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"There is somebody  
who has harmed you?  
There is somebody  
you would like out of  
the way?"



# INCANTATION

**S**URELY a charm has not got the power of life and death! A few words, muttered in a mysterious fashion, cannot bring a man, far away, to his death! Even now, after the whole terrible business is over, I cannot, *cannot* believe it!

And yet, here I am, victim of that same charm, alone in the dreary mountains, waiting for the end. It is but just, I suppose. For if there really be power in those Latin words, then I am a thief and a murderer!

But it cannot be true! Over and over I repeat those words: it cannot, *cannot*

*"Yes, I would like to have Mr. Morrison King out of the way. And he might leave me his money before he goes!"*



By

ADIS FURMAN

*Against her real nature she became a sorceress,  
and what a trail of fear and horror she had to tread!*

be true! And yet, even as I say them, I am preparing the "charm" again—with a prayer of hope on my lips. It is for *him* I perform this dread rite—for his happiness. Will he ever know?

\* \* \*

It all started with my trip to Europe

—one of those cruises so popular with students and teachers. I had just completed my course in normal school, and with the last few dollars left me in my father's will, I was taking this fling before settling down to a life of school teaching. And it was on this cruise that I met two



*Mr. King fell down the grand staircase and broke his neck*

people so important in my after-life—Lillian Sumner, and Morrison King.

Lillian was a pretty, vivacious girl. I became acquainted with her my first hour at sea; and before the day was over we were companions for the trip. I liked Lillian; but she was such an incessant talker that I often wearied of her and slipped away to be by myself. It was that desire to be free for a few hours from her (and Mr. King) that later brought on the terrible events I record.

Now, Mr. King, too, was a nice enough person. He was an extremely wealthy, gouty, old man who was taking the trip for his health. A self-made, self-sufficient man whom success had made a little insensitive. He had reached that age where a widower is apt to be sentimental about any pretty girl who happens to come along. Throughout our trip, to Gibraltar, Algiers, Genoa, he followed me around, part of the time making harmless love to me, the

rest of the time telling me about his business success and the large mid-Western town he had helped build up.

And so it was to have a few hours of peace from him and Lillian that I slipped away from the boat the moment it docked at Naples. . . . And, God knows, I was to find anything but peace there!

It was a beautiful sunlit morning, and I wandered through the city, visiting the museum, glancing into the San Carlo—although there was no opera on—riding up the Posillippo where, overlooking the charming, glittering city below, I had my lunch. Then, returning again to the heart of the city, I started strolling through the lower quarters.

Hearing loud voices ahead of me as I walked through one of the narrow, twisting streets, I hurried my step until I reached the end of an even narrower alley. And there, about ten feet away from me, stood an old, old woman, crouching against the wall, one thin hand clutching her shawl protectively about her head. The other hand was raised to shield her face. For all around her stood a group of small boys, jeering at her and pelting her with stones.

"Old witch!" they screamed.

For a moment I stood still in indignation. Older passers-by did nothing to aid her. Indeed, most of them laughed, while some even encouraged her tormentors. And then, finally, a great hulking man threw a handful of pebbles in her face as he passed.

**W**ITH a cry of rage, I darted forward. There was a boy near me holding a switch, with which he beat the woman's skirts. Snatching it from his hand, I drew it back and swung it straight into the face of the big coward. Then I whirled around, whipping the boys unmercifully, right and left.

"Loafers!" I cried. "How dare you!"

They scattered with cries of pain. The passers-by stopped and looked on with wonder.

"Americana!" they whispered to one another, as if that explained everything.

I turned to the old woman. She, too, was looking at me with large wondering eyes; I suppose it never occurred to her

somebody might come to her rescue, least of all one of her own sex. She started to thank me in rapid Neapolitan, but I shook my head, smiling. I understood a little Italian, but I could not grasp this quick speech. And then her next words rather startled me.

"Do you speak Latin?" The question itself was worded in that language.

I answered yes; for I hoped to teach it upon my return to America. And as if Latin were her native tongue, the woman commenced to thank me.

"Come!" she finished, taking my hand; "you shall be rewarded for your kindness!"

