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The CURSE of a SONG

by ELI COLTER



"The figure danced in unholy triumph as the coffin was lowered into the ground."

HE SAID the damned thing was cursed." Armitage threw back his head and laughed. The laugh held as much of contempt as it did of amusement. "I wonder if he thinks anyone is superstitious enough to believe in such antediluvian stuff as curses in this hectic era?"

"Oh, you don't believe in curses, eh?" Morgenthaler tapped the coal in his pipe and fixed a speculative gaze on Armitage.

"Huh? What's that? Believe in *curses*?" Armitage sobered slightly, returning Morgenthaler's gaze with surprise for the other man's serious tone. "Certainly not! Save the kind in which I indulge when I kick my shin on the rocking-chair in the dark. The other kind are the quin-

tessence of absurdity. Hank! Don't tell me you believe in curses!"

"I'm not telling you anything." Henry Morgenthaler drew deeply on his pipe and shrugged his shoulders, and the serious look in his eyes grew till his whole face was dark and somber with its reflection. "But I've seen things that leave me guessing—yet only to a certain extent. What I've seen and known didn't leave much room for guesswork."

"Well, I didn't mean to step on anybody's toes. If I offended some particular idea of yours, I beg pardon." Armitage settled back in his chair and lit a cigaret, his eyes still on Morgenthaler, surprised and puzzled. Morgenthaler was a hard-headed, practical sort of chap. "I've heard and read a lot of that stuff,

naturally. Curses, ghosts, and all that rot. But I always grinned up my sleeve, took it at face value and let it go at that. Certainly, I never put any credence in it."

"No, I never used to, either." Morgenthaler carefully knocked the dottle from his pipe and began refilling it. "I used to believe the same way you do. But I can't believe that way now."

"You've heard me speak of Rose Wilzen. You knew I'd met her out in Portland, Oregon, that six years I spent on the coast. And you've wondered why I never want to go back to the West. Well, Rose, and her curse, are the reason. Rose's whole life was overshadowed with tragedy and curse. From the first time I heard about it I ceased scoffing. Grant Wilzen, Rose's father, was born in the East. He had a brother named Thaddeus. They called him Thad. Thad was engaged to a girl back there in the Eastern town where the Wilzen family then lived. He was three years older than Grant.

"An old barnstorming troupe came through the town with an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* show. The fellow playing the rôle of Simon Legree was a young man of talent, much dissatisfied with his villain's part. He's climbed. You'd be startled if I told you who he is now in the theatrical world. He had become acquainted with Grant Wilzen the year before while Grant was away at a summer resort on his vacation. When the troupe came to the town the actor looked up Grant, and so got acquainted with Thad.

"Thad didn't like him. There was no particular reason for his dislike. Just one of those peculiar things nobody can explain. He simply didn't like him. And he liked him less when circumstances forced him to introduce the actor to his fiancée. The actor showed marked interest in the girl and called on her the next afternoon. Thad was furious, but he

didn't say much. The troupe's stay lengthened to two weeks, and every day the actor called on Thad's girl. And still Thad kept his mouth shut.

THE middle of the second week, Thad was sent away on business to be gone for two days. He wasn't really much concerned over the affair. He felt certain that the girl would forget all about the actor the moment the show was gone. He went on his business trip rather glad of something to help the time pass. The day he got back, he went straight to her house. There was a little latticed window opening from the parlor on to the front lawn. Thad stepped up to the window and looked through the pane, hearing the sound of the organ, and intending to surprise her. He stopped still at what he saw and heard.

"The girl was seated at the organ, playing and singing *Love's Old Sweet Song*. The actor stood by with an arm over her shoulders, and just as she finished the song he said, 'Wonderful, my darling! So shall our lives be. A continued dream of *Love's Old Sweet Song*.' And the girl answered, 'Yes, my beloved. Yes. I am thine forever!'

"The very tone of the high-flown words should have been revealing to Thad Wilzen. But he was a man of volcanic, vindictive nature—jealous, hot-headed, easily roused to an unreasoning fury. He glared at them for a moment, whirled and rushed blindly down the street, found Grant and told him what had happened. Then, in spite of Grant's efforts to prevent any hasty action on his part, he rushed madly out of town, swearing he would never come back—that none of them would ever see him again. 'His faith in women was broken, he didn't care what became of him,' and all that stuff.

"Grant went straight to the girl, demanded an explanation, and told her what had happened. She was

heart-broken, and she explained to Grant that the actor was coaching her in a scene for a play that the girls of her set were going to produce after the troupe left town. She had refrained from telling Thad because she wanted to surprize him by showing him how clever she was. Those girls were just like a bunch of kids, wanting to play circus after the circus is gone. They had become inoculated with the atmosphere of the theater, and with much high glee and enthusiasm had decided to put on a show of their own. It was merely a passing whim, a regular kid trick, and the actor had good-naturedly entered into the spirit of the thing. He was secretly coaching all the girls and fellows, not only Thad's fiancee. He was a very decent chap, and he was aghast when the girl told him about Thad's misunderstanding of what he had seen, and of his rash action.

"They did everything they could to locate Thad, and the actor left the town with his troupe the next week, expressing deep and sincere regret, saying he was certain they would find Thad and everything would be all right. But they didn't find Thad. He had simply disappeared. Two years passed. The girl married another man. Grant got an opportunity to go to the West, where he had always wanted to go, and he went out to Portland, Oregon.

"At that time—it was some forty years ago—Portland was vastly different from the metropolis it is now. There were no big steel bridges over the wide Willamette River running through the center of the town. The city was still young, in its making. You had to cross the river on either the Jefferson Street or the Stark Street ferry. There was only one street-car in the town—a horse-drawn 'bob-car' running up and down Front Street along the west side of the river.

"Grant was delighted with the

place. He wanted to grow up with it. He went to work, accumulated a circle of friends and set himself to carve out his future. But he thought he was missing something if he didn't see all of it. One night he went on a curiosity-impelled excursion with some boon companions into the then terrible North End. They roamed around through the joints, and rambled along through a couple of wide-open 'music halls' and saloons called by the names of the proprietors—Erickson's and Blazier's. Then they went on to the smaller dives, and in one wild place Grant ran bang-up into his brother Thad. Thad, neither drunk nor wild, was standing around watching the poor devils about him with a kind of cynical sympathy.

"**A**FTER he recovered from his first astonishment, Grant went close to him, took his brother by the arm and spoke to him.

"'Thad! Where have you been all this time?'

"'Thad?' His brother frowned in polite and distant bewilderment. 'You must be mistaken. My name is John Rogers.'

