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Weird Tales

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A romantic and intriguing
tale of witchcraft

By

SEABURY QUINN



ALGERNON BLACKWOOD • ROBERT E. HOWARD

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

As 'Twas Told to Me

By SEABURY QUINN

*'A fascinating tale of romance and witchcraft in Puritan New England,
and the fate of a lovely red-haired girl in
that superstitious age*

"I know not how the truth may be:
I tell the tale as 'twas told to me."
—*Bret Harte.*

Proem

TWENTY miles from Boston, only nine or ten from Salem as the highway runs, you'll find the place. Burned in the white pine plank that hangs beside the gateway is the legend: "Ye Wishing Welle," and from this purposefully quaint orthography you may be led to think it just another roadside "Tea Shoppe"—until you see the garden. There, behind a hedge of knotty-fingered pear trees, are the beds of phlox and marigold and zinnias, the sweet alyssum, columbine and love-lies-bleeding. In the rustic arbor purple Concords ripen in the sun, and where the climbing roses mask the barkless trunk of a dead tree the stone-curbed well that gives the place its name is ringed around with circle after circle of wild pansy-violets called heartsease.

The house bears out the promise of the garden. As you eat clam chowder made with milk, bacon cooked with country cream and scrod so fresh that you can almost taste the salt of sea spray on it, you look around the big low-ceilinged room and read the history of New England culture. There is a spinning-wheel, of course, and several pieces of mahogany which would be worth a fortune at the antique dealers' in New York, some Persian rugs, a Chinese lacquer highboy, blue

china old and fragile as a dream, a Java print blocked in the years when Washington and Jefferson were lads. A flintlock musket hangs against the wall above the fireplace and over it a broadsword from the days of Cromwell's Ironsides. Everywhere are souvenirs of times when Yankee clippers made the Stars and Stripes an emblem known in every bay and estuary of the seven seas, when iron men in wooden ships set out on year-long voyages to bring back tea and pepper, silk, sinament and cloves; sometimes to carry powder, shot and muskets to the Arabs of the slave coast and fetch back cargoes of black ivory for the southern cotton and tobacco fields.

If you have eaten at Ye Wishing Welle enough times to acquire the status of a steady patron, and if you go out there to lunch some afternoon when tourist traffic isn't heavy, Miss Norton the proprietress may find time to exchange a little gossip with you. If she does, you'll have your education broadened. Every stick and bit of furniture and decoration in the house is tied up with the history of the Norton family, and of Massachusetts. The flintlock on the wall was carried by her father's great-grandfather when the Minute Men turned back the Redcoats at Breed's Hill; the broadsword flashed at Naseby when Ironton's regiment broke Prince Rupert's charge; that bit of Java print was brought home by her great-aunt's husband, Joseph Eaton, whose whaling-vessel had been blown out

of its course—perhaps, even, she'll tell you of the days when the old wishing-well was newly dug, of Mary Popham and her phantom lover, and the shadow which eclipsed the Colony of Massachusetts Bay when the Powers of Darkness spread their spike-set wings across the sun.

"Mary Popham," says Miss Norton, "was a very pretty girl, and"—her little, thin-lipped mouth will prim down at the corners as she hesitates, for this is an accolade not lightly to be laid on any

woman's shoulder by one whose family tree's roots strike deeply in New England's soil—"and, I think, a very good one. . . ."

1

THE April sun was up four hours as Mary Popham walked along the Salem Road toward Goody Upsall's cottage. Spring had come early to the colony, and along the creekside willow branches were already showing little tips



"As he toppled backward a horrifying sentence echoed in his inward ear: 'You have shed the blood of innocence, and God will repay you with blood!'"

of green, while in the roadside woods, still bare, but making promise of an early leafage, a robin and his wife were flying all a-twitter as they searched for straws and twigs to build their nest. Judged by any standards Mary Popham was a very pretty girl. She was of medium height with fair, smooth skin, red hair that seemed to have been spun from gold alloyed with copper, gray eyes that in some lights looked green, and small, clear features. Even in her homespun gown of slate-gray linsey-woolsey and her loose leaf-brown cloak of woolen stuff the beauty of her figure was apparent, and the linen cap that hugged her head as tightly as the cupule of an acorn clasps the nut, could not obscure the fact that her bright hair was crinkled into little glistening curls which needed only momentary freedom to run rippling down her back and shoulders in a flashing knee-length cataract. On Sabbath Day when she sat in the meeting-house to hear the Reverend Butler thunder forth the warning of Jehovah's awful wrath or read homilies to heaven disguised (but not too heavily) as prayers, it was to the small Titian curls that clustered at her neck and ears that the young men's eyes went straying, and more times than one the tithing-man's stout stick had come down on the luckless yokels' polls to bring their wandering attention back to the pleasant prospect of assured damnation and the dreadful pains of everlasting torment rather than the contemplation of Mistress Mary's aureate ringlets. She had a way of walking with her small chin tilted up which more than once had brought her admonition from the elders of the congregation, and when she stepped it was with swinging, lovely grace.

A hanaper of plaited willow filled with new-baked bread wrapped in a linen napkin swung in her left hand; in the crook of her right arm she bore a crock

of milk chilled in the well since yestereve, for Goody Upsall was afflicted with the rheumatism, infirm, half blind and nearly toothless, and the meager living she eked out by gathering simples and compounding nostrums was scarce enough to keep her crumbling roof above her head. The leavened bread and rich, sweet milk would be as great a boon to her as quail and manna had been to the wandering Hebrew children in the wilderness.

"Good morrow! 'Morrow, pretty maid!" Goody Upsall bobbed a creaking curtsy as Mary thrust the gate back with her foot and crossed the little patch of herb-garden that stretched before the door. "There's a good Christian maid, come to bring a poor old woman food. Ay, ay, my pretty one, heaven will requite ye for your charity, never fear. Sit down, dearie"—she motioned to the bench beside the door—"sit down and visit with old Mother Upsall. It's famished that I am for human company these days, for everyone has turned against me, and the ones who used to come to me for herbs and simples come no more; the goodwife walks across the way from me; the boys fling stones whenever I come into view." Her wrinkle-withered lips began to twitch and her bristle-studded chin to tremble as she wiped her rheumy eyes upon her cuff. "Alas, alack, woe me!" she sniveled.

MARY put the bread and milk down on the doorside bancal and looked at the old woman with compassion. The slow, scant tears of age seemed somehow much more pitiful than the easy freshets of young grief. "Why do they treat you thus despitely?" she asked.

The beldame sniffed and drew her sleeve across her face again. "They say I get my cunning from the Evil One, and it's a wicked lie! When Goodman Kempthorn lay sick o' the quaking fever,

who was it cured him when the doctors and the leeches—ay, and Deacon Prowder and the Reverend Butler with their prayin', too!—had failed and gave him up for lost? 'Twas I, old Goody Upsall, did it with my cinquefoil, my saxifrage and pennyroyal. And did they pay me for't? Nay, not they! 'Tis Satan's handiwork, not simple herbs, that done it,' quoth the leeches, and, 'Like as not she laid the sickness on him by her wicked arts, then did but seem to cure with herbs when she took off the spell!' the deacon said, and so they bade me go my ways without a penny's pay or even a civil word o' thanks, and count myself as lucky that they did not speak against me for a witch."

"But that was wicked!" Mary flushed with indignation. "Even if you did use Satan's help—and that I don't believe—the work you did was good. You cured him of his ailment, and they'd promised you a guerdon. 'Twas dishonest to entreat you so!"

The old crone's head wagged back and forth as if it had been set upon a rocker. "Ay, ay, dearie, you say truth," she answered in a piping treble, "but there's none as will take up for poor old Mother Upsall nowadays. Deacon Prowder do be wanting I should sell him my poor house and garden plot for forty shillings, and——"

"Sell your home for forty shillings? But that would scarce buy bread a twelvemonth, and where would you be sheltered with no roof above your head?"

"Why, in the poorhouse, dearie."

"But we have no poorhouse in the parish——"

"Ay, but we have. God's resting-place for all His weary creatures. Have ye not seen it in the shadow o' the meeting-house?"

Mary's gray-green eyes seemed almost emerald as they opened wide in sudden

horror. "That shall not be! 'Twould be a scandal and disgrace to all the neighborhood—ah, the pretty things!" Her indignation broke upon an exclamation of delight as Bessie, Goody Upsall's brindle tabby, stalked soft-footed from the house followed by four wobbly-legged progeny. She scooped the foremost kitten up and held it in her hands, where, after giving her a moment's wide-eyed stare of feline appraisal, it curled itself into a furry ball, dropped lids across its almost sky-blue eyes, and straightway purred itself to sleep. Meanwhile Bessie circled Mary's ankles, rubbed ears and whiskers on the rough wool of her stockings, and having decided she was one who could be trusted, dropped down on the border of her russet woolen cape, turned on her side and proceeded to give nourishment to the three remaining kittens.