I protested that I wanted no reward; that it would be a poor world indeed if everybody expected payment for every little deed of kindness. But she would not listen to me, and kept tugging at my fingers with her thin, trembling hand. And so, finally, rather than hurt her feelings, I let her lead me along.

We went down the narrow, dirty alley; into another, if possible narrower and dirtier. And at last we halted before a low basement door. The woman threw it open, stepped aside, and with the gesture of a queen inviting one to her palace, motioned me to enter. I passed through the door and felt my way down three dark steps.

The old woman hobbled after me, closing the door behind her, and thus threw the place into complete darkness. Soon, however, she lit a candle, and its faint flickering rays lighted the room a little.

In one corner was a heap of rags, probably the poor woman's bed. A table was in the center, and a couple of boxes served as chairs. There was a huge fireplace, in which a few coals smouldered, making the room oppressively hot.

"YOU think there is little here with which

I can reward your kindness?" she asked with a dry chuckle. "I shall reward you with something more than possessions," she continued in a low voice; "I shall give you the means whereby you yourself may reward the good for their goodness—and the evil for their wickedness!"

I gazed at her in astonishment as I sat on an upturned box. What did the old crone mean?

She crossed to the fireplace, removed a large earthen pot, and brought it back to set on the middle of the table. Then she

hobbled over to one corner, returning in a moment with an armful of assorted herbs and powders. These she carefully measured and threw into the pot.

"You will take down the names of these herbs and the correct amounts to put in," she told me as she proceeded. "When you leave, I shall give you some to take away with you." And I, delighted at what seemed a harmless but thrilling little incident, drew pencil and paper from my purse, and concealing my smile, solemnly noted down her directions.

I SHALL not give those directions here.

Oh, it all seems absurd, mad; and even after the series of startling, horrible events that I have gone through from that day to this, I cannot, even for a moment, believe that that mixture could bring such terrible calamities into the world.

The herbs and powders mixed, the woman took a coal from the fire and tossed it in the pot. There was a hiss and a bright flare. Then, slowly, a dense smoke rose from the bowl, curling in blue spirals, filling the room with a sickish aroma.

Bit by bit the room disappeared in the thick haze. The dim candle-lit walls vanished; the red glow in the fireplace became fainter and fainter, until finally the last spark died out. The smoke curled around the thin haggard face of the woman who leaned over the bowl; the last I saw were the two trembling hands extended over the pot, the two bright eyes that never wavered from mine. Suddenly they vanished; and only a thin hazy light showed where the candle burned. There was a moment's impressive silence.

"There is somebody who has harmed you?" Her voice was low, hoarse; I could scarcely recognize it. "There is somebody you would like out of the way?"

Why did she put it in those words? Certainly there was nobody in the world I wished dead; but as certainly there was somebody I wished "out of the way." My trip would become much pleasanter if I saw no more of Mr. King!

With a smile—for it seemed to me a thrilling game—I nodded. "Yes, I would love to have Mr. Morrison King out of the way. And," I added, with a laugh, "he might leave me his money before he goes!"

Again there fell a silence. Thicker than ever the smoke swirled upward to fill the

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**"I shall give you the means whereby you yourself may reward the good for their goodness—and the evil for their wickedness!"**

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room. For some reason I commenced to feel slightly uneasy. Then, out of the smoke-filled darkness, rose a low chant.

If I refused to divulge the contents of that pot, how much more unwilling I would be to repeat those terrible words. I cannot believe in the power of mere words to work a spell for good or for evil. But I have come to the conclusion that the real power lay in *an involuntary faith* I had, for the moment. Latin lends itself, better than any other language, to sharp, terse speech; and so sharp, so horrible, were these words that came droning to me out of the darkness, that I could not help but shudder. And, as I say, for the moment I could not help but believe in their power. Could not that belief, mine and the old woman's, have been powerful enough to bring about the amazing tragedy that followed—as well as the horrors and sorrows that were to hound me through my life from then on?

*Or, in the face of all reason, can there be a real, fiendish current, flowing through life, ready to lift its evil head at the command of some foul incantation?*

The voice ceased; the formal words were over. Then, hoarsely, she whispered:

"Repeat this after me:

"And may he die; and may he bequeath to me all his goods, his chattels, and his monies."