"Grant saw instantly that Thad wasn't running any bluff. He never learned how it happened, but Thad's mind had gone God knows where, and some stranger mind was in its place. Grant tried to make him remember who he was, but failed utterly. Then he tried to make friends with him, but only partly succeeded. Thad refused to go to live with him. He hung around the North End, gambling incessantly, looking on, never drinking, but never content anywhere else.

"One night when Grant was roaming around with him, trying to win his confidence and striving to bring back something of the past to Thad's mind, they went into a stinking little hell-hole of a music hall. There was a drunkard in there, seated at a

wheezy old organ in the corner, maudlinly playing and singing *Love's Old Sweet Song*. And something of what Grant had utterly failed to do was accomplished in a split second by that melody. Thad remembered. He stopped short, stared at the man, went white as a sheet and began to shake from head to foot. His stare turned into a maniacal glare; he pulled out a gun and emptied it into the body of the man at the organ.

"The place was instantly in an uproar. Some rushed to pick up the dead man, and others rushed at Thad. Grant managed to get his brother out of the place and away from the North End.

"From then on a curious thing came to pass. Concerning some things, Thad was as level-headed and cool as you could want a man to be. He knew who he was, knew Grant, and remembered most of the past. But just mention *Love's Old Sweet Song*, or let him hear a strain of it, and he was instantly a raving maniac. His insanity was so apparent that there was no talk of sending him to the gallows.

"He was immediately committed to the insane asylum, then situated in Portland on Twelfth and Hawthorne Streets. It was not at that time a state institution, but a private one kept by Dr. Hawthorne, who had built it on his own property and who ran it for the good of the state. There Thad was taken, and there Grant went often to see him, always hoping to find him improved and perhaps in time turned sane. But Thad never changed, except to grow worse. He remembered enough of the incident concerning the girl and the actor to send him into a murderous fury every time she was mentioned, or every time he thought of her or the song. Grant never mentioned either, but he couldn't keep Thad from thinking. Because Grant was with him at the time his memory partly returned, and because the song was

so important a part of the shooting affair, Thad began to associate Grant with all his troubles. Every time Grant went to see him he would go into a rage and begin to curse him. He kept steadily getting worse to such an extent that Grant had to stay away.

"Then Grant got married, and for two years he didn't see Thad. And Thad went into another rage, in which he was plainly dying. They sent for Grant. Thad had cooled down in the meantime and become more lucid and calm than he had been since his incarceration in the asylum. But the moment he saw Grant he went again into a wild fury. He had been told of Grant's marriage. He cursed Grant, his wife, and all of his descendants. He swore that after he died he would come back and curse him so long as he lived, if he ever dared have that song around him or allowed it played in his house. He died repeating that curse over and over.

GRANT, of course, grieved over it. But he was humanely relieved to see Thad out of his troubles, and he paid no attention to the curse. He laughed at it, as you and I would have done, Armitage. For the next few years life moved along smoothly for him, and he about forgot Thad's curse. But he had told his wife about it, and she was just superstitious enough so that she wouldn't have the song in the house, and she wouldn't let anyone sing it or play it on their organ.

"Grant's family began to come, and he had bought himself a place in the town of Lents—then a separate town but since a suburb of Portland. Grant prospered. Portland had grown. Three big steel bridges, the Morrison, Steel, and Burnside, had gone up over the river. Street-cars were running on both sides of the Willamette. And as the town grew, Grant grew up with it. He had got

to be pretty well off, and was feeling well satisfied with life.

"The tragedy of Thad was legend in the family, but none save Grant's wife put any credence in the curse the insane man had leveled at them all. Rose, the youngest of Grant's children, a sensitive, delicate child, grew up with the shadow of that curse hanging over her. She couldn't tell why, but she had an instinctive, uncontrollable belief in it. The asylum had been taken over by the state, and the inmates moved to the state institution at Salem. But the old private asylum remained there on Hawthorne's property for a long time, on the bank of a little creek, empty and deserted. She saw it once, when she was a little kid, and it made a powerful impression on her mind.

"The other children of the family sighed in perfunctory sympathy and shrugged away from them their Uncle Thad's tragedy, although they were oddly careful to avoid any contact with that song. But Rose couldn't shake it off so easily. Nor could she ever get out of her head the inner picture of the gloomy old asylum. It grew to shadow her. She couldn't get away from it. By the time she was eighteen her entire existence was colored by a dread belief in the curse bound up in *Love's Old Sweet Song*. Whenever she would even think of it she would remember the gloomy old asylum, and shiver. The building had been torn down, the creek filled in, and concrete streets heavy with traffic now ran over its site. But to Rose it still stood, a sinister monument of the wreck of Thad's life and the curse of a song.

"When she was nineteen years old she could look back and count seven different tragical happenings that had occurred in connection with that song. Her belief in the curse was so implicit that no one could make her believe other than that to sing it or hear it was disaster.

"Then she met Murray Fielding. He was just back from the war. We were attending a party at the home of one of her friends. I had taken her there. Long since I had made my try for her affections, and lost. But, contrary to commonly accepted opinion on that subject, we remained fast friends. Well, we arrived at her friend's house, and her friend's brother and I stood in the hall talking, waiting for her. She and her friend had gone upstairs to the friend's room where she was to leave her wraps.

"I heard her voice, and turned to see her coming down the stairs arm in arm with the other girl. The girl was telling Rose about Murray Fielding, how fine-looking he was, what a nice fellow, you know—came of a splendid family, was decorated in the war, and all the things girls say about men when they want to interest another girl. I grinned up at them. They were about half-way down the stairs and they were making no effort to lower their voices.

"Just then Murray himself came into the hall, paused by the table where the punch-bowl stood, and began to ladle out a glassful of punch. Rose's friend hailed him gayly. He looked up, smiled at her, and his glance passed to Rose. Just at that precise moment three or four of the girls in the room beyond began to bang on the piano and sing *Love's Old Sweet Song*.

"I started, and shot a glance at Rose. She went white, and stopped short on the stairs, staring at Murray Fielding. Because, in that instant, she knew that Murray was the one man for whom she was intended. And she heard the wailing of that song behind him. He put down the ladle and glass he held, staring back at her, puzzled and amazed by the look on her face and the pallor, knowing also that she was the one girl for him. Rose's friend knew all about the curse, and even had a kind of ro-

mantic respect for it. But she didn't believe in it. She took Rose by the arm, drew her on down into the hall and introduced Murray Fielding to her.

"For the next three months Rose and Murray went through a strange experience. They couldn't bear to be apart, and they were miserable when they were together. Rose was frightened out of her wits. Murray was entirely at sea, bewildered and puzzled by her actions. She hadn't told him about the curse, and she had forbidden anyone else's doing so. Up to that time I had treated the whole thing as a joke, only that I deplored what I considered Rose's foolish belief in it. But now I began to be worried about the thing. I could see that Rose was wearing down under severe strain, and one night I deliberately brought up the subject, intending to try and talk her out of it.