A look that was almost akin to tenderness came upon old Goody Upsall's age- and trouble-hardened features as she gazed upon the young girl with the kitten in her lap. "Wouldst like to have it for thine own?" she asked. "It is a pretty thing, and seems to love the touch of your soft hands."

Mary raised the small gray furry ball and held it to her face, where it rested quietly a moment, then with a plaintive little mew thrust out a quarter-inch of coral tongue and licked her lightly on the tiny nevus-mole that rested like a natural beauty patch just where the line of her small pointed chin sloped from her cheek. "Oh, I should love to have him—see, he seems to love me better than his mother, already——"

A cough, half forced, half reflex, interrupted her as the lengthened shadow of a man fell on the doorstep. "Good morrow, Mistress Popham, morrow, Goodwife Upsall," greeted Deacon Simon Prowder.

Mary neither moved nor spoke, but her

eyes appeared more green than ever as she surveyed the deacon and his hired man, John Wharton, with the sort of look she might have bestowed on a pair of slugs found lurking in her currant bushes.

Goody Upsall was upon her splay-boned feet, bowing and bobbing with obsequious hospitality. "Good morrow, Deacon, good morrow, Goodman Wharton, prithee come and set here i' the sun," she brushed the doorside settle with the hem of her dress. "'Tis overwarm for such an early day in April, is it not? I do not think that ever I have seen the sun so bright and warm."

With a motion of his brogan Deacon Prowder swept the nursing cat and kittens from his way and dropped down on the bancal beside Mary.

"Have you thought well on that of which I spake to you last Sabbath, Mistress Popham?" he demanded softly. "'Twould be an enviable thing for you, for even if I be not young I am a man of substance, having lands and goods, and right much worship in the congregation—nay, put the little cat-thing by and hear me——" he stretched a hand out to remove the kitten from her lap and she turned a shoulder to him, hugging the small beast against her gown.

"I do not wish to put the cat away," she answered. "He loves me and I love him. We are content with each other. Why should I exchange? He will not have me spin and weave and sew and bake, or bear him children, or look after those my predecessors bore——"

"Silence, girl!" Amazed and shocked, the deacon rose and towered over her. "This talk is unbecoming to a Christian maid. Get you to your house and think upon the duty which you owe to God and to His ministers. I would talk privately with Goodwife Upsall."

The cold fury in the outraged Bessie's

eyes was neither colder nor more furious than that which blazed in Mary Popham's green-eyed stare as she arose and faced him. "If I go it is because I find my own—and my cat's—company better to my liking than I can find yours, and not because you bid me leave!" She dropped the vestige of a curtsy. "Your servant, sir! Good morrow, Goody Upsall, Goodman Wharton." She drew her cloak around her and, straight-shouldered as a soldier on parade, walked through the little dooryard and up the dusty Salem Road.

2

MARY POPHAM lived alone. Her cottage was well-built and roofed with cedar shingles, with a wide stone chimney and a cellar under all, a garden plot where cabbages and pumpkins, melons, corn and turnips grew abundantly, and before it a small space where columbine and marigold, harebells, phlox and loves-lies-bleeding showed bright colors. Almost at her back door the great Atlantic rolled, now placid as a playful house-cat, now turbulent as a devouring lion, but always with a note of friendship in its voice, even when it raged most wildly. Between the ocean and the house her father had delved for a spring, and struck it less than twelve feet down. Then he had walled the well with fieldstone and curbed it with a waist-high parapet and set the sweep above it, and round the curb her mother—Irish-born, but Protestant for love of Daniel Popham who had come with Cromwell to despoil and lost his heart to Kathleen Nolan—had set a circling bed of wild pansy-violets called heartsease.

Mary's early training had been different from the training other village children had. She learned the Scriptures, as was seemly for a Christian child, but in-

stead of having fear of God drilled in her she was taught to think of Him as an all-understanding, loving father, and in the evening when the rushlights burned, the verses which were read from the great book were oftener of Jesus and the works of pitying-kindness that He wrought than of the all-consuming wrath and vengeance of the Lord Jehovah. Sometimes, too, her mother told them stories of the Little People who lived in the hollow mountain and came out upon the earth to dance and sing and play the pipes and fiddle in the moonlight, or of the prankish leprechauns who would pay you a king's ransom if you caught them unawares. Sometimes—very softly, lest the godly neighbors hear—she sang them olden Irish songs, tunes with the tang of peat-smoke and the salt of tears in them, or quick-paced, lilting ditties which went as quickly to the feet as the whisky of her homeland mounted to the head.

Mary even had a poppet, a thing of rags with crudely painted face and worsted hair gathered in a linen cap which was a miniature of Mary's own, and a gray, full-skirted gown of linsey-woolsey. A crude, unlovely thing it was, but the darling of her infant heart, and more than once its features had to be renewed when Mary's fervent, oft-repeated kisses wore them dim. She had heard her mother tell of dolls the little girls played with in Ireland, and set her heart on having one, but in all the shops of Massachusetts Bay there was no doll, nor anyone who had the hardihood to offer one for sale. Life was brief and real and very earnest, and the God of Vengeance and of Battles would not hold him guiltless who dared fritter it away with vanities. Christmas was a Popish feast day, not to be observed in any way on pain of strictest discipline, but on Christmas Eve her mother took her to the snow-capped well-curb and bade her toss a penny in the al-

most frozen water glinting in the moonlight.

"Arrah, asthore, 'tis a wishin'-well the night," she declared. "Toss in your penny, turn about and make a wish, and whatever 'tis ye wish for—if so be 'tis nothing wicked—will surely come to pass."

Mary dropped the coin into the well and watched the curling ripples widen till they washed against the stones in little waves, then pivoted three times and cried out in a childish treble: "I wish I had a poppet for my own, to love me and to sleep in bed with me!"

"Whist, child, would ye have the tithing-man—bad cess to him an' all his kind!—come down on us, that ye do be spakin' out so loud?" her mother asked, then gathered Mary in her arms and rocked her to and fro. "Oh, mavourneen, 'tis a cold, cruel sky we're livin' under, and colder, crueller men we're livin' 'midst!" She clasped the small girl closer to her bosom, and: "It's a heavy price I'm payin' for the love I bear ye, Daniel Popham," she whispered toward the house where Mary's father waited, "but"—her clasp was suddenly hysterically tight—"Mary Mother witness that I pay it willin'."

Next morning Mary found the poppet gazing at her from the top of a long stocking hanging by the fireplace, and there was goose with herbs and roasted roots to eat at noontime. For the first time Mary was beset by heresy. If celebrating Jesus' birthday was so pleasant, why should it be a wicked thing to do, and if the Papists worshipped Him and kept his day so joyfully, were they truly wicked and irrevocably damned for all eternity—even little Papist girls, whose mothers doubtless gave them poppets, too?

At school she found a barrier between her and her horn-bookmates. Children

hate and persecute the nonconformist as bitterly as do their elders, and Mary was the only red-haired pupil in the class. But she did not suffer insult meekly, and when her fists and nails and teeth, no less than acid wit, left battle-scars upon her persecutors the school-ma'am cast the final vote, with Mary always in the wrong. For sauciness she had to wear a cleft twig on her tongue, the rattan was her daily portion, her schoolroom crown the dunce-cap.

One day a little band of friendly Indians walked down the village street, just as the pupils issued forth. Of the round-eyed stares and half-jeering, half-affrighted words the children cast at them they took no notice, but of Mary they took instant and respectful observation. One by one they went to her and laid their hands upon her glowing hair. Awed and frightened, the youngsters watched in silence, for these were savages whose fathers had swept down like a plague on the colonists, and the Indian scalping-knife was still a menace in the border settlements. But when the leader of the party pointed to the small girl's fiery thatch and announced gutturally, "She Great Spirit's friend, she child of Sun God!" their fear was turned to shouts of wild derision. Still, a certain fear ran through the malice of the taunts they flung at her . . . what sort of white child was it who was singled out as one apart by wild men of the woods?

