

Ghost STORIES

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My STRANGE Adventure

By

HUGH DOCRE

PURCELL

As told to

W. Adolphe Roberts

FROM time to time, I have written accounts of my psychic experiences for this magazine. Some of them—the battle, for instance, which my brother Owen and I waged with the mind reader Daniel Buwalda—have had unique occult significance. Others seem less important to me, as the years go by. But the story I am now about to tell is the one which, come what may, I can never forget. The bizarre quality of terror in the experience has eaten into my brain like an acid.

Immediately following the violent turmoil of the Buwalda affair, I found myself at a loose end, spiritually. My brother had withdrawn himself entirely from me. He was in seclusion, working out the details of a complicated plan to chart the law of telepathy. I tried to adjust myself to the old routine: days spent at my desk in a Wall Street broker's office; evenings passed with a crowd of normal, fun-loving young people in Brooklyn, where I live. I was tacitly engaged to marry a girl named Roberta Collins, a former school chum of my sister, but it seemed impossible for me to pay her the attention she naturally expected as my fiancée. I was bored with the endless round of dances, bridge parties and midnight jaunts in second-hand roadsters. Roberta lost patience with me, and said she would be just as well pleased if she never saw me again. I could not blame her.

In this crisis, it occurred to me to look up an old friend, John Lang, with whom I had conducted some of my earliest experiments in spiritualism. He had had no connection with my recent plunge into the darker occult mysteries, and for this I was thankful. I needed the companionship of a man who understood my hobby, but who would not remind me of the Buwalda case.

So, little dreaming what the result was to be, I phoned Lang and told him I would like to call. He greeted me warmly, yet there was an appreciable hesitation in his voice before he responded to my suggestion.

"It's this way, old fellow," he said. "My evenings are pretty well taken up, just now. I'm interested in a girl, and I'm seldom home. But I'd be tickled to death to have



"I'll not give messages about this!" the medium cried. "It's too terrible! That tombstone—dripping red—"

you meet her. Suppose you join us for dinner tonight at Joe's Chop House on Fulton Street."

I had a feeling of disappointment, even of annoyance, at the mention of a girl. But I answered that of course I'd be happy to join them.

That was how I came to make the acquaintance of Sulka Kopernik, who cast upon men as singular a spell as it has ever been my lot to encounter.

I WAS struck by her appearance the moment I entered the restaurant and spotted the table where she and Lang were waiting for me. Her head, poised on a long but graceful neck, was remarkable for three things—the yellow eyes, like those of a cat; the full red lips, most voluptuous in their contours, yet with something cruel about them; and the thicket of black curls, which rioted so luxuriantly as to make her seem top-heavy. These features, indeed, especially the mouth and hair, would have been less striking if she had had a head of normal size. But her face was exquisitely small, with delicate cheek bones sloping down to a little pointed chin. The effect was fantastic, what with those lips, as sensuous as a scarlet rose, and that inky halo of her hair.

with a VAMPIRE

*The girl from Prague cast as singular
a spell upon men
as Heaven ever permitted
yet only one of her victims
ever learned
her
unholy secret*



Sulka Kopernik was staring at the scene with wide, fascinated eyes

I stared at her in a sort of bewitched amazement while Lang introduced me. I was conscious of a wave of attraction between us. It was not exactly that I liked her, but she fascinated me, and I felt absurdly pleased that she should greet me with so warm a smile.

"What an odd name you have! It's very pretty," I remarked. "Sulka Kopernik!"

"It is a Czecho-Slovakian name. I am from Prague," she answered, with a trace of an accent.

"But you have been in this country a long time?"

"About ten years. My mother brought me over after the war—but she soon died." The yellow eyes clouded.

I turned my attention to Lang for the first time. His face wore a look of complete infatuation.

"Sulka is a wonderful girl," he beamed. "She taught herself English and worked her way through business college. She's considered the star stenographer in the law office where she works. I'm mighty glad to have you two know one another."

As dinner progressed, I learned that Sulka lived by herself in a small apartment in the Columbia Heights section. Also, it became clear why Lang had warned me that I would seldom find him home. It wasn't simply that he was

gaining on my emotions. Moreover, my sense of loyalty to John made me furious at her for leading me on as openly as she did. Luckily, he appeared not to notice that anything was amiss.