I caught my breath. Then, somewhere within me, a voice told me not to be stupid. This was all a game, it said, and to please the old woman, I should finish it, and then go away. And so, in slightly husky tones, I repeated those portentous words:

"And may he die; and may he bequeath to me all his goods, his chattels, and his monies."

**L**ILLIAN SUMNER met me as I was making my way through the dusk toward the boat. At first, she was a little sulky because of my having slipped away from her to see the town by myself. But before I was half-way through with the amazing tale of my encounter with the "witch," she had forgotten her anger in astonishment.

"Why, I can't believe it!" she cried as, mounting the gang-plank, I finished with my account of the solemn curse laid upon the old man whose continued pursuit of myself had been the subject of much merriment. "It's the finest story I've heard in years!" Just then a figure loomed out of the darkness of the deck. "Here's Miss French!" Lillian cried. "Wait till we tell her!"

**B**UT Lillian did not have a chance to recount the great joke. Miss French herself was bursting with news.

"Have you heard?" she demanded as we came up to her side.

"What?" we both demanded at once.

"About Mr. King!"

My heart jumped.

"What about him?" I asked.

"Why," she explained, "he fell down the grand staircase this afternoon and broke his neck! He died within an hour afterwards!"

I was stunned. In the silence that followed, I felt Lillian slowly turn and gaze at me. And at that moment a tall man approached us.

"Miss Furman?" It was the captain of the ship. "I have been looking for you," he said. "Will you kindly come with me?"

Without a word I mechanically followed him down the deck to a large cabin. When we stepped inside, I made out four or five men standing around, talking in low voices, while on the bed lay the figure of a man completely covered with a sheet. The men turned as we entered.

"Mr. Branchard," said the captain in a quiet voice, "this is Miss Furman."

A kindly old man stepped up to me and bowed.

"How do you do, Miss Furman," he said. "I asked the captain to bring you here simply to explain that, fortunately, I was on board during Mr. King's unhappy accident, and could be at his side till his death."

I stared at him, not understanding.

"Fortunately?" I repeated.

"Yes, Miss Furman. I am a lawyer,

of the firm of Branchard, Holt & Branchard, and therefore could supervise Mr. King's last testament. You see, Miss Furman," he concluded, "Mr. King has bequeathed everything he owned to you—all his goods, his chattels, and his monies, as he quaintly put it."

A moment longer I stared at him. Then, slowly, darkness crept before my eyes, and my head started reeling.

The captain caught me as I fell.

\* \* \*

**I** MOVED into the King house—or rather mansion—upon my return to America. It was a veritable palace, set high on a beautiful hill, overlooking the large and growing mid-Western city that poor Mr. King had helped so much to build. I was living in a home that many a millionaire might have been glad to own; and yet I lived in utmost simplicity. For I felt an intruder, one who was living on money not her own.

Immediately upon my arrival in Amer-

icans; nobody, I was sure, would believe I would be willing to surrender this great property, and until the day came when I could prove my willingness, I decided to keep it all a secret.

Meanwhile I entered, to a slight degree, the social life of the town, going to dinners, dances, and other amusements. The result was a gay and fairly happy life; and much as I liked most of the young men, I considered none of them seriously—until I met Bob Cowley.

I shall never forget that first meeting—the meeting that was to bring me so much exquisite happiness, and so much unbelievable horror. A Mrs. Shirleigh phoned me to invite me to dinner that night to meet him.

"He says he saw you in the street the other day," she told me, "and he was so impressed he could scarcely wait to meet you."

"Impressed with me—or the fortune I'm supposed to possess?" I asked with a laugh. But Mrs. Shirleigh was serious.

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**Can there be a real, fiendish current, flowing through life, ready to lift its evil head at the command of some foul incantation?**

---

ica, I instituted a search for the heir or heirs of the dead man. I found that one son existed—or had, at least, once existed. Years before, Mr. King had been divorced from his wife, and a son of six or seven had gone East with her to live. Nothing had been heard of either since then, and all my efforts to trace them were useless. But still I kept up the search.

That, indeed, was by far my largest expenditure from the vast estate. Beside the money spent that way, I only paid an old caretaker and his wife.