Her name, too, was against her. In Boston, Salem, and the larger towns were many girls named Mary, but in all the settlement of Fairtown she was the only one so called. In her class were Prudence, Charity and Helpful, even Bide-the-Coming-of-the-Lord-with-Patience and Plentiful-in-All-Good-Works. But Mary! Mary was a *saint*. The Papists set her near—some even said upon—the very throne of God. To be called after her was

little better than to be a follower of prelaty oneself.

So Mary trod a lonely path through childhood, finding comfort in her parents and amusement in the little games she made up for herself.

When the plague swept through the colony and her mother was among the stricken, a wailing as of all the northern winds together sounded at the window in the dead of night. "Danny, darlin', Mary, asthore, 'tis the banshee keenin' for me," whispered the sick woman. "I'll not be seein' the sunrise tomorrow, and I'm askin' that ye'll take Itself out of the box behint the door and bring it to me. I'm a weak and sinful woman, so I am, and I'd make me peace with heaven, if so be I can. . . ."

"Nay, beloved, 'tis the wailing of the wind, perhaps a wolf made bold by hunger creeping near the settlement," her husband comforted, but the wailing grew and swelled until it seemed a woman screamed in labor at the very window-sill, and when Mary went to fetch her mother's little leather treasure chest from its place beside the built-in oven she paused and put her eye against the loop-hole in the puncheon shutter.

WITH mouth pressed close against the bottle-glass that glazed the window leant a woman, fair of hair and white of face, violet-eyed and ruddy-lipped. Her mouth was opened wide, showing the hard line of white teeth gleaming pearl-pale in the night, and from her lips there came a steady-mounting cry, first low-moaning like a cat that seeks his leman in the night, then rising like the wind that sweeps the capes when the ocean is in torment, rising . . . rising to a howl, and lifting from a howl to a thin shriek, then sinking gradually again until it was no louder than the whimper of a child that dreams a fearsome dream.

The woman seemed in grief unbearable, and yet . . . was it a woman standing at the window? The floor was two feet higher than the ground outside, and Mary stood upon the oven step to peer out through the loophole; yet the face looked at her eye to eye, the shadowy fair hair blew and floated round the pale thin cheeks—and under it there was no neck.

Mary started back affrighted, then took courage. There was no menace—only sorrow—in the cry the phantom woman raised, and the violet-irised eyes that looked at her were sad, yet somehow comforting. "It is the wind that moans around the ingle," she said softly as she bent and took the leather casket from its hiding-place.

Inside the box were Kathleen Popham's few mementoes of her home across the sea, a sprig of hawthorn, dried and withered, a packet of the letters Daniel wrote her in their courtship days, a wisp of hair clipped from her mother's head as she lay in her winding-sheet; finally, beneath them all for greater secrecy, a crucifix no longer than her little finger, so tiny that the ivory body fixed with nails against the blackwood rood was shorter than a darning-needle, and hardly more in girth.

The dying woman pressed the little cross against her lips and murmured a brief prayer: "*Sancta Maria, mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostræ. . .*" Finally: "Danny, darlin', stand furninst me, with the candlelight upon you, so your face will be the last thing that——" Kathleen Popham's soul went out upon the sigh that broke her farewell to the man for whom she forsook kin and faith and country.

When they buried Kathleen in a grave beside the meeting-house only Mary and her father knew that underneath the woolen winding-sheet a crucifix was

clasped in the pale hands that crossed the quiet bosom.

Daniel Popham outlived Kathleen by a scant two years, and when they had consigned him to his grave Mary found herself the heiress to his house and land, two cows, numerous ducks and chickens and two hundred golden Sovereigns minted with the symbol of King James' majesty. She lacked for nothing, for her skill at linen-spinning made her handiwork a merchantable quality, and her fowls and cows were also money-makers. Serenely, self-contained, she lived and worked and worshipped at the meeting-house, and when suitors cast sheep's-eyes at her she met their overtures with gentle raillery or, sometimes, acid-sharp refusal. One trial was enough, and village lads went off to find some more complaisant maids, leaving her in peace.

All but Simon Prowder, farmer, merchant, deacon in the church and four times widower. When Mary refused him he pursed his lips as was his wont when he encountered obduracy in a horse or land trade, bowed, and went his ways, but not for long. Again and yet again he offered her his heart and hand, the overseership of his big house and guardianship of his ten children, one or two of whom were Mary's seniors. Last Sabbath Day he had informed her he must have her final answer in a sennight, and hinted that the answer must be favorable, else the consequences would be most unpleasant for her.

As Mary walked along the Salem Road that April morning she was more than ever strengthened in her resolution to have none of him. Instinctively she shrank from hurting others, but if Simon Prowder could not understand unless she lashed him with the sharp edge of her tongue, then lashed he would be, and so thoroughly that the memory of it would endure as long as he remembered any-

thing. Try to force old Goody Upsall to give him her house for forty shillings, would he? Kick an inoffensive cat and kittens from his path, would he? Tell her that he was a man of substance and respect, would he? Well, she had substance of her own, and the respect, if not the liking, of her neighbors. She needed none of him, and none of him she'd have. Some day, perhaps, a man whom she could love and honor and obey right willingly would come into her life; if so she'd gladly give her maiden heart to him; if not, then let her live alone, a maid unto her dying day.

3

SIMON PROWDER had not boasted idly when he called himself a man of worship. He had a pew well forward in the meeting-house, a cow-right on the common, and held a sergeancy in the militia. He had six well-worked farms besides some tracts of forest land, a pier and warehouse in the harbor; scarce a ship put out from Salem or Fairtown that he did not have a sharehold in her cargo. Had he lived today he would have been called a go-getter. Certainly, whenever he saw what he wanted he did not hesitate to go for it, and generally he got it. To those opposing him he showed no mercy; for those who were compliant he had nothing but contempt.

The land adjoining Goody Upsall's place had come to him at public cry when its owner had been banished from the colony for adherence to the Baptist heresy. With her small garden plot and cottage added to it he could split it into two plantations, each with a cottage for the tenant farmer. But he was not minded to pay overmuch for it. When he approached her with an offer she was stubborn with the stubbornness of age, refusing to consider any price for what her goodman left her at his death. "The

Lord forbid that I should give my heritage to you," she told him.

But what he could not have by direct assault Simon Prowder took by indirection. Accordingly, that morning after he had driven Mary off he made the aged goodwife a fine offer, twenty pine-tree shillings paid in hand at once for her property when she was dead. Meanwhile, the land was hers to occupy throughout her life. Goody Upsall had been widowed twenty years and had neither blood kin nor affinitive relations; hence her land would escheat to the colony upon her death. In the course of nature she could not live long, and if he bought reversion rights, he would not long be denied possession, while if the land reverted to the commonweath he would have to pay far more than twenty shillings to purchase it at public cry.

Now, with his deed signed, sealed and delivered, he strode home through the April dusk. Supper waited him, and family prayers and Scripture reading, then bed and pleasant dreams. Neither God nor man nor conscience could accuse him. He had not driven Goody Upsall from her land, he had but bought reversion of her freehold. He had not devoured the widow's house, his hands were clean.

Evening prayer was long drawn out at Deacon Prowder's, for there were many matters needing heaven's attention, and these must needs be pointed out with great particularity. But finally the prayer was over, and he turned the covers of his Bible back. It was his wont to let the book fall open as it would, for always Holy Writ had guidance for the devout, and the Lord would point the passage for his reading. The pages opened at the twenty-first chapter of the first Book of Kings. Deacon Prowder set his spectacles before his eyes and read aloud:

"And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, 'Give me thy vineyard that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house, and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it, or if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.'

"And Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.'

"And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth had spoken to him, and he laid him down upon his bed and turned away his face and would eat no bread.

"But Jezebel his wife came to him and said, 'Why is thy spirit sad, and why eatest thou no bread?'

"And he said unto her, 'Because I spake with Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, "Give me thy vineyard," and he answered, "I will not give thee my vineyard."'

"And Jezebel his wife said unto him, 'Arise and eat bread and let thy heart be merry, for I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.'

"So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letter, saying, "Proclaim a fast and set Naboth on high among the people.

"And set two men, sons of Belial, before him to bear witness against him saying, "Thou didst blaspheme God and the king." And then carry him out and stone him that he may die.'

"And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them."

4

MARY plunged her bucket in the wishing-well, then leant against the long sweep's butt to bring the dripping cask up. She had labored late that evening, for the cows had gone astray and when she brought them in their bags were full to dripping. Now the two five-gallon crocks were sunk to chill in the well's depths, the cows were haltered in their shed, the chickens fed, only fresh water in the kitchen ewer, and work was over for the day. Lazy fogs of leaf-smoke drifted slowly over the flat lands; all round her was the scent of spring burgeoning. Out of the Atlantic came the moon, scorched silver with a charcoal smear of cloud across its face. She in-

haled deeply as she poured the water from bucket to pitcher, and a psalm verse came unbidden to her lips. "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works . . ."

