid cow!’ Hamish shouted again. ‘And listen!’

That moment, Eloise’s Zippo went out.

‘Oh, hell,’ she said. She was about to relight it, when there was a rush of noise and she felt and smelt things swarming all around her.

There was a shout from Hamish, a slithering noise, a sudden scream... Something collided with Eloise’s tummy and she tumbled to the floor.

Silence descended. Eloise fumbled around for her lighter, which she’d dropped in her fall. Her hands scrabbled through the sticky mud.

‘Oh, I can’t find it!’ she said. ‘Nick! Your torch! I’ve lost my lighter.’

Her words echoed hollowly back at her. ‘Nick!’ she shouted. ‘Where are you?’

‘Where are you? ... are you? ... are you? ...Nick! Where are you? .... are you? .... are you.... Nick... ? ...’

Nick was running blind. The words seemed to come from the rock around him. Distorted, but undeniably Eloise, her voice thick with fear. She sounded lost and frightened.

Join the club, he thought grimly to himself. The things in the darkness never seemed to let up, but padded after him relentlessly, however fast he sped. Where had the others run to? He had taken the left hand path, swarming down it like a weasel, not looking back. Maybe that was his biggest mistake.

‘...Oh Goddess! ...-ess!... !...’

Eloise’s shriek echoed and re-echoed through the tunnels for long after her voice had died away. Nick’s heart beat fast as he fled down the slippery passage. What had happened to her? Why did she say no more? What had happened?

What had happened?

A distant roar of water became audible as he slithered down the winding tunnel; it echoed like Eloise’s voice and drowned out any other sound. Nick cursed his pursuers.

Abruptly, he turned a corner and the roar of tumbling water was immediately ahead. His feet splashed in shallow water. He staggered to a halt, feeling like Bilbo Baggins in the tunnels of the goblins. But the goblins were pursuing him - and what lay ahead? An underground river?

Tentatively, he produced his pen-torch. In its dim glow, a staggering vista opened up before him.

A rock roof curved high overhead and wide waters reflected it below, stretching away on either side and far ahead into the darkness. The waters swirled and rushed past the shore where Nick stood. His torch’s light was feeble, but he was sure that he would see no further shore to the vast subterranean river even with a maglight.

And the roar of the giant waterfall, though distant, was deafening.

Nick was still staring in wonder at the underground river when the Little People caught up with him.

‘A dead end!’ Hamish panted from up ahead.

‘Hell!’ Osborne swore, skidding to a halt. ‘Frigg ‘n’ Hell! Who’s with us? Anyone?’

‘Nobody here but us druids,’ said Menyw. ‘But I think the pursuit has died off.’

‘Och, where’s Eloise?’ Hamish shouted. ‘We need light. Hasn’t anyone got a Zippo? Menyw, you’re supposed to be Merlin the fucking Magician, aren’t you? Cannie you do something?’

‘Oh, very well,’ Menyw said after a pause.

A warm, honey-like glow suffused the darkness of the narrow tunnel, revealing Hamish standing angrily beside a dead end, Osborne blinking in the middle and Menyw, his right hand the centre of the golden glow.

‘If you could have done that before, why did you let Eloise waste her fuel, you Welsh wizard?’ Osborne asked angrily.

‘And even if the pursuit has died off,’ Hamish growled, ‘it only means they’re not after us. What about the others?’

The druid and the biker exchanged glances. The skinhead was right.

Where were Siân and Nick and Eloise?

‘Nick!’ said Eloise in delight, as the crustie entered her rock-walled cell. Then her face fell, at a glimpse of his captors. ‘Then they got you as well.’

The silent troglodytes slammed shut the rough gate, a wickerwork of overworld flotsam and jetsam, and marched off into the darkness.

‘It’s them Tylwyth Teg again,’ Nick said, ‘like we met in the mines.’ He slumped down next to Eloise.

‘This must be their home,’ she murmured, ‘deep in the bowels of the earth.’

‘It does stink, doesn’t it,’ Nick replied.

The two teenagers exchanged long, wide-eyed glances.

‘What happened to the others?’ Eloise murmured.

‘What’s gonna happen to us?’ Nick replied.

Eloise bit her lip. ‘I don’t know,’ she replied. ‘Nick, I’m... scared.’