We finished dining a little after eight o'clock, and John leaned forward with a mysterious air.

"I've got a surprise for you both," he said. "A new spiritualistic circle has opened up in Flatbush, and they say the medium gets great results. We'll hop into my car and be out there in half an hour."

"MY Lord, why?" I cried resentfully. "I should think you'd gone deeply enough into spiritualism not to put any stock in the doings of semi-public circles where an admission fee is charged."

"Don't throw cold water on it that way," he replied, aggrieved. "Sulka is just a beginner, and she'll get a thrill out of this. Besides, there's more than one kind of circle. Usually, they're the bunk, I'll admit, but sometimes you find one where a lot of power is developed."

"This one calls itself a 'church,' I suppose, to get around the police regulations," I jeered.

"Yes. A woman named Mrs. Susan Thompson runs it."

"All right, we'll go," I conceded ungraciously. "And we'll likely be treated to some amateur fortune-telling for our pains."

If I had only guessed! But our contact with the Thompson woman was too brief to enable me to realize that she alone could have provided me with the key to a mystery.

We arrived at the old-fashioned frame house in Flatbush, paid a small fee at the door and entered a parlor where perhaps a dozen persons of all ages were paying close attention to the sayings of the stout, matronly Mrs. Thompson. She was making a series of vague predictions about the recovery of lost objects, the matrimonial prospects of her female clients, and kindred matters of relatively little moment.

A FEW minutes after we had seated ourselves, however, the medium closed her eyes, passed her hand over her forehead and commenced to pant, as she twisted her body from side to side in her large armchair beside the piano.

"Oh, my!" she gasped. "I get an awful queer impression. There's blood in this room—blood and the grave! But I can't tell whether it has to do with murder. Death? . . . I don't know. There's a tomb connected with it—all dripping red. Yet I don't have the regular feeling that comes when the spirits tell me someone is going to die."

She was silent for a moment, and then, staggering to her feet: "I'll not give messages about this!" the medium cried. "It's too terrible. That tombstone—dripping red—" She shuddered convulsively. "Everybody will please leave at once. Those that feel cheated can get their money back at the door."

Sulka was staring at the scene with wide, fascinated eyes. The girl seemed as horrified as I was.

A number of people protested quite vehemently, and one or two of the women tried to persuade Mrs. Thompson to go on. But the stout medium was firm, in her hysterical way. She gave no further details about her impressions, and she failed to name anyone as having been the cause of them. In the matter of continuing the séance, however, she knew exactly where she stood. It would endanger her health to work any longer that night, she declared, and the crowd must go.

When we found ourselves on the street again, I looked curiously at John and Sulka Kopernik.

"That's a funny proposition," I said. "The woman was not faking, and she must be a real sensitive, after all. But what was she driving at? It doesn't click with any experience I've ever had."

"I haven't the least idea," said John. "She never pulled anything like that before."

"She was prophesying something for me," declared Sulka slowly. "I know it because my heart pained me while she spoke, and I felt cold all over."

"For God's sake, don't talk that way, Sulka," protested John. "It's just that she scared you with that gruesome stuff about a tombstone dripping with blood. Your doctor warned you that you had a weak heart. I guess we'd better lay off spiritualism, if a shock like this brings on an attack."

"I am not scared," the girl cried, stamping her foot, in sudden, unreasonable anger. "And I will not be treated as an invalid, when I feel strong—yes, stronger than you, or that medium person, or anybody tonight, except Mr. Purcell!" She threw me a strange glance. "Take me home at once, and we'll hold a séance of our own."

I made no comment as we crowded into John's small roadster. Sulka was in the middle, and I could have sworn that, despite the restricted space, she contrived to draw away from him and lean slightly against me. Her trailing hand rested upon my knee. I felt a magnetic thrill shoot through me—not wholly pleasurable, either, though the girl fascinated me. I was even aware of a certain degree of fear at her touch. It seemed ghastly that she should be suffering from heart trouble, and I trembled as if a dead woman's

hand had touched me. I drew away in revulsion.

The next moment the girl threw her head back and burst into a peal of incongruous laughter. I looked sidewise at her. The light from a street lamp enabled me to see clearly her parted lips, voluptuous and red. For the first time, I noted that her teeth, with the exception of the two middle incisors in the upper jaw, were abnormally pointed.