The clatter of shod hoofs upon the highway, a woman's voice in piping, querulous protest, then a little trail of dust which settled in the roadway as the cavalcade swept by.

"What is't?" Mary halted at her gateway and hailed a group of half-grown lads who trailed the horsemen, eyes alight with gleeful expectation.

"They've spoken Goody Upsall for a witch!" one of the urchins called across his shoulder. "'Twas Master Tittingwell, the marshal, and his posse, just rode by. They're taking her to Fairtown jail!"

5

THE crowd was packed so densely in the Fairtown meeting-house, the little building seemed like a kettle over-filled, then set a-boiling. Inside, the social strata of theocracy were carefully observed, deacons taking precedence of laymen, clerkly squire, substantial merchant and landed husbandman before the artizan and clown and jerry-workman. Outside at the stoep and on the village green the boiled-up dregs of the community had settled, yokels from the fields, improvident hangers-on from dock and waterfront and tavern, gangling, pimple-speckled hobbledehoys. A long oak table had been set upon the rostrum, and at it sat the magistrates with the Reverend Doctor Simeon Hollinshed, come all the way from Boston town to give the judges ghostly counsel. Master Tittingwell the marshal with his long sword girt upon him was in attendance on their worships, while the tithing-man and two members of the trained band armed with halberds stood as bailiffs to enforce the orders of the court.

"Bring in the prisoner," ordered Mr. Justice Proctor, and a long-drawn susuration followed as necks were craned and feet were scraped while the audience strained to glimpse old Goody Upsall herded down the aisle by two constables. Without the cane which had helped her faltering walk for more than ten years, bent with rheumatism till it seemed she had been born a hunchback, the old dame scarce could shuffle; if the constables had not supported her she could not have walked at all, for heavy fetters burdened down her withered arms, and iron gyves that weighed at least a stone were clamped about her ankles. And to the shackles of infirmity and metal, terror added crushing weight. It took no second glance to see that awful fear had gripped her by the throat and laid its icy hold upon her stomach till she was fairly palsied by it.

The clerk read the indictment, long, redundant, setting forth in complicated law-words her accusations of the heinous crime of witchcraft: ". . . that on divers days she wickedly and wilfully, not having fear of God before her eyes, but being led thereto by Satan, did overlook the cows of Japheth Brown, to wit, one brindle and one black female animal of *genus bos*, making them, the said cows, fail and refuse to give down milk . . . did wickedly and covetously bewitch the churn of Goodwife Gloyd, so that the butter would not come, maugre the industrious efforts of Goodwife Gloyd aforesaid . . . did keep and harbor a familiar spirit in the shape of a grimalkin, which imp, familiar or devilkin assisted her in working grievous wrongs, against the form of the statute in such case made and provided and against the peace and dignity of our lord the king."

With wagging head and fumbling hands the old dame heard the long indictment read, but when the clerk de-

manded how she pleaded her only answer was, "Let me pray! O, your worships, give me leave to pray!" The tears coursed down her wrinkled cheeks, and she would have clasped her gnarled old hands in supplication, but the constables on either side grasped her elbows in so tight a grip that she could not join them.

"We have not sent for you to hear you pray, but to determine your degree of guilt of the crimes which have been charged against you," answered Mr. Justice Proctor. "How do you plead to the indictment, guilty or not guilty?"

"Your worships, gentlemen, have mercy on a poor old woman! 'Fore God, I am no witch, nor did I ever hurt these people. I never did a mite o' harm to anyone. You know me, neighbors"—she swept her rheumy, presbyopic eyes across the double row of pews which held the twelve men who would bring a verdict in—"you, Goodman Hathorn, know I cured your daughter of the bloody flux, and you, Absalom Whitney, can testify I rid you of the scurvy. How did I do? By witchcraft, quotha? Nay, 'twas by the use of God's wild plants, the merits of which I learnt at my mother's knee——"

"Silence!" Mr. Justice Proctor interrupted. "How darest thou vaunt thy wicked cunning here in this appointed place of worship? How plead you to the accusation, guilty or not guilty?"

"Why, then, not guilty, if it please your worships."

So, issue being joined in lawful manner, Sarah Upsall stood upon her trial.

Witnesses were sworn. Japheth Brown, a tenant farmer on one of Deacon Prowder's plantations, told how his kine went dry the evening after Goody Upsall paused to pass the time of day across the wall that fenced his pasture. Butter would not come, despite her earnest labor, the afternoon that Goody Upsall stopped to beg a pottle of corn meal, swore

Goodwife Make-Ye-Ready-for-the-Bridegroom's-Coming Gloyd, wife of another tenant upon Deacon Prowder's land.

In those days nowhere in the world was one accused of felony permitted counsel, but English law required the judge to guard the prisoner's rights. Thus Mr. Justice Proctor carried out his sworn duty when he thundered: "I am content! Gentlemen of the jury, find ye not the prisoner guilty of the crimes alleged against her?"

Twelve heads were nodded in agreement, twelve voices chorused, "That we do."

"So say all of you?" the clerk intoned.

"So say we all of us," the answer came.

"Hast anything to say before the sentence of the law is passed?" asked Mr. Justice Proctor.

The poor old woman looked around as if she sought some avenue of physical escape. Finally, her roving, frightened gaze stopped at Simon Prowder, sitting in his Sabbath pew.

"Good neighbor Prowder," she besought, "will you not raise your voice in my behalf? You know full well I am no witch, but a poor old widow, friendless and afflicted with infirmities of age. But two weeks gone you called and paid me twenty silver shillings for my——"

"I did not know it, then!" Prowder's shout drowned out her quavering plea. "I thought you innocent, or never, as I love my soul's salvation, would I have set a foot within your gate. On the sworn word of these worthy folk and by the findings of the jurors, you're a wicked witch, a child of Satan and a burning brand in hell's consuming fire. Look not to me for testimony, sorceress!"

6

THE sun shone bright on Fairtown Common, and at the edges of the green there showed a glint of pinkish

white where pale arbutus blossoms broke their leafy prisons. The apple blows and plum buds swelled with promise of rich fruitage, birds sang and chirped in trees that showed a fringe of green against the somber brown of bark. But not in one tree. Neither tender leaf nor bulging bud nor twittering bird was on its gaunt, bare branch, but the two-ell length of rope tipped with a running-noose proclaimed the fruit it soon would bear.

The magistrates were grouped beneath the gallows tree, and with them Reverend Doctor Simeon Hollinshed, come all the way from Boston town to give them ghostly counsel. Against them, garbed in sober Sabbath best, the Reverend Butler stood surrounded by his deacons, grave of mien, but somewhat elated, too, for they were about to be admitted to the roll of those who proved their faith by works. Salem, less than ten miles distant, had already turned off half a dozen witches; thus far Fairtown had not hanged a single one.

A loud and formal crying at the common's border: "Make way; make way, there!" Then a roll of drums and the tramp of marching feet as the trained band's halberdiers and constables escorted Goody Upsall on her last brief walk.

No minister accompanied her, no voice read Scriptural consolation or recited valedictory prayers, for yesternight the Reverend Butler and his deacons had visited her in jail and read the awful doom of excommunication to her as she cowered in her cell. Debarred from heaven, hopelessly consigned to hell, she needed but the little walk, the little drop, the strangling tightening of the hangman's noose, to have her soul pass everlastingly to Satan's fiery furnaces where, for little time or longer, as it pleased God in His mercy to ordain, it should burn and smolder in hot torment till the Resurrection Day when, once again en-

closed in flesh, the fire that dieth not should burn, but not consume, the body, soul and spirit for eternity.

A five-runged ladder led up to the dray that stood beneath the gibbet, but the lame old woman was so weak with fear and fasting that she could not mount the steps.

"Will no one pray for poor old Mother Upsall?" she besought, and her voice was like the thin squeak of a mouse caught by the cat.

"Nay, Goody, be of cheer, 'tis but a little step across the line from torment into life eternal, and there those who have gone before await thee. Fear not; God knows you're innocent of any wrong!" Mary Popham thrust herself between the constables who held the aged woman, and bent and kissed the withered, tear-stained cheek.

A hand fell heavily upon her shoulder and she was dragged back. Simon Prowder glared into her eyes, brows drawn down, lips curled back until it seemed he snarled like a brute beast. "Art possessed, wench?" he asked. "How dare you flout the justice of the Lord?"