"'It's no use, Hank,' she told me, her face colorless and her eyes dilated with apprehension. 'I know you laugh at it, but that curse is very real. Uncle Thad hangs around me all the time. I don't know what he wants, but he intends to carry out that curse so long as any of us live.'

"'He hangs around you?' I repeated, staring at her, wondering if she was a little bit unsettled in her mind from brooding over it. 'See here, my dear, that's all bunk. When a man's dead, he's dead.'

"'You may think so,' she answered, shaking her head, 'but you're wrong. Twice in the last month I've seen him, but I've been afraid to tell anybody but you. They'd only laugh at me. I know you won't.'

"'No, I won't laugh at you,' I said soberly, studying her face, noting the dark circles under her eyes and the drawn look about her mouth. 'What do you mean—you've seen him?'

"'Why, just that.' She sank into a chair, and as I walked over to sit

beside her she went white, put her hand over her mouth to stopper a scream, and pointed behind me with a shaking finger. 'He follows me, I tell you! There he is, now!'

"I wheeled and stared across the room where she pointed. For a moment I didn't see anything. Then I saw a shadow pass along the wall. It was exactly like the shadow of some person cast by the sun, on the clear blue-gray tone of the solid-colored paper. I started to say that someone must have come up on the porch, that the sun had thrown the shadow there. Then I realized with a start that the sun was shining from the other direction—that had the shadow been a normal one it would have appeared on the *opposite* wall. That stopped me.

"I stood there staring at that slowly moving shadow, telling myself that it was some ghastly hoax. A ghost in broad daylight! Nonsense. But I couldn't make myself believe it was nonsense. That damned shadow was too clearly outlined. It was the shadow of a man a little above average height, in profile, showing a lean figure, a thin mouth-line and a long hooked nose. And it was moving. When it got within four feet of Rose it stopped. A queer kind of smoky light grew around the edges of it and it began to assume rounded proportions. It took on a color of flesh, and the face became fairly clear.

"And of all the faces I ever saw! It was positively diabolical in expression. The glaring, maniacal eyes glued to Rose's face. The thin mouth twisted in a hideous sneer. It was horrible, menacing, gloating. I felt a chill go over me and the hair raised on my scalp. The whole room was filled with a dank, foul odor, as though something loathsome and putrefying had been injected into the atmosphere. The very sunlight streaming through the window seemed polluted and soiled. I was frozen. I

couldn't move. Then, as quickly as he had come, he was gone.

"I got a grip on myself and turned to Rose. She was all but frightened into a faint, and I didn't for one moment try to conceal the fact that I myself was badly shaken.

"'You saw him?' she gasped.

"'Yes, I saw him, damn him!' I answered harshly. I took her cold hand and gripped it tightly. My own wasn't much warmer. 'Why in thunder is he following you about in that way? What's he up to?' I had no scoffing defense left. He had been there and that's all there was to it. I knew what I had seen. Then, before she could answer, my own reason explained it partly. I summed it up to Rose. 'He knows you're the only one in the family who has really taken him seriously. The very unbelief of the others held him off and rendered his power impotent. The three boys have all married and gone away without anything happening to them, you'll notice. Nothing ever happened to your father—save your mother's death, and he couldn't have been connected with that.'

'He was,' Rose interrupted, shivering and clinging to my hand. 'He was! You don't know all about this thing, Hank. Mother was getting better—and some crazy Italian came along the street playing a hand-organ. And of all things on earth he was playing that hideous song! And Mother heard it, and she cried out in a kind of terror, as if she saw something at the foot of her bed. She shrank back on her pillow and died in the instant. All of them stared toward the foot of her bed, and though they saw nothing, they remembered the curse, and they were secretly startled and shaken. But I—I saw. I saw that shadow—for the first time.'

"'Exactly!' I put in, getting some control of my shaken faculties in my eager following out of the hypothesis I had formulated. 'You

saw him! No one else did. Your very belief in him has given him power to reach you.'

"'Yes, and his power is growing.' Rose shivered uncontrollably and clung to me like a child afraid of the dark. 'And I'm so fearful of the future that it's breaking my nerve. I don't know what to do.'

"I didn't know what to do either. I didn't know what to suggest. All my preconceived ideas of such things were knocked into a cocked hat, utterly shattered by the proof lately put before me. I couldn't shake off the feeling of dread that had descended on me. I couldn't get rid of the picture of that hideous, leering, rage-contorted face. I couldn't smell anything but that putrid, foul odor he had brought with him. I stayed around for over an hour, trying to calm her and persuade her that the problem could be worked out somehow. But I made a rather poor job of it because I was so upset myself, and I had no idea what might be ahead of her if that fiend were not stopped in some way.

"I left the house, finally, and walked the streets for another hour, trying to think, and not making much headway with that, either. There was no doubt about it. Thad had come back, all right, if he had ever left the family in the first place. And he had fastened himself on the one member of the family who was approachable by him. What he intended there was no way to hazard an opinion. But it was something ugly and horrible, and he would succeed in it all right—if someone didn't find the means of stopping him.

"**T**HAT week the crowd of young people with which Rose associated took a sudden idea into their heads to make up a party and go to Mount Hood for the week-end. Mount Hood is a magnificent snow peak, 11,225 feet in elevation, some fifty or sixty miles from Portland.

All the girls of the crowd were jeering at me because I had never been even so far as Government Camp. They begged me to come along on this week-end trip, and although I didn't care to get that far away from Rose, I did feel a desire to see the place for its historic significance.

"I wanted to see the beauty of the mountain, and I had a desire to look at the monument erected there by the Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers—the monument dedicated to Samuel Barlow, pioneer from Kentucky, who built the first wagon road across the Cascade Mountains, passing that spot at the base of Mount Hood somewhere in 1845 to '46, enabling other wagon-train immigrants to have direct ingress to the Willamette Valley. But though I knew how much there was to see up there, I refused to go till I found that Rose and Murray had finally agreed to trail along. Then I consented in double-quick time.

"The party was bound for a cottage, owned by one of the girls' parents, and built a little way this side of Government Camp, in the big firs. The camp was then the end of the road, or nearly so. That was long before the cement highway was built to form the loop around Hood. The girls thought it would be no end of a lark to go up there on Saturday, take a trip a little way up the mountain, and come back on Sunday.