"If anyone was frightened, it was Mrs. Thompson, the medium—frightened of me!" she shrieked.

"Hush! That's a crazy thing to say," muttered John unhappily.

Our talk for the rest of the trip back was commonplace, and I had recovered my poise by the time we reached Sulka's apartment. The two rooms she lived in were attractively furnished, but they do not stand out in my memory as revealing any singularity of taste on her part. A divan in the parlor was strewn with gaily colored cushions, among which the girl lolled, as she ordered John about with mock tyranny. She had him bring her a pack of cards and started to tell his fortune, but before she had gone very far with this childish amusement, she capriciously threw the deck aside and called for a ouija board. She handled it clumsily, and clearly did not know how to use it. I paid almost no attention to what she was doing, but kept my eyes fastened on her face, so like that of a beautiful young witch.

The thicket of black curls now struck me as being her most amazing feature. This hair was too virile, too abundant, to be wholesome. Surely it must sap the strength of her entire body, I thought. No wonder she looked frail, and had such delicate, semi-transparent hands, a neck so slender that it seemed scarcely able to support the burden of her overweighted head.

It was John Lang who broke the silence that had fallen.

"Quit fooling, Sulka," he pleaded impatiently. "You know we never get results from the ouija. Let's try something that works."

She raised her eyes and gave him an enigmatic stare.

"All right—the table," she answered. "But don't blame me if you go into one of your trances."

"What's that?" I asked, turning to him. "Does Miss Kopernik hypnotize you?"

"Oh, no! It's a sort of self-hypnosis that comes over me when we experiment with the table."

"Do you recall afterward what has happened to you?"

"I do not. My mind is a complete blank."

"Then what's the point?"

"It seems that I talk a lot—say queer things. Sulka keeps track of them."

"Yes," the girl cut in hurriedly, "and sometimes he gets mad at what I tell him. He swears he couldn't have uttered such nonsense. That's why I warned him not to blame me tonight."

"I feel mighty weak, too, when the trance is ended," John said.

"That's bad business, especially for amateurs," I commented, and told myself that John was by no means looking as well as he should. I hadn't noticed it before, but in comparison with his appearance a few months earlier, he seemed haggard. "Better give up the idea of a séance to-night," I advised.

BUT Sulka cried out in protest, and, being a woman, she had her way. A light table was moved over beside the divan. John and I sat in chairs on one side of it. Sulka knelt among her cushions, balancing herself upon her toes and extending her arms at full length to rest her fingertips on the table.

I was, and am, a powerful medium for this kind of séance. Yet I had never known results to be at the same time so negative and so sinister as they were that evening. The table commenced to quiver. I felt the usual vibrations pulsing in the wood. But in less than five minutes—before

any strong manifestation had had time to develop—John slumped back in his chair unconscious, and the table went dead.

I gazed at my friend, astounded. His eyes and mouth were closed, and he breathed gently through his nose. None of the ordinary symptoms of hypnosis were present. He was in a heavy narcotic sleep, from which I could not rouse him, though I slapped him on the shoulder and ordered him sharply to awaken.

Slowly, I turned my head toward Sulka Kopernik. She was not looking at John. Her eyes, which had grown enormous and brilliantly yellow, like condensed sunlight, were fixed upon me.

"Do his—his trances—always take this course?" I muttered.

"Not always. He generally speaks, but tonight he will say nothing. I know the signs," she answered in a curious, high-pitched voice.

Instinctively aware that she was deceiving me on some vital point, I countered by asking: "Can you wake him? It's a dangerous condition—"

"Don't you feel sleepy yourself?" she interrupted.

I passed my hand over my forehead. Actually, I felt slightly drowsy, but there was no danger of my succumbing, as John had, to the unknown malign influence in that room.

She did not wait for an answer. Leaping from the divan, she ran about the room, clapping her hands and laughing hysterically.

"It's all right!" she cried. "You don't have to be asleep. I can kiss you anyway, and he'll never know."

As I got to my feet, I swear I thought she had suddenly gone mad. But it was not insanity that shone from her strange eyes, and unaccountably my own will became weaker than water. Lured by her beauty, I believed myself already more than halfway in love with her. When she finally halted by the fireplace, I advanced toward her, and the next instant my arms were about her and our lips had met.