Old Goody had been lifted to the cart, the noose was slipped about her scrawny throat, the hangman's helper struck the cart-horse on the rump, the cart moved off, and Goody Upsall's chain-bound feet danced on the empty air.

A double-roll of drums served as her passing-bell. It did not take her long to die. Half dead with fright already, her wildly-beating heart most likely broke like shattering glass before she felt the hempen collar tighten round her wizened neck.

The air was tense, electrified. A silence like the silence of the interstellar spaces lay upon the crowd assembled on the common. Even nesting birds forbore to chirp as Sarah Upsall's spirit winged its flight.

Then Mary Popham's voice rang bell-clear through the silence. "'Twas you who did this, Simon Prowder. They were your suborned hirelings who swore her life away. You have shed the blood of innocence, and God will give you blood to drink!"

7

THE rumbling echo of a signal shot rolled across the plowed and wooded flatlands, brought up against the hills and came grumbling back like summer thunder. A ship, the *Johan Plomaert* out of Haarlem, had put into Fairtown harbor for refitting and repair. Sailing for the Carolinas with a company of Huguenots she had been battered almost to a wreck by storms and blown far from her course. It would take at least two weeks to fit her for her long trip down the coast; meantime much profit would accrue to Fairtown chandlers, and French passengers and Dutch crew might have a chance to stretch their legs ashore and see and be seen by the citizens.

Everyone who could went to the waterfront to see the foreigners, and the baggy knickerbockers and short jackets with bright silver buttons of the Dutchmen were a cause of interested admiration on the part of Fairtown girls, while the Hollanders' prodigious thirsts and willingness to treat were equally acceptable to taverners and townsmen. Most of the Dutchmen spoke some English, many Fairtown men had been to sea and picked up smatterings of Dutch; so fraternity was thick and bibulous until some roistering seamen chose to sing a rousing lied beneath the marshal's window late at night. Next day four of them had an hour in the stocks in which to meditate upon the evils of ebriety; three others were assessed ten shillings each, and one stood lock-necked in the pillory. From that time on the

cause of temperance gained increased devotion.

The Frenchmen were of different stripe. Small, for the most part, dark, frugal with their money and unable to communicate except in Dutch so broken that it might as well have been their native tongue, they were objects of suspicion rather than of welcome. Protestants they might be, but they were also French, and Frenchmen were traditionally suspect in New England. Also they were sensitive, and gave back baleful glare for glare as they walked through the town. When some young oafs mocked their alien talk, imitating it with jabbering gibberish, then progressed to jostling from oral insult, the Huguenots turned on them and for a sorrowful five minutes the young roughs knew the fierce wrath that had made the walls of La Rochelle impregnable to Richelieu's soldiers for a year of bitter siege. Then the Frenchmen walked back to their boats, not swaggering, but decidedly not meek of mien, and Marshal Tittingwell was waiting at the waterfront with a posse of three constables to place them in restraint for assault and battery.

Master Tittingwell and his posse swam to shore, their ardor dampened and their dignity irreparably damaged, and the Frenchmen rowed out to the *Johan Plomaert*, where next day their leader openly defied the bearers of a warrant of arrest, maintaining that his followers were guilty of no crime, but acted only in their own defense. He also promised to run through the first man who set foot upon the deck to molest his company, and as he had two score of naked swords behind him, the marshal wisely forbore to assert authority. But a proclamation was published the next day, making it a misdemeanor for any passenger of the *Johan Plomaert* to set foot in Fairtown or any of the lands appurtenant thereto.

MARY had not joined the curious crowds who went to see the outlanders, nor was she greatly interested in gossip of their looks and dress and manners. Her little farmstead and the work of spinning flax kept her fully occupied, and she had small ear for tattle. But when she heard about the Frenchmen's tussle with the marshal and his aides she rejoiced at their spirit and at their leader's declaration of defiance.

Two evenings following the interdiction of the Huguenots she was coming home from taking thirty skeins of thread to Goodwife Fowler when she met the lawbreaker. Shadows were falling rapidly, for it was late. The April twilight lay in pellucid cumulus upon the landscape, and kindling village lights flashed through the purple dusk in echo of the stars that kindled in the overhanging sky. To her left the ocean chuckled on its rocky beach as if it knew a jest too good to share; beyond the rolling country at her right the hills stood with their shoulders to the night, holding back like dikes the flood of savagery and malice of the Indians, dispossessed and powerless for the nonce, but with their smoldering dreams of vengeance kept afire by memory of ancient wrongs.

She had almost reached the pollard willow where tradition said the earth-bound spirit of a suicide was wont to walk o' nights—the spirit of a Royalist who fled the Lord Protector's wrath and killed himself to thwart the purpose of the colonists to send him back in chains to England. She knew the story of the specter from her girlhood, how it strutted in its feathered hat and laces, swaggering its sword and shaking out its ghostly lovelocks in the moonlight, and her girlish heart had beat until her breath came short when they told how the shade sometimes stopped the passer-by, challenging the male wayfarer to a

duel, refusing to allow its women victims to proceed unless they danced a measure with it or permitted it to kiss them.

A shadow deeper than the shade the topless willow cast moved by the roadside as she quickened pace, and she felt the ripple of small chills run up her back and itch across her scalp. She halted with a gasp, one hand raised to her throat, for the shadow took on form and seeming substance, and addressed her. "In"—Mary flicked a dry tongue over dryer lips as she strove desperately to call to mind the charm her mother taught her to ward off evil spirits—"in nomine——"

The breath surged back into her lungs, the feeling of constriction left her throat, for the first rays of the rising moon struck on the figure, and a shadow stretched before it on the white road-dust. Ghosts did not cast shadows. Neither did ghosts speak in such substantial voices, rich and deep and musical, velvety and throaty, with the softness which comes from the Roman tongues. "Your pardon, *Mademoiselle*, I fear I startled you."

She laughed in sheer relief. "You did! but——"

"But you forgive me? I did not mean to frighten you, but when I heard your footsteps on the road I thought it best to seek the shadows, since I am where I should not be. Then when I saw it was a girl, and beautiful, I made bold to——" He struck his heels together and bent his shoulders in a courtly bow.

Mary looked at him with interest. Colors do not show with clarity by moonlight, but as nearly as she could make out he wore a habit of fawn-colored velvet, breeches tucked in high jack-boots, sleeves slashed with yellow satin, and above his coat a jerkin of buff leather, sleeveless and fastened down the front with frogs of yellow braid. At throat and wrists were falls of lace; his hands were gauntleted, and from the black hair

rippling round his ears he had removed a wide-brimmed hat which bore a plume of curling feather fastened by a silver buckle. A long thin sword swung at his side. When he smiled, his teeth flashed whitely underneath a slim mustache, and his beard was quite the smallest she had ever seen, the merest tussock of black hair beneath his lower lip, as if a beetle had lit on his chin.

"You're from the ship," she decided.

"But yes. Have not I said so? Your amiable magistrates have ordered that my people may not come ashore, but one grows weary of the feel of oak beneath his feet, especially when he has not trod the earth for nine long weeks. Accordingly"—he raised his shoulders in a shrug until his long curls brushed his leather jerkin—"tenez, this is not the first time that I have defied authority. You will not call the watch, *Mademoiselle*?"

A dimple showed each side her mouth. "Nay, not I, *monsoor*, the ocean still is overcold for bathing."

He laughed, a merry, chuckling laugh infectious as a yawn, and tucked her fingers in his elbow's crook. "They tell me ghosts and devils and monstrous hobgoblins abound in these parts," he said seriously. "'Twere best I walked with you to keep them at respectful distance."

"Do—do you truly think there are such things?" she asked, and delicious little chills of fear and thrills of terror rippled just beneath her skin. "I've heard of them since infancy, but never have I seen one, or——"

"But certainly," he broke in, nodding with such gravity that she could see he struggled with a grin. "I, myself, Pierre Aristide François Joseph Fallières, have fought with them on land and sea——"

Her gurgling laughter cut him short. "*Monsoor*, so great a name for such a little man!"

He looked at her, quick anger in his

eyes. Indeed, he was no taller than she herself, and his waist, girt with a sash of scarlet silk, might well have been the envy of the fairest ladies of King Louis' court. But his shoulders had a breadth that spoke of strength, his hips were lean and straight, and when he stepped it was with a light spring that might have come from practise in the dance, or with a sword. "I?—little?" he began; then his words broke short. Laughter started in his eyes, she saw his lashes flickering. "Now that you speak of it, the name is longer than the man, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he answered almost gleefully. "Let us not deal with wordy sobriquets, then. Will not you call me Pierre?"