"Well, of course we started out in fine spirits. I hadn't heard the curse-bearing song since that night of the party three months before. If it had been a favorite with the gang, it wouldn't have seemed so strange a thing for it to crop up that night. But it wasn't. The girls didn't like it. They voted it sloppy and slow. They couldn't understand what motive had impelled them to tear into it right at that moment. I know. I asked them. And why should they take a freak notion to take a bust at it at the precise instant when Rose

first laid eyes on Murray Fielding? I never have believed in coincidence. I guess I was the only one in that gay crowd that Saturday evening who had the shivers under the grin I wore to mask my feelings. I was thinking of all the affairs, and mostly of Thad's appearance.

"Murray's presence had steadied Rose a great deal, and the rest of the crowd was so hilarious that they drew her into their nonsense in spite of herself. We started from Portland early, but the roads were bad, and we struck one nasty detour that forced us to crawl along at five miles in low. At Rose's request I had gone in Murray's car with him and her. He had a roadster that would barely accommodate the three of us. When we reached the detour, another party bound for the mountain drove up even with us and the cars got all mixed up. The rest of our party got away ahead of us, but Murray didn't pay any attention.

"I noticed that he was watching the side roads; a few of them showed up here and there, rutted and almost impassable, and he was keeping a careful eye on them. Finally he stopped at one of them, turned down it, and crawled along through the timber on miserable going. I wondered what he was up to, but I kept my mouth shut and attended to my own business. Murray was a fine, keen, level-headed chap, and I knew that whatever he was doing was all right. He finally drew up before a dark, remote and hidden cabin. Still, I didn't say a word. And neither did he. And neither did Rose. He got out of the car, assisted her out and started toward the cabin with a beckoning gesture for me. Of course I followed close.

"The cabin was locked, but he took out a key, opened the door, preceded us in and struck a match to light the oil lamp sitting on the table. It had grown dusky early there in the shadow of the trees. I don't know

to this day whether he simply accepted me as someone close enough to Rose to be trusted all the way, or whether he was driven so hard he didn't give a whoop who was around. At all events he turned and faced Rose, ignoring me utterly, and asked bluntly, 'Rose, just why are you afraid of me?'

"'I'm—I'm not,' she denied, but she went white as paper and I felt the cold chills go up and down my spine. In a passing car on the not distant detour I could faintly hear a band of celebrators singing *Love's Old Sweet Song*. And squarely behind Murray on the wall appeared that malignant shadow.

"Murray set his mouth grimly as Rose dropped into a chair, too much frightened to keep her feet, and answered with terse words, 'Rose, you can't expect me to believe that weak denial. Why, you're as white as a death's-head at the very question!'

"He was shaking with emotion, and I felt infinitely sorry for him, but I couldn't tear my eyes from that hideous shadow on the wall. It wasn't moving now—it was standing still directly behind him. He went on harshly, 'I'd swear you care as much for me as I do for you. I've seen it in your eyes, if I'm any judge of human beings at all. Yet, every time I come close to you, you shudder. You shuddered and went white the first time you ever saw me. What is it? What have I done? What do you think I've done? I swear I've never committed any act in my life of which I need be ashamed. I've not even any relative of which I need be ashamed. As a matter of fact, I've no living relative at all save a half-brother from whom I became separated during the war. I never could find him again, never expect to see him again. But he was one of the finest chaps I ever knew, and I'd give ten years of my life to find him. What is it, Rose? You've got to tell

me. Your treatment of me is driving me mad!'

"*Mad*. Ugly word. Driving him mad! Rose's eyes dilated terribly as she stared at the shadow taking shape behind him, and the voices from that ear crawling along the detour still faintly wafted that cursed song down to us.

"Rose half got up from her chair, driven beyond control, and cried out at him, 'Murray—listen—what do you hear?' He strained his ears for the least sound, and caught the echo of that song, as Rose finished wildly, 'Look behind you! Murray—look behind you!'

"Murray wheeled, and stared where her gaze was riveted. The shadow had completely taken form by this time, and he saw clearly, as we saw, that horrible, sinister figure, with the thin cruel mouth and the glaring mad eyes. As he looked, the thin mouth opened, twisting, writhing, and I knew Thad Wilzen was trying to speak to him. But his power hadn't grown strong enough for that yet, and no sound came from the menacing, diabolical shape. Murray stared a moment, then his face went black with anger. He thought it was a real corporeal fleshly body standing there.

"'Get out of here!' he roared, jerking out the little automatic he habitually carried in defiance of all laws to the contrary, leveling the snub-nosed wicked weapon at the vicious figure he now faced. 'Get out of here, instantly, or I'll drill you!'

"Thad got out. But he didn't go through any fear of Murray, nor because Murray had commanded it. He did it to put the fear into Murray's heart, and he succeeded. He laughed—and we heard that. A thin, high, mocking titter. The glare in his eyes shot an ugly threat at Rose, his whole figure wavered, grew thin and vanished into the air. Oh, he went, all right. And there was no mistaking the way he went, either! Murray

stared a moment at the blank wall, his eyes starting from his head, then he turned slowly, replacing the gun in his pocket, shifting his stare to Rose's white face.

"'Good God!' he cried hoarsely; 'what was that? Rose, what does it mean? What's back of all this?'

"'That—that song—'" Rose gasped, and fainted in her chair.

"Both of us sprang toward her, but he reached her first. He picked her up in his arms, took the chair himself, and sat there rocking her in his arms like a baby, staring down into her colorless face, smoothing her forehead with one hand.

"'She'll come about all right in a moment,' I said, trying to speak calmly. 'I know the whole affair. Better let me tell you before she comes out of her faint. She's merely frightened.'

"Murray looked up at me with a start, suddenly recalled to the fact of my presence. The shock and bewilderment on his face settled a little, and he asked in a steadier voice, though still hoarse and shaken, 'You—you saw it, Hank? You smelled that vile odor? I thought at first that the cabin was just musty from being closed so long. It's our summer house, you know. The folks haven't been up since last year—the folks where I stay. They have made me one of the family. They're all the folks I have. But Rose saw it. You—did you—?'

"'Certainly I saw him,' I cut in. 'I've seen him before. If you'll give me just a minute or two I'll explain to you.' And I did so, rapidly and briefly.

"**H**E LISTENED silently, sitting there and rocking Rose in his arms, and she looked so white and still that it gave me the shivers just to glance at her. 'I don't know how in God's name it will end,' I finished, 'but we've got to fight the thing out somehow. Rose has managed to keep

it from you all along. She feared if you learned of it, and believed in it, it would give him power over you, too. But you had to know, and I'm glad it's come about this way. We've got to figure out some way of stopping him before he literally frightens her to death. I'm certain that's what he's trying to do. He's violently, unreasoningly bitter against Grant, her father. She's all Grant has left. The boys are all married, as you know, and none of them nearer than Canada. Rose's mother is dead. You see what a keen revenge he'll have against Grant if he can bring tragedy on Rose. Rose was always her father's favorite, anyway.'