We exchanged a single terrible kiss. How am I to describe it? I experienced a moment of intense ecstasy, and then—her sharp teeth stabbed into my lower lip! The pain was considerable, for the wound which had been inflicted bled freely; but the mental horror that surged through me was far more acute than the pain. I suspected now with what sort of creature I had to deal. Tearing myself loose, I threw her from me and felt no compunction at seeing her stumble over a chair and fall flat upon the divan.

She lay face downward for a few minutes, uttering no sound. When she finally pulled herself together and arose, she looked grievously weary and beaten. The color was all drained from her cheeks. Only her lips were still red.

"I'm sorry," she said listlessly. "I did that because—because I couldn't help it. I really love John."

"I don't believe you," I replied curtly.

She shrugged her shoulders. "What does it matter what anyone thinks! A curse is on me. But we can wake John between us. Let us try."

Had my friend been hypnotized, the person responsible could at once have called him out of his trance. But Sulka Kopernik was unable to do this, and I was thereby convinced that she did not practise hypnosis. She told me that John was always affected as soon as the table started to move, and that he usually recovered his senses an hour later. Her earlier story that he talked while entranced had been a lie, she admitted, invented to give drama to the adventure.

Just what force was responsible for my friend's assuming this condition is still a puzzle to me. I can only presume that some evil spirit, summoned by means of the table, took that method of placing him completely in the power of the

girl Sulka. If the theory seems grotesque to my readers, I can only suggest that they consult the books of the great Medieval mystics, such as Sprenger and Dom Dominic Schram.

Be that as it may, in about ten minutes our united efforts to revive John Lang were successful. He appeared to have suffered no ill effects, and exhibited naive disappointment when I assured him that he had failed to transmit any messages from the world beyond. With the slightest encouragement, he would have continued the séance. But when the girl declared sullenly that she was sleepy, I seized the opportunity to persuade him to leave with me.

On our way home, I was tempted to tell him what I believed to be the awful truth about Sulka Kopernik. Yet I remained silent. I had no proofs to offer—nothing to go upon, in fact, except the interpretation I now placed on the frenzied words of the medium Susan Thompson, and my astounding personal experience which he would surely misunderstand in the telling.

JOHN sealed my decision by remarking that he was starting in the morning on a business trip, to be absent from New York for a week. He would be safe for at least that length of time, I reflected. Meanwhile, I would think the matter over and confide in him, if necessary, when he returned.

It was not written in the stars, however, that John should make that trip. I heard from him the following day. He called me on the telephone, his voice breaking with anguish, to ask me to help him through the tragedy that had befallen him.

Sulka Kopernik was dead.

She had set out at nine o'clock, it appeared, to walk the few blocks from her home to her office. At the corner of Court and Remsen Streets, passersby had seen her place her hand to her breast, reel and fall to the pavement. She had been carried to the nearest drug store, where a physician pronounced her dead from heart failure. John's card had been found in her pocketbook, and he had been summoned. Since all her living relatives were in Europe, the ordeal of arranging for her funeral would have to be undertaken by him.

At the inquest, it developed that her own doctor had been treating her for acute heart disease. So there was no mystery about her death—no medical or legal mystery, at any rate. For my part, I was haunted by a frightful doubt.

During the preparations for the funeral, I saw the body several times. On one occasion, I went alone into the room where the open coffin stood on its trestles, and stared for several minutes at Sulka Kopernik's face and folded hands. They made a most painful impression upon me. Not because they were ghastly to look at, however. On the contrary, I could scarcely convince myself that the girl was dead.

Her flesh had a natural, healthy glow and her lips were just as red as I had known them in life. The faint tracery of blue veins on the backs of her hands almost seemed to be throbbing. Her eyelids lay so softly over her eyes that I expected them to flutter open at any moment. Her wealth of black hair was absolutely lustrous.

Yet the coroner's official, as well as two private physicians, had certified that a corpse lay here—a dead body that in a few hours, would be buried. Could I set up my judgment against theirs?

No, I could not, and I will tell you why.