"Ppair?" she essayed doubtfully.

"*Non—Pierre,*" he corrected, then: "But even if you do not say it right, I like the way you say it, *ma belle*. How are you called!"

"Mary."

"Marie? A lovely name and one that fits you to perfection. How do they call your surname?"

"Popham. Mary Popham is the name, *monsoor.*"

"Popham! *Dieu gracieux*, what shame, what infamy, what savagery! You are lovely as the evening when she walks the earth crowned with a diadem of stars, fairer than the moon as she lies pliant on the ocean's breast, beautiful as that Tyrian Helen for love of whom the wizard Simon Magus forsook books and philtres. Your hair is like the treasured gold of Africa, your eyes are like the emeralds queens swoon to possess, your lips like coral from the Indian sea, and—*mon Dieu*—they call you Popham!"

In all of Mary's nineteen years no one except her parents had ever called her pretty. The color of her hair and eyes had always been a cause for jeering and derision. To be told they were like gold and gems, to have a man swear she was

beautiful! "I have heard that the Frenchers speak extravagantly," she answered primly.

"Extravagantly? *Sacre nom*, were I to begin now and speak until I live to be as old as Methuselah's grandsire, I could not finish telling half the story of your beauty, *Marie charmante.*"

WHEN they reached her cottage gate she hesitated for a moment, then, greatly daring, bade him enter.

There was a loaf of fresh-baked bread, a roll of new salt butter and a crock of milk in readiness, and on these they feasted as he told her of his wanderings. Orphaned when his Protestant father fell in fighting under Cardinal Mazarin of Spain, he had been made a ward of the great churchman who determined he should be a priest. But after several years of schooling at a seminary in Limoges he decided that the sword and not the tonsure was his destiny, proceeded to take unannounced leave of his school, and shipped before the mast on a bark bound for the Low Countries. There he had taken service with the Staats General and sailed to Africa and the Indies. Finally, he had come as second in command of the *Johan Plomaert* to bear his erstwhile countrymen and co-religionists to the Carolinas.

"But"—Mary's conscience troubled her lest she entertain an emissary of the spiritual and ghostly enemy of the faith—"are you then a Protestant or Papist?"

For the first time she saw sorrow in his laughing eyes. "What have they done to you, *ma chère?*" he asked. "What wicked lies have they taught you? The good God is like gold, precious in whatever place you find Him, whether in the church or meeting-house, the mosque or Buddhist temple. I have worshipped in them all, and found Him in each one." He waved a slice of thickly buttered bread at her:

"How God must laugh at all our little creeds——"

The tread of boots upon the road broke off his discourse, and Mary rose affrighted as she saw the marshal with two musketeers halt at her gate. "Quick, hide you!" she besought. "'Tis Master Tittingwell with his men, and they have muskets."

He seized the mug from which he drank his milk and hid it underneath his jerkin, bent and pressed her fingers to his lips and glided like a shadow to the kitchen garden.

Her hand still tingled with the kiss Pierre had left upon it as she swung the door back in response to Master Tittingwell's sharp knock.

"Good even, Mistress Popham." He spoke gruffly. "There has come word to us that one of the French heretics has disobeyed our laws and landed on our shores, despite our interdiction. We are told he came this way; that he was seen before your door. We must search for him."

"A—a Frencher—*here?*?" she faltered. "Surely, they make sport of you. There is no man in this house, for as you know I've lived alone since heaven called my father. But even if a visitor were here"—she spoke much louder than seemed necessary—"he could have made good his escape while we talked. He need only leap my garden wall and follow down the beach to come upon the harbor where the Dutch ship lies."

The marshal brushed her from his path and with his musketeers went through the house and gardens, even looked down in the well, but nowhere was there any sign of the invader.

"What means this food spread out?" he asked suspiciously as he and his men tramped back through the kitchen.

"I—I was an-hungered and cut bread and poured myself some milk——"

"Ay? And do ye drink from two mugs, then?"

"Two mugs? I see but one."

And one there was upon the table, and no more. Search as they would, the musketeers could find no evidence that Mary had a partner at her evening snack.

NEXT day consternation reigned in Fairtown. Two of the watch had come upon one they assumed to be a Frenchman skulking in an alley by the piers, but when they sought to apprehend him he had suddenly become a giant eight feet tall, wrested their staves from them and beaten them unmercifully. In proof of which they both displayed an assortment of fresh bruises, and one of them showed his broken staff. A tipling sailor in the tavern said the bruises might have been made by one who was an expert with the quarterstaff, but the gossips howled his rum-tinctured opinion down. None but a demon, and a very diabolic demon, could have overmastered two stout members of the Fairtown watch.

Mary smiled, but kept her counsel, when she heard the tall tale. That morning on her kitchen doorstep she had found the mug from which Pierre had drunk his milk, and with it a tall bottle of red sherris wine.

Perhaps her smile would not have been so carefree if she could have heard the conversation in the Reverend Butler's study where Master Tittingwell was closeted with the parson. "It is attested, reverend sir," the marshal said. "John Oakes, the cooper's son, who though he is a half-wit is a truthful lad, declared he followed Mistress Popham from the town on yesternight, for he knew she had a sum of money on her, and feared she might be set upon by robbers. At the tree where the malignant hanged himself he saw her pause and wait until another joined her. He wore long lovelocks and

a hat with feathers, and his clothes were gay with trimmings of vain ornament. They stood awhile in talk, then walked along the road until they reached her cottage. Thereupon honest John came back to town to tell the story of the phantom which came from the suicide tree's shadow.

"With Goodman Dykes and Goodman Trotter, both members of the trained band and men of most undoubted probity, I went to Mistress Popham's cottage to inquire of the matter, for meseemed it was a Frenchman, not a phantom, whom she harbored, but——"

The Reverend Butler drew his hand across his face. He suffered from a cold, and pocket handkerchieves were things of vanity, not included in his wardrobe. "And what was it you found?" he asked.

"Nothing, reverend sir. Mistress Popham denied a man was there or had been there. We found food upon the table—bread and milk—but no evidence a man had eaten with her. Howbeit"—he paused and drew a deep breath—"beneath the table was a thing in cat's shape lapping milk from out a saucer. Knowest whom 'tis said she has her kitten of—if indeed it be a kitten—reverend sir?"

"Not I," returned the parson.

"'Tis said 'twas given her by Sarah Upsall, her they hanged for witchcraft three months ago. Sarah Upsall, too, 'twas testified, had an imp that bore resemblance to a cat, and by its aid she worked much mischief to our godly folk."

Long after Master Tittingwell had gone, the parson wrestled with the ghostly problem left with him as Jacob wrestled with the angel. At last he took his Bible up to find an answer to the crux. Both eyes he closed in prayer, then spread the book before him, laid his hand upon the random-opened page and looked to see the verse on which his index finger

rested. He started, sucking in his breath like one who fights the coming of a sneeze. Beneath his finger lay the eighteenth verse of the twenty-second chapter of the Book of Exodus:

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

8

THE June night lay upon the land as if it had been a perfumed sleeping-robe. Crickets chirred and chirped among the weeds, from trees that murmured faintly in the almost breathless breeze came dream-dulled twitterings of sleepy birds, above the roofs a bat wheeled in eccentric circles as she quested midges in the dusk. The roses climbing on the trellis set behind the wishing-well filled the dew-drenched air with sweetness. Westward, the distant hills were mounds of shadow, dulling the luster of a silken sky with purple mists. Beyond the garden little waves broke lazily upon the giant boulders of the beach, their spray as white as ivory filigree on rocks turned silver by the moonlight's alchemy. "*Marie adorée,*" Pierre said, "the ship is once more ready for the sea. We sail upon tomorrow morning's tide."

The breath seemed suddenly to stop in Mary's throat. Her lids seemed scalding with hot tears that somehow would not come, there was a frantic feeling in her breast beside her heart; unconsciously, she raised a hand to soothe it.

"*Marie, ma chère, O, Marie de mon coeur,* you do then love me?" he exclaimed.

Her eyes looked levelly into his, gray-green, with pupils like twin pools of ebony, something hesitant sunk in their depths. "I—I——" the pressure of her breath dammed back her words, her lips moved at the bidding of her heart, but no sound came from them. Then she was in his arms, so naturally, so simply, so ut-

terly at home in their embrace it seemed as though she were some tired bird, wind-buffeted, wing-weary, come finally to the haven of its nest. Her voice was warm with tenderness and hardly-stifled laughter. "My dear, my dear," she breathed against his cheek, "I've loved you always; before I ever met you, even. I had seen you with my mind's eye, I used to dream of you—I always knew you'd come to me . . ."