It did not take long, of course, for the news to spread around town as to how I got the property, although the story was distorted. The general theory, I believe, was that Mr. King and I were engaged to be married at the time of his death. Nor did I undeceive them; I had no wish for the vile tale of the "witch" to be known—even though I told myself, over and over, that there could not possibly have been any power to the charm, that it was all just a terrible coincidence. I also said nothing about my attempts to find the true

"I really don't think he's that kind of a chap, Miss Furman," she replied. "Of course I know little about him. But he seems an honest, clean-cut young man. And he certainly is handsome!"

And he was handsome—to me, anyhow. As he sat across the table from me that night, tall, light, with clean-cut features and that wide, humorous smile of his, I felt drawn to him as I had never before been drawn to a man.

**A**ND he, on his part, seemed attracted to me. Throughout the meal he spoke to the others only when absolute politeness demanded it; the rest of the time he directed his remarks—and his eyes—to me. After the meal, he immediately steered me into a corner, and before the evening was over, we were fast friends. The next afternoon, at my invitation, he appeared at my house for tea.

And so began days of happiness such as I had never before known. Day after day he would call. And we would talk; of what, I could never afterwards tell. I know only I was thrilled by every word he

said. And every time his clear blue eyes caught my glance, a wave of warm ecstasy would pass over me. For I was in love.

And so, I told myself, was he. Only one thing ever made me question it—even, sometimes, making me slightly uneasy—his eyes!

Clear and honest though they were, every now and then I would catch them upon me in a curious, speculative fashion. Immediately when I caught his glance, he would woo me with more ardor than ever; but for all that, the memory of that glance would last some time to make me uneasy.

**W**HAT did it mean? Surely he was honest in his attentions to me! No man, with such an open countenance, could be attentive to a girl just for the money he supposed she had! For I had never confided in him that I was rich, not really, and he never asked me questions.

And thus the summer passed, and fall set in; and then came that first evening of evil memory . . . when the dead past rose up to taunt me in my present happiness.

I remember it was windy that day, and warmly bundled up, Bob and I took a long walk through the hills, riotous in color, with the exhilarating wind blowing against our cheeks and sending the dead leaves to dance and swirl all about us. Then we returned home, and drank hot tea in the old library before a roaring fire.

Bob stayed to dinner and after it was over we sat drinking our coffee in the library before the flames. The wind tore around the house, in a frenzy now, blowing shutters and rattling the panes. Bob's hand stole over mine, and we sat side by side in silence, gazing into the burning logs. I remember how cozy it was. I remember thinking I had never before been so happy, that such happiness as this was too wonderful to be true.

Was that intuition? Could I possibly have known, down deep, that I was right then on the brink of an unbelievable horror?

Listening to the wind, I set down my cup and looked at Bob with a smile.

"On such a night as this the evil spirits must be abroad," I murmured.

Bob glanced quickly up.

"You say that almost as if you believed in them," he laughed. "Have you ever believed in such things, in ghosts, or spirits—or charms?"

I started. Through the voice of my beloved an ugly word had risen from the past.

"No, no!" I cried hastily. "I—I couldn't believe in such nonsense!"

And now he gazed at me curiously.

"And yet," he said slowly, "your very vehemence in denying sounds a little false. Have you ever had any experience—with charms, say?"

I started again to answer no; and then I hesitated. Despite my assuring myself, over and over, that the death of Mr. King was only an amazing coincidence, the uneasy memory of the old woman's "curse" always haunted me even in my happy moments with Bob. And now, suddenly, I had an overwhelming desire to confide in somebody—in him!

"Yes," I said, "I have."

He slapped his knee with delight. "Good!" he cried. "Then let's try it! What could be a more appropriate night for it than this?"

But I swung around, clutching his knee. "No! no!" I gasped.

He turned to me, regarding me with wide, wondering eyes. "Why, Avis!" he exclaimed. "Surely you don't really believe in that nonsense? Come," he added, as I lowered my eyes in shame, "if you really do have any foolish notions about such things, now is the time to prove to yourself how wrong you are!"

Again I hesitated. Perhaps he was right; perhaps if I tried the "charm" once again and realized how powerless it was, I would be relieved forever of this haunting uneasiness! Suddenly I jumped up, and without a word went to my room where in the bottom of my trunk I dug up the herbs and powders that had lain there ever since I left Naples. And in a few moments I was back in the library sorting them out on a bare table.