‘Come here,’ Nick said awkwardly. He put his arms around her. ‘You’re scared. I’m just glad the place stinks so much. I’m shitting myself.’ Eloise gave a muffled laugh.

‘No, really I am,’ said Nick. Eloise went suddenly quiet. ‘Only kidding,’ Nick added. ‘Honest.’

In the glow of Menyw’s light, the galleries and passages were transformed into things of wonder: tunnels as narrow as a needles opened out into chambers so high that the roof was lost in the darkness above; wide passageways contracted rapidly into holes that would deter anyone less skinny than a supermodel; steep slopes ended abruptly at chasms spanned by narrow natural bridges, if the wanderers were lucky. Often they would have to turn back and find another route. It was Osborne who finally had the courage to admit what the other two were afraid of.

‘We’re lost, aren’t we?’ he said, as they paused in a narrow passageway. ‘We’ve seen neither hide nor hair of t’others, or of Kohl and Anghelides. We must’ve come miles. We don’t know what’s happened to Eloise or Siân, or Nick. T’ Little People have got them, that’s what I reckon.’

‘Aye,’ said Hamish dolefully. ‘If only we knew where they were.’ He looked at Menyw.

‘Don’t glower at me,’ the druid replied. ‘I’m not a miracle-maker.’

‘You said you were Merlin in a former life,’ Hamish growled.

‘I said no such thing!’ Menyw replied. ‘I said...’

‘Don’t fucking deny it,’ Hamish replied. ‘Not that Ah believed you. You’re just some auld chanty rastler who took too much acid in the sixties. Don’t think we believed awe that keek. And now ye’ve got us lost underground. Och, we’ll never get oota here, you auld keech! And it’s awe your fault!’

He lunged at the druid. Menyw tumbled backwards. Osborne jumped between the two of them.

‘That’s enough, lads,’ he said. ‘Break it up. We’re in enough trouble as it is!’

‘Fuck off, English keech!’ Hamish growled. ‘What are you, with yer Viking gods? You’re no less of a Nazi than Kohl!’

‘That’s fresh, coming from a skinhead!’ Osborne replied, glaring at him. ‘Scot-Nazi!’

‘Children, children,’ Menyw remonstrated. ‘We mustn’t fall to bickering among ourselves. Remember Arthur and Mordred.’

‘Ah cannie say Ah do,’ Hamish replied. ‘But you’re right, you daft auld wizard.’ He turned to Osborne, who shrugged and reached forward to grip him by the wrist.

‘Comrades,’ he said, ‘if not friends.’

Hamish shook Osborne’s hand; then shook his own head.

‘Friends,’ he replied. ‘We have a common enemy.’

‘How dare you!’ said a voice from the shadows. ‘Common, indeed! You Scotch oik!’ They turned to see an animated corpse standing in the entrance to the cavern.

‘And besides, what makes you so sure we’re enemies?’ Anghelides added.



The wickerwork gate creaked open. Eloise and Nick looked up as three of their captors entered. They stared at the Tylwyth Teg in amazement. This was the first time they had got a chance to study the creatures in any kind of light.

The leader, the first to appear, was a black-haired little man, about three foot high and very stout, with what appeared to be a severe case of acne on his mottled, slightly Mongoloid features. Dark, reptilian eyes as black as buttons darted from one captive to the other. He directed his two companions forward.

These bore a family resemblance to their leader, but both seemed thinner and younger. Their green shellsuits and red baseball caps added to this impression. Unlike the leader, whose garments were old, tattered and homespun, the two youths wore clothes that had been the height of fashion four or five years ago. But the glitter of their hate-filled eyes and the primitive spears with which they jabbed Nick and Eloise to their feet suggested this apparent sophistication was barely skin-deep.

The leader said something in a language that sounded like Welsh and strode out. The two youths prodded Nick and Eloise to follow. As they left the cell, the two travellers exchanged glances.

‘Fuckin’ scally midgets!’ Nick said.

‘Where did they get those clothes?’ Eloise added wryly. ‘Fashion disaster, 1989!’

‘So, what you’re saying,’ Osborne said, looking gingerly at the half-flayed, half-burnt black magician, ‘is that because Tybalt Kohl seized the Spear and left you for dead, we should join forces?’

‘How do we know we can trust you?’ Menyw asked gravely.

‘We cannie trust the manky bawbag,’ Hamish broke in.