"'There's just one thing I want to know,' Murray said tensely. 'Not that it will make any difference in my fighting for her so long as there's any fight left. But I've got to know whether or not Rose cares for me. I can't stand the suspense any longer. I've got to know.'

"'She loves you better than anything in the world,' I said steadily, and I had good cause to be sure of that. 'You can feel absolutely settled about it. All you've got to do is help us plan some campaign against that ghoul that threatens her.'

"Rose stirred in his arms, and he turned his entire attention to her, swiftly, looking anxiously into her eyes as she opened them and stared up into his face.

"'Are you all right, Rose? You've got to be! Hank and I are going to see this through somehow. Can't you buck up a bit, and trust us to manage to find the way to foil him—whatever he intends doing? Just so surely as we three are here on the bank of the Salmon River, I tell you there is a way, and Hank and I will find it.'

"'If you could!' Rose shuddered and leaned wearily against his shoulder. 'I am—am so afraid! I don't feel like going on to Mount Hood.'

" 'We don't need to go on,' Murray answered, glancing up at me. ' I couldn't go on myself without knowing just how matters stood between you and me. That's why I stopped off here. I intended stopping here when we started from Portland. We'll turn around and go back, if you wish.'

" 'Yes—I'd rather. It's all right with you, Hank?' She looked up to catch my vehement nod of assent, and went on talking to Murray. ' I'm too much frightened to think clearly, or to bear the nonsense of the crowd tonight and tomorrow. Maybe Hank has told you—that song has spelled tragedy for me all my life.'

" Murray nodded, and she got to her feet with his aid, white and weary till it cut my heart to look at her. ' Well, there's no good going over it, then. You know. And the moment I saw you on the stairs that first time—those crazy youngsters began singing that awful song. Why, have you ever stopped to think what the initial letters of the horrible thing spell? L—o—s—s, loss! What are we going to do? He—he's getting closer. I feel him more powerful and hideous all the time.' She shuddered and stopped for sheer lack of breath.

" 'I don't'—Murray started to speak, hesitated, then went on grimly—"I don't know what we're going to do. But we're going to do something, never doubt that. Rose—are you afraid to marry me with that thing hanging over?'

" 'Oh——!' She started, shrank back, then stumbled on: 'Yes—I—I am. I'm afraid to do that—and I'm afraid to let you go.'

" 'You're not letting me go,' Murray returned curtly. ' It can't be done. I'm yours for good, and if he stops us he's got a big job on his hands!'

" 'Let's get back to Portland,' I said abruptly. ' I don't think any of us feels much like mingling with a picnic crowd.'

" Murray nodded, handed me his flashlight and motioned toward the door as he went to the table to blow out the lamp. I snapped on the flash and lit the three of us out, and none of us spoke again till we were in the car and headed back for Portland. As a matter of fact, little was said at all on the way back to town. We rode in a strained silence, too much shaken for further speech, busy with ghastly thoughts, and the remembrance of Thad's appearance in the cabin. We left Rose at her front door, and didn't drive on till we saw the lights go up inside the house. Then we drove away, and Murray asked me to spend the night with him.

" I was rather glad to accept that invitation. I knew his thoughts were the same as mine. Knew that he had the idea of our getting together with all possible haste.

" **T**HE people with whom he stayed were all abed and the house dark, and we went up to his room with as little disturbance as possible. But not to sleep. We never even removed our clothes. For a while we didn't even talk. Murray switched on the light, and we sat around and paced the room, alternately. Then suddenly Murray wheeled to face me with a queer light in his eyes.

" 'Listen here, Hank. I've got an idea. I don't know that song. Never even read it through. But one of the girls here has a book of old home and college songs that's bound to contain it. I'm going to get it.'

" He went out of the room abruptly, and I paced back and forth awaiting his return, wondering what kind of scheme he had in his head. He was back shortly, carrying the book spread open to the song.

" 'Look here, Hank. Read it,' he said, and held the book out to me.

" Neither had I ever read the song through, and I took it in my hands with a kind of grisly interest, seeing in my mind's eye again the thin ma-

lignant face of Thad Wilzen. I went through the two stanzas word by word:

Once in the dear dead days beyond recall,
When on the world a mist began to fall,
Out of the dreams that rose in happy throng,
Lo, to our hearts love sang an old, sweet
song;
And through the dusk, where fell the fire-
light's gleam,
Softly it wove itself into our dream.

Even today we hear love's song of yore,
Deep in our hearts it dwells forever more,
Footsteps may falter, weary grow the way,
Yet we can hear it at the close of day;
So to the end, when life's dim shadows fall,
Love shall be found the sweetest song of all.

Chorus

Just a song at twilight, when the lights
are low,
And the flick'ring shadows softly come and
go;
Though the heart be weary, sad the day and
long,
Still to us at twilight comes love's old
song—
Comes love's old, sweet song.

"'Exquisite,' Murray breathed. 'I never realized before how lovely the old thing is, set to that haunting music. And he's trying to make of it a hideous, horror-ridden symbol of tragedy. Trying to frighten the life out of Rose through one of the most glorious melodies, written on a glorious theme. Well, I think I've discovered the way to stop him. I—damn him! Look!'

"I whirled to look toward the doorway, where Murray's gaze had flashed. There was the shadow, materializing as though it had just come through the door. And as we stared, it assumed full shape quickly, and Thad stood there pointing at the open book, glaring malevolently at Murray, mouthing furiously and striving to speak so that we could hear. But only one word could we get—the word 'Rose.' Murray hurled the book at him furiously, his face white with rage. Thad went out exactly as he had gone from the cabin. And again that high, thin, tittering laugh trailed in the air as he disappeared.

"Murray sprang across the room, picked up the book and whirled to face me. I asked him what his idea was, but he shook his head, dumb with anger and fear for Rose, with a shaking realization of what a futile-seeming battle was ahead of us, fighting a ghoul that could laugh and fade out on the wall like a shadow. He finally told me he would explain to Rose and me together, and began pacing the floor like a madman. I slumped into a chair, staring at him, and slowly it grew in my mind exactly what Thad intended. If he could frighten Rose to death and send Murray insane, he would accomplish his hideous design. He knew too well how utterly that would break Grant Wilzen. And as though in affirmation to my thought I heard again his high, tittering laugh.

"Both Murray and I were about half mad when the night had finally worn away and the morning was late enough for us to go over to the Wilzen house. Rose let us in with a sigh of relief, and we saw from the weariness on her face that she had slept little. Murray asked after her father, and she said he had gone out for a drive with some friends up the Columbia River Highway. He had gone before she was up, surprised to find her returned when he thought she had gone out to Mount Hood. He left a note saying he wouldn't have gone if he'd known she was to be home, but he'd already given his word and didn't want to disappoint the men with whom he was going.