**T**HERE was a brass bowl on the mantel.

Bringing this over to the table, I measured out the ingredients in it. Then, extinguishing the lights, until only the flickering glow of the fire played along the walls, I raised my eyes to Bob, who had taken a seat across the table and was watching me with silent interest.

"You are to make a wish," I said, and somehow my voice was hoarse. "You are to make a wish concerning somebody, a wish for good to befall them—or evil."



For a moment he was silent. Then, slowly, he spoke. "I wish that a certain woman would fall ill," he said, "that she would suffer long, and then die."

I raised my hand in horrified protest.

"No! No!" I cried. "You *can't* wish that!"

But Bob only looked up at me with his curious wide smile.

"That was a wish carefully calculated to startle you," he replied. "If I made some little Pollyanna wish, you would not hesitate to perform it. But a wish like this is a test of how much you really believe this stuff. And surely a girl I—love—" He looked up at me with great solemn eyes. "Surely she can't believe in such truck!"

And I, once more ashamed that he should possibly have reason to be contemptuous of me, lit a match and tossed it into the bowl.

"You will concentrate upon this woman until the end," I told him in a low voice.

**A**FTER the first flare and hiss, the smoke slowly rose, as it had in that den, back in Naples. It rose in thick spirals, deep blue, that covered the ceiling and bit by bit hid the walls. It lowered in a thickening haze between my beloved and myself; and while I held my palms outstretched over the bowl, I saw his blue eyes, intently watching me; until at last they disappeared, and only the glow from the fireplace permeated the deep fog. Then, in a low voice, I began the horrible Latin chant.

The chant ended. There was a moment's intense silence. I could neither hear nor see the man who sat opposite me. Then clearing my throat, I spoke.

"Repeat these words after me," I said.

"May she fall ill; may she suffer a lingering illness . . . and then die . . ."

A moment's pause. Then, out of the darkness: "May she fall ill; may she suffer

a lingering illness . . . and then die . . ." That night after Bob went home I slowly mounted the stairs to my room. More and more, as the hours passed, I had become conscience stricken. Supposing, by some horrible chance the charm should work? I threw myself on my bed.

"But it couldn't work, it couldn't!" I whispered to myself. "It's madness to believe it!" Surely I would never have dreamed of attempting it had there been the slightest chance it might harm some innocent, unsuspecting person!

And then, deep down within me, as I lay there gazing up at the ceiling another voice spoke.

"Are you so convinced of its harmlessness," said that voice, "that you would be willing to try it against yourself?"

**"YES,"** I cried aloud in answer, "a thousand times, yes!"

"Would you," went on that relentless voice, "be willing to offer the greatest sacrifice as proof—your life?"

And then I rose to my feet.

"The greatest sacrifice," I told my conscience, "is not my life. I am will-

ing to offer a greater one, to prove that this charm cannot have power!" And crossing to the door, I went out to the hall and down the great staircase to the floor below.

The fire still burned dimly in the library hearth. Switching on the lights, I crossed to the table, on which still stood the brass pot, along with the herbs and powders.

I divided the latter into two equal parts. One half I placed in the bowl, leaving enough for one more "charm." Then, switching off the lights, I struck a match, and tossed it inside.

Everything happened as before. I waited until I was lost in the dense haze. Then, aloud, my low voice reverberating in the silence of the large room, I repeated the terrible formula of the "charm."



As my last words died away, I sat a moment, very still, gathering courage. And then, slowly but clearly, I spoke these words: "And if this charm have any power at all may he learn to love the girl he cursed with all his heart, and soul and body!"

And then I dropped my head in my hands, sobbing as if my heart would break.

But the days passed and nothing happened. I forgot my fears. As a matter of fact, Bob, instead of showing less affection for me, as he must, I believed, if my last "charm" worked, became more ardent than ever. Gone was that curious look I had sometimes caught in his eyes, which now held only affection for me.

**WE** never mentioned the night of necromancy to each other. For my part, I wanted to drop it from my memory, and I imagined he was equally ashamed of his foolish little role in the business.

And I was content in his love. Content? The word scarcely expresses the deep happiness I felt during that gorgeous autumn. Sometimes, when alone, I felt so happy I could hardly stand it, and I would cry for pure joy.