Samaël Anghelides turned his skinless face towards the Scot.

‘I realise I’m not at my best like this,’ he wheezed, ‘but if you could keep the personal remarks to a minimum. Besides, who burnt my house down around my ears?’

Hamish shrugged. ‘Ah’m still not countin’ on trustin’ ye.’

‘Let us see it as a rogue’s alliance,’ Anghelides chuckled, his larynx visibly vibrating. ‘We both wish to stop Kohl reaching Agartha and bringing the Spear to the Cauldron of Rebirth, do we not?’

‘First I heard about it,’ Osborne replied.

‘Ah just want ma fuckin’ spear back,’ added Hamish.

‘Yes,’ Menyw said, ignoring his companions. ‘You are right, Anghelides.’

The other two turned to him. ‘Is he?’ asked Osborne. He looked thoughtful. ‘The Cauldron of Rebirth... Agartha...’

‘How’s he gonna do that?’

‘Using his own knowledge of the mystic arts of the occult,’ said Anghelides, with a sneer in his dry voice, ‘Kohl has achieved an alliance with some of the stunted, degenerate denizens of these tunnels. In return for certain items, they have agreed to assist him in his descent of the vast waterfall that plunges deep into the underground Sea of Valusia and beyond to the oceans of the Hollow Earth. In the midst of those interior seas lies the citadel of Agartha, where the Cauldron of Rebirth is to be found.’

‘Then the Little People who ambushed us are Kohl’s allies?’ asked Osborne. He shuddered. ‘Eloise and the others may be in their hands even now...’

CARMILLA by J. Sheridan LeFanu

XIV

The Meeting

"My beloved child," he resumed, "was now growing rapidly worse. The physician who attended her had failed to produce the slightest impression on her disease, for such I then supposed it to be. He saw my alarm, and suggested a consultation. I called in an abler physician, from Gratz.

Several days elapsed before he arrived. He was a good and pious, as well as a learned man. Having seen my poor ward together, they withdrew to my library to confer and discuss. I, from the adjoining room, where I awaited their summons, heard these two gentlemen's voices raised in something sharper than a strictly philosophical discussion. I knocked at the door and entered. I found the old physician from Gratz maintaining his theory. His rival was combating it with undisguised ridicule, accompanied with bursts of laughter. This unseemly manifestation subsided and the altercation ended on my entrance.

"Sir," said my first physician, "my learned brother seems to think that you want a conjuror, and not a doctor."

"Pardon me," said the old physician from Gratz, looking displeased, "I shall state my own view of the case in my own way another time. I grieve, Monsieur le General, that by my skill and science I can be of no use.

Before I go I shall do myself the honor to suggest something to you."

"He seemed thoughtful, and sat down at a table and began to write.

Profoundly disappointed, I made my bow, and as I turned to go, the other doctor pointed over his shoulder to his companion who was writing, and then, with a shrug, significantly touched his forehead.

"This consultation, then, left me precisely where I was. I walked out into the grounds, all but distracted. The doctor from Gratz, in ten or fifteen minutes, overtook me. He apologized for having followed me, but said that he could not conscientiously take his leave without a few words more. He told me that he could not be mistaken; no natural disease exhibited the same symptoms; and that death was already very near. There remained, however, a day, or possibly two, of life. If the fatal seizure were at once arrested, with great care and skill her strength might possibly return. But all hung now upon the confines of the irrevocable. One more assault might extinguish the last spark of vitality which is, every moment, ready to die.

"And what is the nature of the seizure you speak of?" I entreated.

"I have stated all fully in this note, which I place in your hands upon the distinct condition that you send for the nearest clergyman, and open my letter in his presence, and on no account read it till he is with you; you would despise it else, and it is a matter of life and death. Should the priest fail you, then, indeed, you may read it.'

"He asked me, before taking his leave finally, whether I would wish to see a man curiously learned upon the very subject, which, after I had read his letter, would probably interest me above all others, and he urged me earnestly to invite him to visit him there; and so took his leave.

"The ecclesiastic was absent, and I read the letter by myself. At another time, or in another case, it might have excited my ridicule. But into what quackeries will not people rush for a last chance, where all accustomed means have failed, and the life of a beloved object is at stake?

"Nothing, you will say, could be more absurd than the learned man's letter.