"Rose led us on into the living-room, and Murray followed her to the divan and sat down by her side. I dropped into a chair across from them, and he pulled from his pocket that book, and spread it open to the song. One hand on the page, he looked intently into her eyes and asked, 'Rose, how do you kill a leech?'

"'Why'—Rose frowned, puzzled—
'I—I don't know.'

" 'You stick a knife into it,' Murray answered tersely. 'Stick a knife into it and let the blood out. The thing that hangs over you is a leech, menacing, striving to sap your life of happiness till it will leave nothing but a drained husk in its wake. It—he, that crazed fiend of yours, is trying to frighten you to death and drive me mad.' I caught my breath. I hadn't thought he'd got it, too. He went on swiftly, 'He's a leech, hanging onto you like death. And we're going to stick a knife into him! You and I love each other too much to be licked by a thing like this. We're starting a line of active defense, right now! See here!'

"He lifted his hand from the page and held out the book. Rose saw the song to which the page was opened, shivered and shrank back. He got up, walked over to the piano and spread the book open on the music rack, then turned and walked back to her.

" 'We're going to show him!' he said sharply, taking her hand and drawing her to her feet. 'He can't hang anything on us like that with that lovely old song. I want you to sit down there and sing it and play it from beginning to end. And we're going to keep right on singing it, and repeating it, day after day, till we drive him out of our reckoning by the very force we set up against him. For every note you play and every word you sing, Hank and I will shoot out every ounce of will we possess to make of it a blessing instead of a curse. We'll stick a knife into that damnable leech—we'll drain him of every ounce of blood-power he possesses. Play it, Rose!'

"She shrank from it in abject terror, and Murray almost had to force her to the piano. But she did get there finally, and I sat dumb in my chair, looking on. She dropped on the piano bench as though her knees had buckled under her, and managed to command her fingers as she raised

them to the keys. Only the iron dominance of Murray's will drove her on.

"The melody stumbled under her hands at first, and her voice wavered over the words. But the song grew clearer as she went on, and Murray stood close to her with his arm about her shoulder. And I shivered—and thought of Thad's girl. Then I had something else to shiver about. As she began the second stanza the shadow appeared on the wall. It writhed and danced in a blast of insane fury, and speedily grew to form the figure of Thad Wilzen. Murray was watching for it, and he whirled around, dropping his arm from about Rose's shoulder.

"She knew instinctively what had happened, and Murray shouted at her, 'Don't stop, Rose! Go on! *Go on!*' And he advanced two or three steps to face Thad, keeping between him and Rose. 'Get out!' he cried. 'Get out of here and stay out!—Come on, Hank—quick! Pit your will against him with mine!—Get out of here, you devil! That song is a blessing, a psalm to the most holy and God-given emotion on earth! You can't stand against it! Get out!'

"Rose's voice stumbled, caught, and wavered on, gaining strength as it approached the glorious close. I sprang to my feet and stood face to face with Thad, shoulder to shoulder with Murray, willing with all my might that the song should change from curse to blessing, that he should go down before it. We were two to one. The malignant, hideous face contorted and mouthed at us, and we advanced side by side toward him, striving to stare him down, to force him out of there. The closer to him we got the more revolting grew the putrid odor in our nostrils. And then, suddenly, as the song trembled to a finish, he was gone as quickly as light, leaving behind him only that horrible odor and the echo of his thin, high, tittering laugh.

"Murray wheeled around with a look of grim triumph on his white

face, and Rose swayed where she sat. Murray sprang to her, and she wilted limply on the bench, drooping against him.

"We got him that time," Murray exulted, throwing an arm about Rose's shoulder. "And we'll get him every time. We'll drum that song into his ears till he's sick of the sound of it. We'll drive him so far away he can't ever come back!"

"Oh—I'm afraid!" Rose sat up rigidly, clinging to Murray's hand on her shoulder. "I'm afraid! I heard him laugh. There was something triumphant in it!"

"I felt a quiver of apprehension. I'd got that, too, and I saw by the look in Murray's eyes that it hadn't escaped him, either. But he wouldn't admit it to her. He sat down by her and talked incessantly for nearly a half-hour, exulting in what he felt certain was an initial victory, trying to calm her and banish her fears. He'd about succeeded and she was growing nearly normal again, when the 'phone rang. She got up to answer it, and we could both see her from where we sat, standing in the hall opposite the open door.

"She took down the receiver and answered, made a short reply to some question, stood listening a long minute, then cried out sharply and dropped the 'phone. Murray sprang toward her as she turned to face us, her features the color of a corpse. He caught her, and I went past them to replace the receiver on the hook, then rushed back into the room where he had taken her.

"Rose—what is it?" he was asking as I came through the door.

"Father—" Rose gasped. "The call was from a house on the highway. The car—went over the bank—Father was driving. One of the men heard him cry out something like—Thad—then he twisted the wheel crazily—the car went over. All but one were killed."

"Your father carried an identification card—saying to notify you in case of accident, didn't he?" I interrupted.

"Y-yes," she nodded, her face strained and her haggard eyes filling with tears. "It—it happened about half an hour ago. Oh—I told you he—he had triumph in that horrible laugh! Murray!" She turned to him and beat her hands against his arm. "Don't ever defy him again!"

"I'm killing a leech!" Murray's voice was hard. "He shan't have you! I'll drain him, and pound him and knock every ounce of power out of him! Or die in the attempt! Hank, my car's out front. You drive, will you?"

"I nodded, speechless, stunned before the swift comeback Thad had accomplished in answer to Murray's defiance. Murray helped Rose into her wraps, and we went out to get into the car and drive to the scene of the accident. Murray gave all his attention to Rose, and I drove in a kind of grim daze, but I could hear his low voice running along.

"The fight's on, Rose. I'm going to win, if you and Hank will just stick with me."

"I was pretty sick inside, and I wasn't at all hopeful about the tactics he was pursuing, but I had no idea myself that was any better, and I determined I was certainly going to stick with them no matter what the end might be. We got out to the Highway, and came back with another bigger car, bringing her father's body with us. Two days later he was buried. Rose went through it all in a cold, numbed state that precluded tears and words. She took up life alone in the house, with a companion Murray hired to stay with her, an old Irishwoman who had sense enough to keep out of sight and sound when she wasn't wanted."

"But Murray never gave any quarter, never relaxed an inch in the fight he had begun. He had a professional

singer render that song at the funeral, and held Rose's head against his shoulder so that she couldn't see the figure of Thad literally dancing in unholy triumph as the coffin was lowered into the ground. Of course none but we three could have seen him, anyhow. And none but we three heard his tittering laugh of triumph as we turned away from the grave.