I believed Sulka Kopernik to be a vampire, one of those monstrous elemental spirits which seize possession for a while of the bodies of women. In mortal life, they partake of the nature of death; and after they have entered the



tomb, they do not perish utterly—they remain the “undead,” as the medieval occultists called them. At night, they rise and go forth to suck the blood of the living, and so long as they are able to do this, the flesh they inhabit cannot decay, even though buried.

In modern times, of course, the existence of vampires has been denied; they have been classed as myths. But the older students of black magic accepted them without question. And I, too, in this year of grace, 1929, affirm that such things can be.

The body of Sulka was indeed dead, but if a vampire controlled it, its presence in Brooklyn was more dangerous than a pestilence. Sorcerers in the old days believed that there was only one way of destroying a vampire. The body must be interred at a cross-roads, in unconsecrated ground, with a stake driven through its middle. This would cause the evil spirit to flee screaming into outer darkness. But could I, a supposedly rational American citizen, propose such a course in conducting the funeral of John Lang's fiancée?

I simply could not.

SHIVERING with the awfulness of my thoughts, I returned to John and did my best to strengthen his morale. He was badly broken up, poor fellow, and needed to hear the conventional words of comfort which I offered him. In due time, we went together to the cemetery as chief mourners. Sulka was buried on a green hillside, according to the rites of the Church, and thus a tragic episode was seemingly ended.

The reader will understand, however, that I could not feel that way about it. If my fears were correct, John and I were likely to become the first victims of the marauding “undead” creature we had laid away. I had a natural impulse to put as great a distance as possible between ourselves and the scene of our contacts with Sulka. If we remained away for a while, I figured, perhaps the spell would be broken. Certainly, for the simple physical reasons of health, John needed a change. So I persuaded him to go with me to the Adirondack Mountains. I arranged for a month's vacation for myself, and the day after the funeral we started north.

We chose a primitive, wooded section in the neighborhood of Indian Lake. At the only hotel in the village, we were told of a log cabin which could be rented cheaply. It was fifteen miles further on, in a valley surrounded by forests. A corduroy road could be followed for half the distance, and then one turned into a narrow trail. Our only neighbors would be occasional roving lumbermen. The isolation appealed to us, and we departed, laden with supplies of food and bedding. The grocer, whose car took us as far as the trail, promised to fill our further orders once a week. From the end of the corduroy road, we made several trips to the cabin, carrying our belongings.

I shall always remember with delight the beauty of that summer retreat in the woods. The valley was thick with pine trees and hemlocks, which created a perpetual green twilight of shade. But there was very little undergrowth, and one could look for hundreds of yards between the ranked colonnades of the tree trunks.

The log cabin was old and covered with an emerald-green moss. It had been built, we were informed, by trappers who had made it their headquarters as far back as the 1880's, when fur-bearing animals were common in that section of the State. No one had lived in it for years, but the wood-dust which lay thickly on the floors and the built-in bunk beds seemed clean compared with the dirt of cities. We never even troubled to sweep the place out thoroughly.

The charm of the place—the cabin, the dark woods and all—brought peace to my heart, despite the fact that its loneliness and the absence of sunlight undoubtedly gave it a certain eerie character. Memories of Sulka Kopernik were easily banished in that primeval setting. The mere idea that her influence could pursue us to the far woodlands of the Adirondacks appeared ridiculous.

John shared my mood. He shook off his grief and joined me eagerly in fishing expeditions and hikes through the forest. His health improved with extraordinary rapidity. At the end of two weeks, he had lost all traces of the haggard look I had noted on the evening before Sulka's death. His cheeks became tanned, and his eyes grew brighter. I believed him to be a man saved in the nick of time from a subtle inevitable doom.

Our third week passed so tranquilly, so wholesomely, that there is nothing to record concerning it. But on Saturday occurred a change, and every subsequent detail is important, if the reader is to understand what happened.

We expected the grocer at the cross-roads at noon, so we strolled down in leisurely fashion to meet him. He had brought several boxes of canned goods, and it was necessary to make three trips to get them to the cabin. John made light of his share of the work, until we had said good-by to the grocer and started back on our last trip. He then complained that he was tired. Half way, he discarded his load, sat on a stump and insisted that he must rest a while. I noticed that his cheeks were flushed.