Words of love are very sweet, but love's first kisses are still sweeter, and for a long time they had little need of words.

At length: "How do you say 'I love you,' in your tongue, Pierre?" she asked. Then, taught by him, she practised till the syllables were graven on her heart: "*Pierre, m'ami, je t'adore!*"

The breeze that plaited the smooth ocean into little waves bore the echo of eight bell-strokes to them, then one, then two. "Very dearest, you must leave me, now," she told him. "'Tis an hour past low twelve, and your ship sails with the dawning. And if they find you ere you reach her decks——"

He stopped her with a kiss, then laughed and laid his hand upon the pommel of his sword. "No fear, *ma chère*, knowest not that I live by the soldier's code: '*Pour les dames, le baiser; pour les hommes, l'épée?*'"

"And what might that mean, Master Puss-in-Boots?"

"For the women, the kiss; for the men, the sword!"

"For the women, quotha?"

"*Mille tonneres, non!* I do speak the foolish words of yesterday! Hereafter in heaven and on earth there are no lips but yours for me, Marie beloved."

"And you will surely come again?"

He took her cheeks between his palms and kissed her on the mouth. "To you and God I dedicate myself, and as I am

true to one I shall be true to both. The sea and storm may delay me, but when the fruits are gathered in the storehouse and harvest time is done, I shall come to claim you, *adorée.*" Then with another kiss he left her.

THE dusty road showed white as a healed sword-slash as Pierre walked jauntily toward Fairtown. Joy was in his heart and happiness upon his lips. He hummed a snatch of hymn-tune, a hymn the Huguenots were wont to sing around the altars of their God and in the battle-line:

*"Encore un hymne, ma lyre!
Un hymne pour le Seigneur,
Un hymne dans mon délire,
Un hymne dans mon bonheur . . ."*

"Another hymn, my lyre!
A hymn to God above,
A hymn that springs from ecstasy,
And joy and life and love . . ."

A hundred yards behind him—fifty, thirty—a darker shadow flitted in the shadow of the roadside trees.

9

WHEN Mary had denounced him as the murderer of Goody Upsall, Simon Prowder knew his suit was hopeless, but with an egotism born of uniform success in getting what he wanted—by guile when force could not be used, but preferably by force—he thrust himself into her way at every turn, demanding, rather than entreating, that she give her hand to him. Every day he called upon her, and when her plainly-spoken requests that he cease his visits proved of no avail Mary let him cool his heels outside her door, not deigning to respond to his authoritative poundings on the panels.

In fifty years of pious living Simon Prowder had not ever failed to get the thing he sought, and when Mary shunned

and defied him the sting of wounded vanity and the realization that he could do nothing to amend the matter drove him almost to a frenzy. His passion for her could not be called love, for, except himself, Simon Prowder was incapable of loving anyone or anything, but he longed for her young beauty and bright grace as the aging David lusted after Bath-Sheba's lush charms; he wanted her as a collector of vertu might want a lovely piece of bric-à-brac, or a miser long for gold, finally as a drunkard craves his drink. Day by day desire increased till it became an obsession. The fervor of his appetite grew till it seemed to be a starved wolf gnawing at his very bones. When Mary would have none of him, and refused to speak to or to look at him when they met in the street, he took to hanging round her house at night, watching with eyes hot with craving the reflection of her candle on the window-panes. When the rushlight was extinguished and the mullioned casements gave back pearl-bright mirrorings of moonlight, he turned the iron of cold torture in his heart as he visioned her retirement, in fancy saw her undress lovely limbs and gracious body, plait and bind her glowing hair, finally kneel beside her white-dressed bed to commend soul and body to the coverture of heaven.

When he first saw Pierre meet her in the garden his impulse had been to summon Master Tittingwell and have the French knave haled before the magistrates to be condemned to whipping at the cart's tail, but he quickly reconsidered and rejected this decision. As the Lord God had delivered Jericho to Joshua, so had He put the means to crush this saucy wench's insubordination into Simon Prowder's hands. The Dutch ship must soon sail, and there would be a final meeting of the lovers ere she heaved her anchor from the harbor mud. He would

waylay Pierre on his way to join the ship, provoke a quarrel and kill him; then he would confront Mary with the evidence of her dalliance with the alien, and only when she begged his pardon for her obduracy—besought the shelter of his name and husbandship upon her bended knees—would he consent to hold his peace.

10

FAIRTOWN lay as quiet as a phantom city in the early morning. The moon shone brightly on the gambrel roofs, lit the narrow, winding streets, and flooded the wide common with an inundation of bright silver etched in sharp black at its center by a long shadow shaped like an L set upside-down where the gallows tree upreared its stark shaft over the cropped turf.

Pierre paused for a moment to inspect the gibbet. With Gallic cynicism he refused to accept witchcraft as a fact, but he knew that one accused of it had strangled on the scaffold in the past trimester. "*Requiescat in pace,*" he murmured as he viewed the bare-limbed bole. "I doubt not that thy sleep is easier than that of those who sent thee hence, *ma pauvre*——" He swung round, hand on sword, as a moving shadow showed upon the sod beside him.

Less than two fathoms from him stood a man in somber homespun, a steeple-crowned, wide-brimmed hat upon his head, bands of white linen at his neck and wrists. From a baldric swung a ship's cutlas at his left hip, and as Pierre turned he laid his hand upon the weapon's grip.

For a moment they looked at each other, took each other's measure with cold eyes, and hatred leaped into each face with the violent spontaneity of a chemical reaction. Prowder's broad blade flashed as he rushed on the Frenchman,

Pierre's long, slender rapier shone in the moonlight like a silver thread. Their steel clashed musically, and the look of wild elation upon Prowder's face gave way to something like alarm as he felt the firmness of the blade that met his own. Taller by a full head than his adversary, big-boned, thick-sinewed, he had thought to chop Pierre's sword from his hand as easily as he would lop a twig from a tree-bough. Instead, he felt an upward surge of steel, a pressure which despite the double burden of his strength and weight bore his blade back and up. Then, nimbly as an eel escaping from a gloved hand, the Frenchman's slender weapon disengaged, and Prowder saw a point of flickering menace dance before his eyes.

The rapier played lightning-like, weaving glittering patterns in the moonlight; Pierre danced agilely as the shadow of a wind-blown leaf, avoiding heavy slash and devastating lunge, then closed in quickly as a winking eye, thrusting, stabbing, driving with a blade that seemed more quicksilver than steel. Prowder gave back a quick step, another, and the fury faded from his face as fear replaced it, draining off its color, leaving it corpse-gray.

"God is my refuge and my fortress, in Him only will I trust!" he panted, but it was more of a sob than battle-cry; the dread of death, foreknowledge of a swift and certain doom, was on him, and the rage of bitter disappointment flooding through his veins was like a physical sickness. At last he had begun a task he could not finish to his liking; he had chanced a throw with loaded dice, depending on his greater stature and preponderant strength to overthrow his adversary without trouble, and the dice had played him false. He had lost everything upon that fatal throw. According to his lights he was a righteous man. He had

tithed and prayed and read the Scripture regularly, he was steadfast in adherence to the Articles of Faith, surely his God would not fail him now. . . .

Then Pierre ran him through the throat and he fell back, his face a mask of torment unendurable, blood trickling from the corners of his mouth and down his chin until it stained his linen collar. He tried to speak, a choking gurgle sounded. He tried to scream a prayer, a seethe of blood boiled in his mouth, and as he toppled backward a horrifying sentence echoed in his inward ear: "You have shed the blood of innocence, and God will give you blood to drink!"

Pierre drew out a cambric handkerchief and wiped his rapier blade with loving care.

Deacon Simon Prowder lay still in the moonlight with the band of shadow that the gallows cast across him like a bar sinister, all the spite, malice and covetousness, all the little good, gone from his face, his life and deeds a closed record of testimony certified for review by a court from whose decisions there lay no appeal.

11

MARY'S trial took all day. Not that the issue ever was in doubt, not that she offered testimony in defense, but the tale of her abominations was so great that it must needs be read at length, and witness after witness begged their worships' leave to bear their evidence against her. The battle had been joined between the Hosts of Light and those of Satan. He who piled a faggot on the fire or cast a stone at the transgressor laid up treasure for himself in heaven.