"**A**FTER that, Murray and I both spent with Rose every hour away from business. And every day he made her sing that song for him. And every day we went through the same old ghastly business of striving to will that song into a blessing, as Thad grimaced and threatened and filled us with a horrible fear we couldn't name or conquer. Inside of a week we were beginning to feel the wear of it. Murray was looking like a ghost himself, and Rose went around like a phantom. Murray began to carry a wild, fanatical light in his eyes, and I knew that Rose was sick with dread. But he wouldn't give up. He kept on with his mad campaign, and gradually I began to think I saw a change in Thad himself. Not that he was any the less furious at us.

"He grew more violent and threatening every time he appeared. And he appeared more quickly each time, now. The moment she struck the first notes of that song the shadow darkened the wall, and each time the shadow remained for less time a shadow and took on more swiftly the full outlines of the figure. Undoubtedly he was growing stronger. His laugh was clearer. Now and then we could catch clearly a word or two that he mouthed at us. And he was positively maniacal in his fury. But—it was the fury of a man *fighting* something tangible! Of a man who realizes that *he has something to fight!*

"We all saw that, and though the strain was terrific, a look of fanatical triumph and frantic suspense began to grow in Murray's eyes. Then the

climax was on us before we realized it.

"Murray worked for a lumber company, and he was given orders to go down to Astoria, a little town about a hundred miles west on the Columbia River, to inspect some trees for the company. It seemed there was a tract there of heavily timbered land, and its owner had promised the president of the company that he would give him first chance at the timber in the event that he ever decided to sell it. The timber was of exceptional value. Murray was panic-stricken to think he must leave Portland right at that time, but his position with the company was important, and he was compelled to make the trip.

"The moment he told me he was forced to go, I felt a chill of apprehension. He was to be gone for a week. My fear of Thad's ultimate victory over Rose hadn't for a minute subsided. I marveled at her ability to keep going under that strain. It was wearing Murray and me both down. But the old Irishwoman said she slept like a baby at night—Murray had insisted that the old woman was to sleep right in Rose's room—and I think that was the only thing that helped her to carry on. She was sick with fear when she learned of Murray's coming absence. And the grimdest part of it was that Murray insisted that she was to keep singing that song, every night.

"'We've got him going,' he said, and I could see from his white face that he knew we were making our last stand against the powers of darkness. 'We can't let up now, or we're lost. You'll stick, Hank?' He turned to me, and I nodded in silent assent. He knew very well I'd stick. He turned back to Rose. 'Hank will be here right with you every minute he can spare. And I want you to sing that song every evening precisely at 8 o'clock. Your watch is steady, and so is mine. We'll set them together to the fraction of a second. I'll hear your voice

down there, as surely as I do here. And exactly at 8 o'clock, wherever I am, no matter what I'm doing, I'll stop and listen. I'll stop and set my mind with Hank's, against his. You'll —carry on, Rose?"

"I could see her shaking with fear, clear across the room, and her lips were stiff, but she was game to the core. She promised, and I knew she'd keep her promise no matter what it should cost. And Murray knew it also.

"He went to Astoria the following morning. He gave us his word to drop us a telegram every evening to let us know that he was all right and everything was going well. The timber land was near enough to town so that he could go in on one of the man's horses.

"And that night Rose sang the song for Murray, a hundred miles away. We sat there in the living-room, she in front of the piano on the bench, I standing by her, our eyes glued to the dial of her watch, waiting for the hands to reach 8 o'clock. On the precise instant she lifted her hands to the keys. I saw her fingers tremble, and her voice wavered, but she didn't falter for a moment. She'd hardly struck the first chord when Thad followed his hideous shadow and faced me across the room, menacing and horrible. I sprang between him and her, walking slowly toward him, and stopped within four feet of him, my nostrils smarting with the foul odor surrounding him, my will battling his as I held his mad, glaring eyes.

"It seemed an eternity that I stood there, straining every ounce of will and brain against him, till the song was done, and he was gone with that tittering, mocking laugh, and Rose fainted on the bench and slipped to the floor. I sprang to pick her up, and it took me twenty frantic minutes to bring her back to consciousness. She wasn't the hysterical type, or she'd have gone completely out of her

head, then. As it was, it was more than an hour before I succeeded in calming her to any extent, and I was utterly shocked to see how thin she'd grown with the wear of the battle we waged. For all I could do, I accomplished little in easing her mind. It was a telegram from Murray that did the trick there. Just a short, terse message, saying that he had accomplished quite a good deal that day. He was well. He had heard her.

"That was Monday. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday weren't much different. Every evening Rose, growing thinner and more like a spirit herself every hour, struggled through that song, while I stood between her and Thad and held him off. Every evening it grew more difficult for us both. And every evening Thad was more violent and harder to handle. I began to have a sick fear that ours was a ghastly, losing battle. Yet every evening we got a telegram from Murray, saying he was well. And he always added that he heard her.

"On Friday evening it seemed to me that I couldn't go on. Rose was so white and wraithlike that I shook with fear for her. I didn't see how she was going to endure much longer. I wanted to be loyal to Murray, yet I feared he was killing all three of us. He was hard as rock when he thought he was right, and he was nearer apt to be right than any fellow I ever knew. I had no defense for my own reluctance to keep up the battle he had begun for us. I couldn't see any other way out. That evening, when the hands of the watch drew close to 8 o'clock, I knew that Rose was about at the end of her tether.

"There was a frightful tension in the atmosphere. I felt a terrific struggle dead ahead of us. I almost yielded to the impulse to tell her to stop, to let the ghastly song alone. But I didn't dare. We'd both given our word to Murray. Then the hands of the watch stood at 8 sharp, and she forced herself to begin playing.

“THAD burst upon us in a wild whirl, full-figured, not even preceded by the vestige of a shadow. I had to make the quickest move of my life to get between him and her. And the moment I did it, I knew his power had come down with him full-fledged. For the first time, I felt him like a body of corporeal flesh. But he was cold, hideously cold. It was like battling with a corpse. And around him rose that putrid odor so strongly that it caused me to choke. He launched himself upon me like a black fury, struggling and trying to reach her. He shouted at her, and every word was clear.

“‘Stop!’ he screamed. ‘Stop that damnable song! I hate it! Stop it!’

“‘Don’t listen to him, Rose!’ I shouted, from a choked throat. ‘Keep on—keep on to the end. We promised Murray.’

