

# The Bloodstained Parasol

## A Study in Madness

By JAMES RAVENSCROFT

WITHIN the room were sounds that were unpleasant to hear. They were dreadful maniacal shouts of command, shrill cries of terror, the more awful because constantly broken by hoarseness, and moanings of infinite tenderness and sadness.

"He is in one of his spells," the attendant said. "Perhaps it would be just as well not to see him now. It is not a picture that you would want to carry with you."

The attendant's voice was one of gentle solicitude and pithos. Doubtless long service in the place had made it so. It was a private sanitarium, in the National Capital, for the hopelessly insane, to which my profession as specialist and alienist gained me admittance.

The sounds hypnotized me; I could not turn away. The small iron grating in the upper part of the door drew me like a magnet, and I went and looked into the room.

A pale-faced, emaciated, wild-looking man, standing in the middle of a bare mattress on a heavy iron bedstead, was yelling and gesticulating madly at some imaginary object at the bottom of the door.

"Get away, curse you, get away!" he cried frantically. "Begone, you brute! Out of my sight! Would to God I had burned you as fine as ashes! *Oh-h-h-h!* *Oh-h-h-h-h!*"

The groans which ended the fury cannot be described; they were those of a soul in agony. His whole appearance was that of one convulsed with a terror as of death.

At first he did not see me as I peered through the grating; his eyes, bright with the glitter of madness, were fixed in a fearful stare at the bottom of the door.

"It is over for a while," said the attendant.

The words roused the man and he raised his eyes to the grating. A wan smile of relief broke the expression of horror on his face, and he at once stepped off the bed and came to the door. A beadsweat, not the kind caused by heat, though the day was sultry, was on his brow and upper lip, and his body relating from the tension of the spell,

was shaking with a nervous palsy. He was clad in pajamas of some coarse white material and his feet were bare.

"Pardon me," he spoke in low tones and with an accent of breeding, "but that infernal dog distracted my attention and I didn't see you. I'm glad you came. I remember you quite well, indeed. You were doing interne work, were you not?"

I yielded to his humor, grateful that I could help to ease his tortured spirit, and nodded affirmatively.

The glitter in his eyes seemed to be intensified, and putting his face almost against the grating, as though he meant his speech to be confidential, he said:

"Perhaps you saw her?" His voice was almost a whisper. "She came in when I was dissecting. I was always dissecting, then, always dissecting. Understand? I cut things up, alive and dead, dead and alive. That was the beginning of the hell."

He said it so sanely, so remorsefully that I, startled, looked closely at him. Reason appeared to be reinstated on her throne. Then he broke out again.

"I cut them to pieces, but I didn't burn the pieces and they escaped, out of the windows, through the keyhole. They even hid in the pockets of my clothes until I was on the street, and then they would leap out and dart away."

He moistened his thin, dry lips with his tongue and took hold of the bars of the grating, and went on:

"No, I didn't burn the pieces and they escaped. That dog follows me in pieces. At night its feet scratch at the bottom of the door and its eyes look in between the bars of this window. Its red, dripping tongue lies on the bed beside me and its hot, horrible breath smothered me. Its footsteps trot up and down the floor and its hellish moans and whines drive me crazy. Listen! It was alive. That's why she struck me! A soft, white thing it was, and I threw up my hand and caught it. She dropped it and I took it and kept it. That's it, standing in the corner over there."

Involuntarily I shuddered and looked toward the corner designated by his gesture. There was nothing in any of the corners.

"And after the dog is gone, she comes. She comes slipping, slipping. I can't hear her, I can't see her. She comes to get her parasol. But when she sees the bloodstains on it she turns to a ghost. I try to wash the stains out, but I can't. Every time I put water on them they spread."

He leaned closer to the bars, and with one eye cautiously on the attendant, he whispered:

"I'm working on a solution that will entirely remove the bloodstains, so she will take the parasol, for when she does the dog will leave, and then I can get a long, quiet rest."

He paused and looked furtively around the room, and then began his awful babblings again.

He called piteously after me as the attendant took my arm and drew me away. I remembered little else that I saw in the sanitarium.

"Tell me about him," I implored, as soon as we were out of hearing of his cries. "Who is he? How did he come to be here?"

The attendant hesitated. "Not every one should hear that story," he remarked, thoughtfully, as if half talking to himself, "but, of course, with you, a specialist, it is different."

He took me to a chair on a porch. From there I could see into a section of the grounds of the inmates, where benighted beings were engaged in assuming their various and fantastic roles of madness.

"HIS name I shall not tell you," he began, "for that is a secret and very properly so. I shall only relate briefly what happened to him, as it came to me from his mother. His people are prominent and wealthy. It wrecked his mother's life, but the only thing that could be done was to give him up to this place. When they come here to see him they wait until he is comparatively free from symptoms of an attack, and then they go look in at the grating, as you did. Strange to tell, he recognizes only one of them, a sister, but he believes her to be a sister who died some two or three years before he became insane.