At last came the day that I shamelessly admit to having looked forward to since first I met this man I loved. I remember that despite the lateness of the season it was quite warm, and we sat side by side, as usual, on the terrace. I was wrapped up to protect me from a little cough that had been troubling me recently—a cough that seemed to bother Bob much more than it warranted.

"Are you sure you are all right?" he would ask me, over and over. "Are you sure you shouldn't visit the doctor, Avis?"

And I, pleased by his solicitude, yet a bit surprised that my little cough should worry him so, would answer that there was nothing the matter.

We sat up on the terrace, gazing silently down into the city. All at once I felt his fingers close to my hand, felt him lift it gently until his lips were pressed against the back. And as suddenly he flung my hand from him and jumped to his feet. I gazed up at him, hurt and surprised.

"What is it, Bob?" I asked, while he turned his head away from me. "Have—have I done something?"

He swung around at that. His eyes were flashing.

"Yes," he cried, "you *have* done some-

thing! You have made me love you better than anything in the world—and in heaven, too, I think! You have made me realize I am the lowest cad on the earth! I love you!" He said it almost threateningly. "You understand? I love you, love you . . . and—" His head dropped; his last words were low and heavy. "And I have no right to tell you so."

And now my heart beat high. I thought I understood. I reached gently for his hand.

"You think you have no right," I said softly, "because I am rich—" He snatched his hand from mine, turned sharply away, at that. "And because perhaps—perhaps you have not so much money? Is that it, Bob?"

I waited, but he did not answer or turn; and then I went on.

"Then do not let that worry you," I said, "for listen to this, Bob." I stood up, resting my hand on his shoulder. "I am not rich. Despite appearances, I am probably far poorer than you. All this vast estate, that an old man willed to me in a moment's madness before his death, I am holding, waiting to find the natural heir or heirs. Practically the only money I spend of the estate is upon a world-wide search for those heirs. Now do you see, Bob?" I finished, "why you should not be afraid to—to—"

And then I stopped. Bob had turned, and was listening with eyes wide with wonder, horror, it almost seemed.

"You are giving it up?" he whispered. "You do not consider this property your own?"

It was my turn to be surprised. "No, Bob," I said, gravely, "this is not my property. Does that—does that make a difference?"

**T**HERE was a wild look in his eyes now.

He did not seem to understand what I was saying. And for my part, my heart sank. Surely I had not been mistaken in this man I loved! Surely those clear eyes could not be the eyes of a fortune-hunter! Suddenly he laughed, a wild, heart-breaking laugh.

"Does it make a difference?" He repeated my words like a man in despair. "Does it make a difference!"

And then I knew my fears were unjust. Something—something very terrible—was troubling him; but it was not the fact that I was practically penniless. I reached for his hand.

"I am waiting, Bob," I said very softly. He turned to me, as if not understanding.

"I am waiting," I repeated; and then, when he did not speak: "Bob," I said, in a low voice, "will you marry me?"

And with that he dropped to his knees and pressing both my hands against his cheeks until he almost hurt them, he broke into the most terrible, tearless sobs I have ever heard.

**WE** planned to marry in two weeks. It was to be a quiet affair, absolutely secret, in fact, to take place in a little church beyond the city. Then we were going South on our honeymoon. I remember how Bob brought maps to the house, and we sat, excited as two children, poring over them. We would go down to New Orleans, and then take a boat to the many little romantic ports in the Caribbean. Oh, it would be a wonderful two months, and we lived it over, night after night!

Never once, after that evening on the terrace, did we mention our conversation there. I knew that in due time Bob would tell me what was troubling him; for something *was* bothering him; for several days afterwards there was a continued look of pain and anxiety on his face, particularly when he looked at me. And over and over he questioned me concerning my health. However, as the days passed and I continued to reassure him, the strained look began to disappear.

But, though I did reassure him, I had less and less reason to as the days went on. For my cough, at first just slightly annoying, was becoming extremely painful. Every night I lay awake (after the first week of our engagement I scarcely got a moment's sleep), and I would cough and cough until I was too weak even to sit up. Before Bob, however, I disguised it as best I could, continually taking cough palliatives and hiding the drawn look on my face that was becoming more pronounced by the use of various cosmetics. And then came the morning before our wedding day, and wak-

ing up with a spasm of coughing, I looked at my handkerchief—and understood.