“And Rose kept on. Her voice wavered and quivered, and her fingers shook till they stumbled over the keys, but she kept steadily on. He shrieked in utter abandonment to fury, and for the first time in my life I was glad of my six feet three and the exercise that had kept my muscles hard as nails. I’ve always been powerful physically, but I had my hands full then. He raged and tore, struck, bit and kicked, cursed and tried to get to my throat. It took every ounce of strength I possessed to keep him from her. And by the time she had reached the second stanza I realized that he was gaining on me.

“I roused myself to desperate effort, choking in that foul odor, beating back that cold, hideous body. But he was bearing me down. In spite of my frantic, superhuman effort to prevent his accomplishing what he strove to do, he was wearing me down, forcing me back and drawing closer to her. I threw all I had into one last mighty effort, lunging against him, just as Rose swung into the last chorus.

“And suddenly with a wild, horrible shriek, he collapsed in my grip. I staggered, finding it all I could do to keep my feet, as he fell back away from me. He mouthed and gibbered, flinging up his arms above his head like a man so maddened, so utterly overcome by fury that he had no control of himself whatever. There was a sudden flash before my eyes, like a puff of red fire, the room was filled with a rank odor entirely different from the odor that had been there before—an odor like the acrid stench of burning rubbish. Then he was gone with another wild shriek. But he didn’t laugh. And abruptly the last word of the song died away, and both Rose and I went out.

“That was the first, last and only time in my life that I ever fainted. And because of my greater strength I came back to consciousness before Rose did. She lay on the floor by the piano bench, so white and still that I thought at first she was dead. But as I stared at her I saw that she was breathing, and I got to my feet and went into the kitchen for some water. I came back and bathed her face with it, and got her back to her senses again. I was weakened, worn as though I’d been through a long sick spell, and she wasn’t any better. Time dragged by.

“I got her over to the divan, and she lay down there, while I sat by her side and held her hand and tried to think of something to say. But the same thought was with us both, and we couldn’t put it in words. We had both looked at the clock on the wall. It was an hour past time for Murray’s telegram to come. And he was punctual. I never knew any man so iron-bound in keeping his word as Murray Fielding. It was an hour past time for his telegram, and Thad’s last furious shriek rang in our ears. We were both of us on the edge of insanity from suspense when a boy brought a telegram a half-hour later.

"I dragged myself to the door, got the yellow flimsy and brought it to her. She stared at it, shivering, and looked up at me with terrible eyes.

"'Murray!' she said, and her tone made me wince. 'Oh—Murray—Murray! You open it, Hank. I—can't.'

"I thought at first that I couldn't either; my fingers were cold, and even that flimsy envelope seemed to be too much for them. But at last I managed to get it opened somehow, unfolded the sheet and looked at it with fearful eyes. And at what I saw, I froze. This is what it said:

ROSE READ THIS TWICE THIS AFTERNOON THIS MAN LAWSON AND I WENT OUT TO TAKE DOWN A BIG TREE THE OFFICE TOLD ME TO FELL ONE AND EXAMINE THE GRAIN LAWSON AND I GOT IT ALMOST CUT THROUGH WHEN MRS LAWSON CALLED US IN TO DINNER AFTER DINNER LAWSON SAID WE HAD BETTER HURRY OUT AND GET IT DOWN BEFORE DARK WE GOT ALMOST TO THE TREE WHEN I THOUGHT OF THE TIME I LOOKED AT MY WATCH AND IT WAS JUST EIGHT OCLOCK I STOPPED AND STOOD THERE WAITING FOR YOU THEN I HEARD YOU A SUDDEN WIND CAME UP OUT OF THE CLEAR SKY AND LAWSON EXCLAIMED ABOUT IT THEN LOOKED BACK AND ASKED WHAT I WAS WAITING FOR I MOTIONED HIM TO BE STILL AND HE STROLLED ON UP TO THE TREE AND STOOD IMPATIENTLY WAITING FOR ME I HEARD YOUR VOICE QUIVER AS THOUGH YOU WERE BADLY FRIGHTENED I PUT ALL MY WILL TO HELPING HANK THEN JUST AS YOU GOT INTO THE SECOND CHORUS THAT WIND KEPT RISING WITH A PERFECT FURY AND SUDDENLY THAT TREE SWAYED AND WENT OVER WITH A CRASH IF I HAD NOT STOPPED TO LISTEN TO YOU I WOULD HAVE BEEN UNDER THAT TREE MASHED TO A JELLY AS LAWSON WAS THINK HARD ROSE WE HAVE WON HOME TOMORROW

MURRAY

"I HANDED the telegram to Rose, wordlessly, and she read it with something of eagerness, having been watching the expression of my face. And when she got to the last word she

broke down and cried. Every tear she had held back in stunned grief at her father's death demanded its outlet then, along with the tears of joy for Murray. And I sat there, limp with relief, and let her cry. She literally cried herself to sleep. I got her coat out of the hall, threw it over her, and let her sleep. I went across the room and stretched out in an easy chair to watch by her, and she slept there till morning. I warned the old Irishwoman not to wake her. She had come in to say she had some breakfast ready.

"I went out into the kitchen with her and had a bite, but I knew sleep was the best thing Rose could have right then. She was still asleep, four hours later, when Murray came racing up the steps. He'd left Astoria at day-break. I wrung his hand in speechless gratitude for the outcome of the thing, and turned my back when he went over to kneel by Rose and wake her. Then I did something for which I have no reason and no excuse. I went over to the piano, sat down on the bench, and began to play that song. They were still, behind me, listening—as I played on to the close.

"Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low—"

"There was a slight quiver in the air just beyond me, as though something furious, maddened, but impotent, was striving to reach toward me, and could not. But that was all. The atmosphere of the room remained clear, unpolluted by that foul odor. Thad's malignant, hideous shade never came back again. Murray had won against him and all the dark powers he may have had allied with him.

"And Murray and Rose were married the next week. They had a friend of Rose's sing that song at the wedding. I came away and left them a very happy couple. They're out there in Portland, now, living as serene and untroubled a life as you could wish

for your most beloved friends. In Rose's mind, in place of the gloomy picture of the old asylum, she carries a still photograph of Murray standing with his head lifted, listening for her voice a hundred miles distant, with a great tree falling—safely twenty feet away. And about the first melody she taught their two children was *Love's Old Sweet Song*.

"You know I'm not an imaginative man, Armitage, and you know I don't spin fairy-tales. What have you got to say about curses, now?"

Morgenthaler raised his eyes to the other man's face as he knocked the dottle from his cold pipe.

"Nothing. I've said altogether too much already." Armitage leaned forward in his chair, a strange light in his eyes, and Morgenthaler noted for the first time that the other man's face had gone oddly pale. "I tried for years to find him, but I'd given up hope. I'm greatly indebted to you, Hank. I shall take the next train for Portland. I am Murray Fielding's half-brother."