John Wharton told at length about the morning he and Deacon Prowder—a godly, righteous man who had, alas! been called from this world's misery to the halls of everlasting bliss—had come upon

her as she sate in gossip with old Sarah Upsall. He had not heard the words they said, but doubtless they had been concocting dire plots for the harring of the elect. Certain it was that she took a cat-shaped thing from out the demon litter of the Upsall witch's familiar and held it to her face, where both he and Deacon Prowder saw it nurse itself at the witch-teat she wore on her cheek, the mark, insensible to pain, which Satan gives his servants when they seal their souls to him and swear to do his bidding evermore. Less than two days afterward old Upsall laid spells on her pious neighbors' churns and cattle, as appeared by the record of her trial. Could any Christian doubt this wicked witchery was the result of the council he and Deacon Prowder interrupted?

John Oakes, the cooper's son, who though he was a half-wit was an honest lad and credible, seeing he had made confession and joined church, deposed he saw her meet the ghost of the malignant at the haunted willow, and saw them both mount broomsticks and sail like darting swallows through the air until they reached her cottage. Afterward, the shining of a ghastly bluish-greenish light had dazzled him, so he ran until he panted like a dog to fetch the marshal and his dauntless musketeers to look into the matter.

Then Master Tittingwell and Goodman Dykes and Trotter kissed the Holy Book and swore to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Thereafter they related how they scoured Mary's house and garden, yet found no human being there, but on coming back into the house they found a something which appeared to be a kitten lapping something in the form of milk, yet when Goodman Dykes had sought to stroke it sparks flew from its fur and all but paralyzed his hand, and the white stuff in the saucer boiled

and frothed and gave off stinking, choking smoke that smelled like burning sulfur.

The town watch told how they had been set on by a great demon as they made their peaceful rounds the very night the marshal and his posse failed to find a man in Mary's cottage.

Her childhood schoolmates, now grown into respectable goodmen and goodwives with families of their own, related how aforetime Red Men from the forest had declared she was friendly with the Great Spirit—and as every proper Christian knew, the Indians' god was nothing but the white man's Devil.

Finally, most diabolical of all, it was remembered how she caviled at the justice of the sentence passed on old Witch Upsall, had kissed the sorceress before the righteous judgment of the law was worked on her, and cursed the godly Deacon Prowder with a curse of death, saying that he should have blood to drink. In furtherance of this dire prophecy, the deacon had been found on Fairtown Common at the very foot of the tree on which Upsall had been hanged, and blood was dried upon his mouth. Verily, the forces of Satanic malice had been loosed upon the land. The shadow of the awful wings of the Great Adversary was spread between the people and the sun. They had neglected to root out the workers of ungodliness, and for lack of diligence and faith the dreadful judgment of the Lord was come upon them.

MARY gave no testimony in her own defense. Indeed, who would, or could, or dared, speak for her? To tell the court that it had been a man, no demon, who accosted her beneath the haunted willow would be useless, for had not John Oakes, the honest, credible John Oakes who had confessed his sins and been admitted to the bosom of the

church, declared he saw her and her companion ride on broomsticks through the air? Surely, natural men who had no power of the Devil could not do such things. Once or twice she had essayed to speak, but now some women in the congregation were in fits, crying out she tortured them each time her lips were parted. So the outcries of the people drowned her voice, and it was not until the jury found her guilty that a hush fell on the audience as she rose to say her say before the sentence of the law was read to her by Mr. Justice Proctor. Then it was she added blasphemy to witchcraft:

"Your worships, and ye, people of Fairtown, the testimony which convicted me was lies, as those who gave it know full well. There are no witches and no wizards, for Satan when he takes the hearts of men can find enough ways to mislead them into sin without resort to magic. Goody Upsall was a poor old woman who was sinned against most grievously by Simon Prowder for her small land's sake. I'd choose to stand in Sarah Upsall's place in preference to the place of Deacon Simon Prowder when the assize of the Lord is opened and all men must answer for their sins.

"Take my life ye can and will as ruthlessly as ye destroyed my little inoffensive cat which in your ignorance and superstition ye declared an imp of Satan, but in the days to come your children and your children's children will have shame by this day's doings. When in the future claim is made that ye were good and godly men who really understood the message of the Gospel, the things ye did to Sarah Upsall and to me and other innocents like us will stand as testimony of your accusation, and generations yet to be will call ye cruel and blind and savage, and say ye mocked and blasphemed—albeit, perchance, unwittingly—when ye

worked your cruelties in the name of God. . . ."

Then the shouting and the clamor drowned her words, and they led her to the jail.

IF PROOF of her debauchery by Satan had been wanting, it was had when she was hanged on Fairtown Common the next day. Just before they drove the cart from under her she called out in a loud voice, not upon the Lord for mercy, not a plea of recantation and repentance, but a heathen, unintelligible sentence in such gibberish-words as witches surely use when they address their lord and master, Beelzebub:

"Pierre, m'ami, je t'adore!"

12

AUTUMN came, and with it came the harvest. The grain was gathered in, the ripened fruits were stored away against the winter, and the *Johan Plom-aert* thrust her blunt bows into Fairtown harbor. Pierre was first ashore, and ran like one who races for a prize until he reached the place where Mary's cottage stood. It was no longer there. The house had been burned to the ground, only its chimney and foundation-stones told where it had been, but in the garden flowers showed among the autumn weeds—phlox and marigold, harebells and love-lies-bleeding. A rose or two hung on the thorny vine that climbed the trellis by the wishing-well. But Mary . . . where was she?

He stopped to drink a stoup of wine at the tavern by the fish-wharf. A dirty pamphlet, soiled with thumbs and beer-stains, lay upon the table, a crudely printed thing with a woodcut illustration on its cover picturing a woman hanging from a gibbet. He flipped it open carelessly and read the opening stanza of

the doggerel ballad while a chill like polar ice spread through his veins:

"May Popham was a wicked witch,
A wicked witch was she,
And fit was she to swing at last
From Fairtown's gallows tree . . ."

On the north side of the meeting-house they'd laid her, for north was devil's land, fit for witches' graves. The idiot boy, John Oakes, who led him to the place was voluble in narration, but Pierre paid little heed until he heard the story of her hanging. With the sure, retentive faculty of the simple and illiterate, the lout had memorized the devil's-jargon Mary cried before they turned her off, and though the words came thickly, Pierre could recognize them:

"*Pierre, m'ami, je t'adore!*"

"*O, petite Marie de mon coeur,*" he sobbed into the weeds that grew upon her moundless grave, "to God and you I vowed myself. Did I speak blasphemy . . . did I set up an idol of inordinate affection? God has taken you to Him, only through Him can I come to you at last, beloved of my heart!"

L'envoi

IF YOU are in New Orleans on the first day of November, be sure to visit old St. Louis Cemetery. It isn't very comfortable, for there is little shrubbery in the high-walled close and the sun beats blindingly upon the paths of broken shell and the little oven-like tombs where the dead are laid aboveground because colonial New Orleans was so marshy that interment in the earth could not be made. But on All Saints' Day the little tombs are bright with flowers, for it is a custom of the Creole City to bear tribute to the dead this day, and no grave lacks decoration, though its tenant may have died a century and more ago and his family long since died out, too.

When you visit old St. Louis, look for

a small tomb set in the south wall, with the epitaph:

*Ci Gît
Jusque La Résurrection
Pierre Fallières
Un Prêtre de Dieu*

That is all. There are no vital data, no word to tell you who he was or when and where he first saw light, or when he died. But if you're fortunate you may meet an old priest coming to the tomb with a great armful of japonicas, and if you ask him about Pierre Fallières, he'll tell you what he knows.

A charming courtesy to visitors characterizes all New Orleans residents. You meet it in the hotels, at the counter in the French Market where you drink black chicory coffee and eat doughnuts light as frothing bubbles. You find it at the bar of the Old Absenthe House, and receive it from the pretty little ladies whom you will encounter in Bienville Street. You find the old priest has it.

"No, *M'sieur,*" he'll tell you, "we know but little of him. Such records as we have deal mainly with his life within the church, how he was a valiant bearer of the Word among the Indians, how almost single-handed he prevented the establishment of an Inquisition in New Orleans during Spanish occupation, and how he preached in the cathedral on holidays. The very day he died he had the sermon at High Mass and spoke upon the text, 'Judge not lest ye be judged.'

"They say he was not born a Catholic. I do not know concerning that, and I know only by hearsay that like the sainted Loyola he laid aside the sword to take the Cross. I have heard his worldly heart was broken by the cruel death of his beloved. Nor do I know concerning that. I know only he was a brave and tolerant and godly man. May his soul, and the souls of all good Christians, rest in peace.

"Benedicite, M'sieur."