It was monstrous enough to have consigned him to a madhouse. He said that the patient was suffering from the visits of a vampire! The punctures which she described as having occurred near the throat, were, he insisted, the insertion of those two long, thin, and sharp teeth which, it is well known, are peculiar to vampires; and there could be no doubt, he added, as to the well-defined presence of the small livid mark which all concurred in describing as that induced by the demon's lips, and every symptom described by the sufferer was in exact conformity with those recorded in every case of a similar visitation.

"Being myself wholly skeptical as to the existence of any such portent as the vampire, the supernatural theory of the good doctor furnished, in my opinion, but another instance of learning and intelligence oddly associated with some one hallucination. I was so miserable, however, that, rather than try nothing, I acted upon the instructions of the letter.

"I concealed myself in the dark dressing room, that opened upon the poor patient's room, in which a candle was burning, and watched there till she was fast asleep. I stood at the door, peeping through the small crevice, my sword laid on the table beside me, as my directions prescribed, until, a little after one, I saw a large black object, very ill-defined, crawl, as it seemed to me, over the foot of the bed, and swiftly spread itself up to the poor girl's throat, where it swelled, in a moment, into a great, palpitating mass.

"For a few moments I had stood petrified. I now sprang forward, with my sword in my hand. The black creature suddenly contracted towards the foot of the bed, glided over it, and, standing on the floor about a yard below the foot of the bed, with a glare of skulking ferocity and horror fixed on me, I saw Millarca. Speculating I know not what, I struck at her instantly with my sword; but I saw her standing near the door, unscathed. Horrified, I pursued, and struck again. She was gone; and my sword flew to shivers against the door.

"I can't describe to you all that passed on that horrible night. The whole house was up and stirring. The specter Millarca was gone. But her victim was sinking fast, and before the morning dawned, she died."

The old General was agitated. We did not speak to him. My father walked to some little distance, and began reading the inscriptions on the tombstones; and thus occupied, he strolled into the door of a side chapel to prosecute his researches. The General leaned against the wall, dried his eyes, and sighed heavily. I was relieved on hearing the voices of Carmilla and Madame, who were at that moment approaching. The voices died away.

In this solitude, having just listened to so strange a story, connected, as it was, with the great and titled dead, whose monuments were moldering among the dust and ivy round us, and every incident of which bore so awfully upon my own mysterious case--in this haunted spot, darkened by the towering foliage that rose on every side, dense and high above its noiseless walls--a horror began to steal over me, and my heart sank as I thought that my friends were, after all, not about to enter and disturb this triste and ominous scene.

The old General's eyes were fixed on the ground, as he leaned with his hand upon the basement of a shattered monument.

Under a narrow, arched doorway, surmounted by one of those demoniacal grotesques in which the cynical and ghastly fancy of old Gothic carving delights, I saw very gladly the beautiful face and figure of Carmilla enter the shadowy chapel.

I was just about to rise and speak, and nodded smiling, in answer to her peculiarly engaging smile; when with a cry, the old man by my side caught up the woodman's hatchet, and started forward. On seeing him a brutalized change came over her features. It was an instantaneous and horrible transformation, as she made a crouching step backwards. Before I could utter a scream, he struck at her with all his force, but she dived under his blow, and unscathed, caught him in her tiny grasp by the wrist. He struggled for a moment to release his arm, but his hand opened, the axe fell to the ground, and the girl was gone.

He staggered against the wall. His grey hair stood upon his head, and a moisture shone over his face, as if he were at the point of death.

The frightful scene had passed in a moment. The first thing I recollect after, is Madame standing before me, and impatiently repeating again and again, the question, "Where is Mademoiselle Carmilla?"

I answered at length, "I don't know--I can't tell--she went there," and I pointed to the door through which Madame had just entered; "only a minute or two since."

"But I have been standing there, in the passage, ever since Mademoiselle Carmilla entered; and she did not return."

She then began to call "Carmilla," through every door and passage and from the windows, but no answer came.

"She called herself Carmilla?" asked the General, still agitated.

"Carmilla, yes," I answered.

"Aye," he said; "that is Millarca. That is the same person who long ago was called Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. Depart from this accursed ground, my poor child, as quickly as you can. Drive to the clergyman's house, and stay there till we come. Begone! May you never behold Carmilla more; you will not find her here."