I remember I phoned Bob after breakfast. He was to have come over to spend the whole day—we had so much to talk about, concerning our plans that would commence on the morrow! Making some excuse, I put him off till tea time. Then I dressed, got in the car, and rode down town to the doctor's.

The moment he saw me, his eyes filled with shocked surprise. It did not take long to make an examination, and when he was finished he looked up at me with sudden anger.

"Why didn't you come to me months ago, Miss Furman?" he demanded. "Why did you put it off till now?"

"Months ago?" I repeated, staring at him. "But I had the first signs of a cough only two or three weeks ago!"

**I**T was his turn to stare at me, incredulous. Then, slowly, he nodded.

"It has been known to progress that rapidly," he grudgingly agreed, "but very, very rarely."

"Then—it is something—quite serious?"

He watched me a moment before replying. "Miss Furman," he said at last, "can you stand the truth?"

I tried to smile. "I think so," I replied.

But he did not return my smile. "You have got tuberculosis in—" He hesitated.

"Yes?"

"—in its final stages."

For a minute we gazed into each other's eyes. I wet my lips.

"I'm glad—to know it—to-day," I said finally in a low voice.

"To-day?" He was puzzled.

Again I tried to smile. "I was to be married to-morrow," I explained.

The doctor lowered his eyes. When finally he raised them he did not speak. There was nothing to be said. He simply extended his hand.

I shook it, bowed, and went out.

And then, when I got home, I sat down to wait for the hardest moment of all—the moment of Bob's coming, when I must tell him. The hours passed, hours of agony such as I have never known . . . and at last I heard his light step on the porch. In a moment he was inside, and flinging his hat on a chair, he strode over to me.

"Well, honey girl," he cried, stooping over to kiss me, "how is Miss Furman this afternoon? Notice," he added, with a laugh, "how careful I am to say 'Miss Furman'; for in twenty-four hours that name will be lost to you forever!" And again he laughed that exhilarated, boyish laugh of his. How hard he was making it for me!

**B**UT I knew I must speak now, or perhaps lose the courage to speak. "I'm afraid you are wrong, Bob," I told him. "I'm afraid I will be Miss Furman longer than twenty-four hours—though perhaps not so very much longer."

He stared at me, not understanding. "You mean—you are putting the marriage off?" he cried.

"Not putting it off, Bob. I—I—" Then I had to look away when I said it. "I shall never marry you—or anybody else."

"Never marry me?" He breathed the words.

I looked up, managing a half-hearted smile. "You see, Bob," I said, "I have tuberculosis in its last stages."

A look of horror that almost frightened me appeared on his face, and he sank to his knees, burying his face in the other side of the divan on which I sat.

"God have mercy on me!" he whispered hoarsely. "Oh, God have mercy upon me!"

I think I smiled, rather ruefully, at that. How like a man, I thought, to think only of his own misfortune.

"Perhaps," I chided him gently, "you might ask God to have mercy on me, too."

He looked up at that, not understanding. Then, suddenly, he broke into a harsh laugh.

"Have mercy on *you*?" he repeated. "Why should I ask mercy for a saint, when I am so vile, so—so—" His voice sank. "There is no word terrible enough," he said.

Surprised, I laid my hand on his head. "But what have *you* done, Bob?" I asked.

He looked up quickly. "What have I done?" he cried. "It is I who have brought this on you! Yes it is!" he in-

sisted when I started to deny it. "Do you remember the night I asked you to—to curse a certain woman?" And when I nodded: "Well," he breathed, and there was a terrible fear in his eyes as they looked up into mine, "*you were that woman.*"

I drew back in sudden horror; and at that he laughed more harshly than ever.

"That's right!" he cried. "Hate me! Loathe me! O God, if only you would kill me!"

"But why, Bob?" I asked, when I could speak. "Why did you want me to—to die this terrible death?"

"Because I hated you! Because I had sworn to do it! Oh, don't you see? My name isn't Bob Cowley, it's Bob King! Don't you understand? Don't you understand? *I am the son of Morrison King, the man who left you this property!*"

And then, after a long horrified silence, he commenced to explain in a low voice. By chance he had met Lillian Sumner, the one person who knew the secret of the "charm," and she had told him about it. Whereupon he had sworn vengeance, and had come here with the purpose of meeting me and carrying it out.