Nevertheless, I did not think that anything was seriously wrong, even when, on reaching the cabin, John threw himself on his bunk. I prepared an early supper, for we had dropped into the outdoors habit of going to bed shortly after sunset. My companion tried to eat with me, but he had lost his appetite and complained of a raging headache. He drank a little strong coffee, and then crawled under his blanket, his teeth chattering.

The next day, Sunday, he felt better. I did not like the congested appearance of his face, however, and suggested that I should go to Indian Lake and fetch a doctor. He would have none of it. The worst that could be the matter with him, he insisted, was a touch of indigestion. So we went fishing, and, oddly enough, ran into the first traveler we had seen since our arrival in the valley. This was a lumberjack named Stephenson, on his way to a logging camp many miles to the northward where he hoped to find work.

Stephenson gave us a hearty greeting and threw himself on the ground beside the rill in which we were rather aimlessly angling with home-made rods. He talked about the weather and the scarcity of fish, but all the while he was speaking he stared more and more intently at John.

“Boy, you're sick,” he interrupted himself to remark. “You've got a high fever—or else I'm crazy!”

I swung around, and was shocked at my friend's appearance. He had suddenly grown far worse than he had been the day before. The veins on his neck and forehead were swollen. He was teetering on his heels, and seemed about to fall. The lumberjack seized his wrist with rough kindness and felt his pulse.

“God, it's beating like mad!” he said. “We'd better take this lad over to your shack and put him to bed.”

JOHN did not utter a word, and as we both put our arms about him he collapsed against us. We were forced to carry him for more than a mile, to reach the log cabin. When we finally got him undressed and covered with all the blankets available, he was babbling in delirium.

“It's what we call woods fever. It comes from drinking bad water,” declared Stephenson.

But this diagnosis was too vague to be helpful and too primitive to dispel my fears.

“I've got to get a doctor for him. The nearest one is at Indian Lake. Fifteen miles of bad road—and I'll have to walk the whole way!” I cried, a bit hysterically. “Will you look after him while I'm gone?”

“I wouldn't know how. I'm not accustomed to nursing folks,” answered Stephenson. “But I'd make better time to town than you would. Let me fetch the doctor.”

“That's darned good of you.”

“Forget it. I'll go—and glad to do it, Brother. But it's late in the day already. There isn't much chance of my

finding the doc' and bringing him here before tomorrow morning. S'long, and good luck!"

It was then around six o'clock in the evening, and due to our location among the trees at the valley bottom, the darkness of night was upon us. I made John drink a mild and harmless sedative, and was presently relieved to note that it had taken effect. He fell off into a light sleep. His face was still abnormally red and he breathed with difficulty, but otherwise there were no symptoms to alarm me particularly.

I cannot excuse myself for failing to remain awake all night. It had been my firm intention to do so, not knowing when the opiate might wear off and more stringent treatment become necessary. But I was young, and my recent outdoor life made it pretty hard for me to keep my eyes open. Shortly before midnight, I felt overwhelmingly tired, and I yielded to the temptation to lie down, fully dressed, in my own bunk. I must have gone to sleep immediately.

I RETURNED to consciousness abruptly, two hours later, as though I had been summoned by some force outside myself. It was a curious phenomenon. Instead of the usual transition between slumber and wakefulness, I was wide awake in an instant and lay with unblinking eyelids, all my senses acutely attuned to detect whatever had startled me in the darkness. For a brief moment, I wondered. And then I knew. John and I were not alone. *A third presence was in the room.*

I am almost tempted to write, a "third person was in the room." For, although I had seen nothing, and only felt the nearness of a mysterious being, it did not suggest a ghost to me. The presence seemed more concrete, more terrifying and ghastly, than any specter. I burst into a cold perspiration and shook with fear. Most people have had the similar experience of waking up at night and feeling sure that a burglar was in the house. But this was something worse than a crude robber with a gun. Instinctively certain that no one had come to steal from us, I quailed under a menace which defied analysis.

Very slowly, I raised myself on my elbow and strained my eyes to pierce the gloom. At first it was too black for me to distinguish anything except the outline of the window at the foot of John's bunk. Finally I thought I could make out a shifting mass of darkness. I blinked my eyes. Surely it must have been a trick of the imagination! Then I heard the faint sound of panting, and ascribed it desperately to John's feverish breathing. Oh, how I wanted to let it go at that, and bury my head under the covers like a frightened child! While I was still struggling with myself, a woman laughed softly, gloatingly, a short arm's length away.