"Every possible care is given him and every famous specialist in the country has examined him. They say it is useless to hope; that he will be raving mad to the end of his days. When the fury seizes him he will hurl at his imaginary tormentors anything he can lift. That is why his room has nothing in it but a bed, and that is fastened to the floor with heavy cleats. The mattress, made of material that resists his nails, is securely attached to steel slats riveted to the bed frame, and there is no covering. Blankets, spreads, pillows and sheets were given him at first and he rent them to tatters fighting the 'dog.' In the winter his room is kept so warm that covering is not needed.

"His was accounted one of the brightest minds at the medical college in which he was a professor. It was predicted that he would do great things in surgery. He was making a special research in the field of vivisection. As he himself says, every time he can get some one to listen, that was the beginning of the hell.

"He was engaged to marry one of the loveliest young women of his city. From what I was told, she was as lovely in spirit as she was in person. The woman, it was said, was the real force that moved his work at such amazing strides. He was eager to give her of the very best of his energies and talents.

"As a quiet and close observer of life, I am sometimes almost persuaded to believe in fate. The story is that a whim possessed his fiancée to 'go through' the medical college, just, I presume, as a whim possessed you to go through this place. She said nothing to him of her intention for she wanted to surprise him.

"Two girl friends accompanied her, and together they explored. An attendant, who must have been exceedingly careless, was directing them, and at a certain place in their adventure fate willed that he should be called elsewhere for a few minutes. In those few minutes a man was doomed to madness, a woman's heart was broken, and several lives were made desolate.

"The place where the attendant left them was in a corridor by the laboratory where dissecting and other ex-

perimental work was done. The doctor's fiancée opened a door of the room and peeped in. At the opposite side a man with his back to her was working over some object. She at once recognized the familiar figure, and, as fate would have it, she was seized with the caprice to steal up behind him. Telling her companions who he was, and bidding them wait in the corridor for the attendant, she went in, softly closed the door and noiselessly tiptoed along the aisle between benches.

"If there had been more light—but why say 'if,' other than 'if fate had not taken her there that day? Her lightly-slipped feet made no sound and she stood behind him unnoticed. He might have heard, but he was deeply engrossed in his work.

"She tilted slightly on one foot to look past him at the object which so held his attention. She gazed a moment, and then, as though forgetting his presence, she sprang to his side. A dog was stretched on the dissecting board. How she discovered the fact is a mystery, unless she saw with the inner and more penetrating vision, but she *did* see evidences of life in an animal that had been carefully prepared, by all the modern methods, as a subject for the dissector.

"The doctor dropped his instrument and stood staring at her, speechless. Had she dropped from above he could not have been more amazed and startled.

"It is alive!" the girl gasped.

"Yes," he admitted. "You had better not look at it. Please come away. How did you get here?"

"The girl never moved nor took her eyes from him.

"It is in the interest of the science of saving and preserving human life," he began to explain. No doubt a cold fear was creeping into his heart at the sight of her. "It is done in nearly all colleges and hospitals, you know. The animal is under a powerful anaesthetic and does not feel pain."

"A moment more she stood, so the tale goes, as though transfixed, and then—

"You fiend, you coward!" she screamed, as she struck him in the face with her parasol. She swung it with all

her strength for a second blow and he threw up his hands to ward it off. There were red smears where he touched it, and when she saw them she flung the parasol from her and swooned.

"Her companions, from where they were waiting in the corridor, heard the scream and the commotion, and rushed in just as the doctor was picking her up, and ran after him as he carried her to another room. He told them that she had fainted at the sight of the dissecting table.

"It was a fatal day for the doctor. In his excitement he had forgotten to wipe his hands before he lifted the girl, and there were red finger marks on her white dress. Almost as soon as she revived she saw them, and swooned again. And when she again revived she began trying to tear off the dress, like she had lost her reason. One of her companions telephoned to her home and fresh clothes were brought. It was perhaps all of an hour later when, sick and too weak to walk, she was carried from the room to which the doctor had taken her.

"That was the end. The doctor pleaded with the girl's father and mother, but in vain. She never again permitted him to see her. She said she would as soon marry a murderer. Night after night he paced the sidewalk in front of her home, and went away only when the lateness of the hour and the vacancy of the street made him conspicuous.

"He gave up his college work, neglected his personal appearance, and at last became like a haunted man. Many dark tales of what had happened were whispered among friends and acquaintances of the two families. The girl became a nervous wreck and finally her people broke up their home and moved to a distant city.

"Then something in the doctor's brain cracked, and, well—you have seen for yourself."

He arose, a gentle reminder that he could not then spare me more of his time. As we shook hands in parting, he said:

"Vivisection may, possibly, be of service to medical and surgical science, but it has nothing to do with love."



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