"Common sense told me the 'charm' had no power," he said, "but I decided to try it out. Somehow I would make you work it against yourself. If the 'charm' had no power to hurt you, then you had not hurt my father with it. But if, on the other hand, it *had* somehow worked against him, then it would work against you and revenge him."

"And," said I, in a weak voice, "he is revenged."

But Bob's eyes flared. "No, no!" he cried. "You did not mean it! Didn't you tell me yourself you were hoping to find the rightful owner of this property? I saw your true self then, Avis, and I would have killed myself to take back that curse!" He hid his face for a moment in his hands; and then slowly he looked up with pleading eyes.

"**A**VIS," he whispered, "I know I have no right to ask you to forgive, much less forget. But—but will you let me marry you? Will you let me go with you, wherever you must go; to live with you, and—and die with you, if you are to die?"

I smiled, a bit wistfully. "After all the hate you had for me?" I asked.

"No, no!" he insisted. "I never really

hated you, after I saw you! I really loved you that first day, though I fought against it and pretended to myself I didn't. I—I thought I hated you till the very night you performed that curse; and then, going home, I suddenly realized I was wrong. I suddenly realized I loved you with all my heart, and soul, and body!"

Suddenly, a terrible pain shot through me. I jumped up, laughing hysterically.

"You think your hate is evil!" I cried, looking at him as he knelt there. "But I will tell you something far, far more evil than your hate—your love!"

He drew back, as if I had struck him. "No," he whispered, "not that! Don't say that!"

But I was still laughing, laughing till the tears rolled down my cheeks.

"*With all your heart, and soul, and body!*" I repeated. "Those were my words. Those were the words I used that night after you left, Bob, when, my conscience troubling me, I worked the 'charm' again. If the first 'charm' succeeded, you were to learn to love the woman you cursed—with all your heart, and soul and body!" I stopped; looked down at him. "Now do you see why your love for me is more vile even than your hate?"

For a moment he did not move. A man who has been stabbed by one he loves must look as he did. Slowly he rose to his feet.

He dragged himself across the room; took up his hat. At the threshold he turned.

I shall never forget the tragic eyes that gazed at me. He knew he was seeing me for the last time in this life. But he did not speak. He turned, went out the door, out of my sight forever.

I heard his footsteps descending the outer stairs and die away down the walk. I listened, straining my ears for the last sound, kneeling the while where he knelt, resting my cheek against the back of the

sofa which was still warm from his cheek.

And here in my little cell in the mountains, I wait the end. They tell me it won't be long now, and I am glad of that. For my heart is tired as I sit by the window, hour after hour, day after day, looking across the mountains toward the East, wondering what he is doing now . . . asking myself, is he, perhaps, thinking of me?

And I ask myself, too, what terrible force did I evoke to ruin two lives besides my own?

Who can say? Perhaps some day the answer will be found; but long before that—very, very soon, in fact—I shall be at rest.

**A**ND meanwhile, before that hour comes,

I have one more duty to perform, and then I shall be ready. From my trunk I have taken the powders and herbs, all that remains of the old woman's sinister gift; and I have put them in a small pot, struck a match, and dropped it inside.

It hisses and flares; then, slowly, the smoke curls up. My hands tremble a bit as I hold them, palms downward, over the top, and my eyes turn toward the small window facing the east that darkens in the twilight.

Soon the smoke hides that, hides the whole world from my gaze; and now I start, in a low, clear voice, those terrible words. It is the last time they shall ever be spoken, unless the old Italian woman still lives.

The Latin words are ended. And now comes the plea. I find my voice is a little tremulous; but I am glad, really and truly glad, to make this plea to that *something* that watches over me in the darkness of my smoke-filled empty room.

"May he find another whom he can love, and who loves him . . . and may he forget me . . . and be happy forever, and ever, and ever. . . ."

*To the Reader: Would you have ended this story differently? How? Was Avis too self-sacrificing, and could she have used the charm for her own happiness with justice? What do you think? Let us hear your ideas on the subject.*