I cut loose then with a shout of horror. Overcoming the numbness in my legs, I tumbled from the bunk. There was the sound of swishing garments, and light but definite foot-falls pattered on the dirt floor. The silhouette of a head passed swiftly across the window. Its identity was unmistakable, for the huge blur of fluffed-out hair merely confirmed my suspicions. Appalling and unbelievable as it may seem, Sulka Kopernik was in that room.

She ran to the door and opened it with hands of flesh and bone—hands that I had seen buried in a Brooklyn cemetery. I would rather have taken poison than have attempted to seize her. But after she had gone, I followed and stared through the doorway. For a few minutes, I could make out her figure running between the tall trunks of the pines. Then she disappeared.

Too stunned even to be aghast any longer, I turned back into the cabin and lighted an oil lamp. I don't know what I expected to find, but I was certainly unprepared for the happy surprise that awaited me. John was lying peacefully on his bunk, his eyes open and a smile on his lips. He appeared to be rather weak, but the fever had subsided.

"What's the matter, Hugh? I thought I heard you yell, and it woke me. Did you have a nightmare?"

"Yes. Did you?" I retorted cryptically.

"I guess I did. A funny dream, anyway. But I don't recall what it was about, and I'm feeling fine."

I placed a fingertip on his pulse. The beat was quite regular. Then, as he sighed and shifted the position of his head on the pillow, I observed two small punctures in his neck—the mark of the vampire who had been interrupted at her feast.

Perhaps I might have questioned him further about his impressions, but he fell asleep peacefully before I was able to speak. My rôle for the balance of the night was that of a shuddering watcher, who dreaded a second visit from the unknown.

Early in the morning, the lumberjack returned from Indian Lake with a Dr. Hiram Aldis. The latter made a careful examination of John, and showed special interest in the marks on his neck.

"He has had a touch of enteric fever, complicated by his constitutional tendency toward high blood pressure," the doctor announced at last. "D'ye know, this is the sort of case that used to be relieved in the early days of medical practise by artificial bleeding. We have better methods now, but our great-grandfathers believed firmly in blood-letting. I'm not so sure but what this gentleman would have died last night if you hadn't applied leeches to him."

"Leeches!" I cried, astounded. "The little water slugs that physicians in the Middle Ages employed to suck blood from their patients?"

"Certainly. And they're still used in some countries," replied Dr. Aldis. He stared again at John's neck. "I'd say that these punctures were made by leeches. Weren't they applied intentionally?"

"I had no leeches," I muttered.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "They inhabit these damp woods. Possibly, a couple of them crawled in here, though I never before heard of their doing such a thing."

"It sounds unlikely to me," said John feebly. "Besides, I found marks on my neck every once in a while, back home in Brooklyn!"

"Those marks may have been scratches, made by your own fingernails," retorted the doctor, smiling skeptically. "But on this occasion blood was drawn from your veins, and it just about saved your life, young fellow. You'll recover quickly now."

HE was neither a very scientific nor a very inquisitive doctor, for he allowed the matter to go at that. I listened to him mutely, while cold chills crinkled the skin between my shoulder blades. For I knew better. Those punctures had been made by Sulka Kopernik, with her little pointed teeth! Before she had gone to the grave, she had played the vampire at her amateur séances with John; and last night she had come back to do the same thing.

But a startling theory was now formulating itself in my mind. Could it be that her purpose in returning had been to help him? She had told me that her love for John had been sincere. Perhaps in the world beyond, she had resolved to use her awful powers only for good where he was concerned.

When John had recovered his health, I discussed the problem with him, holding back no detail of what I believed about Sulka herself, living or dead, and the events I had witnessed that night in the cabin. I'll admit frankly that he scoffed at my whole testimony, dismissing it as "preposterous." He could not accept the reality of vampires, and agreed with Dr. Aldis that he must have been bitten by a leech. But John's knowledge of the occult is superficial, and since he is happy in his ignorance, it is just as well that he should remain so.

I can do no more than affirm that we have neither of us been visited again by the vampire, Sulka Kopernik. Whether she has molested other persons, I cannot say. If there is any evidence which points in that direction, I would like to hear about it, so that I may study it in the interests of science.