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**I** MAY as well state at the beginning that I am not, either by gift or inclination, a writing man; this story must therefore be pardoned in advance for its rough manner of narration, its absolute lack of all literary polish. Fortunately, the fantastic and well-nigh incredible happenings which make up my narrative stand by themselves. They need no refurbishing of brilliant phrases, but rather a stark and truthful simplicity for their telling. Let me commence, then, without further apology or explanation.

My name matters little to the story. I am a man of middle age, a bachelor, and fairly successful in the practise of law. The one hobby which I possess is the collecting of Colonial furniture of the earlier periods, and it was through this interest that I first made the acquaintance of Harry Ware.

Harry, unlike me, is rather an unusual fellow. He is, first and foremost, a scholar; widely traveled, tremendously learned and well read. As a friend old Harry is the salt of the earth. I know of no other man whom I would choose in preference to him as a companion and intimate. He is, incidentally, the last male descendant of a fine old American family of English stock, and one of the most dis-

creet and intelligent of collectors of early Americana. What with me is merely a diverting hobby and pastime is to Harry an overpowering obsession—a life-work, almost.

We met for the first time at an auction in White River Junction, Vermont, some eight or nine years ago, on which occasion we fought each other amicably enough, for the possession of an unusual block-front highboy. We returned to New York together, and from then on our acquaintance gradually progressed and developed into the closest and happiest friendship I have ever known. For several years it was our habit, every summer, to make collecting trips together through the South and New England. Once each week during the rest of the year we dined together, alternately at Harry's huge barracks of a place, and my rooms in town.

**I** REMEMBER that it was on a cheerless and murky morning in early February, about three years ago, that Harry called me up at my office.

"I've got something very interesting to tell you," he said. "If you're not going to be busy tonight, come up to the house." And then, before I could reply: "Why not come straight

out from the office, and have dinner with me?"

I replied that I had nothing else on hand, and promised to be at his home, which is in Fieldston, on the northern outskirts of the city, at about 8 o'clock. I presented myself there, accordingly, at the stated time, and after an excellent dinner we repaired to the library for cigarettes and coffee. I could see that something had happened to disturb Harry's usual calm, sleepy manner; for the first time in my experience he seemed bubbling over with suppressed excitement. As soon as the man-servant had withdrawn, closing the great doors silently after him, Harry extinguished his cigarette and drew his chair up closer to mine.

"Charles," he announced dramatically, "I've had the most unusual thing happen to me—it's like something you'd read about. If it weren't that I have tangible proof, I'd think I'd dreamed it. You can't possibly imagine what it is."

"Well, for Pete's sake, man, let's have it!" I demanded, somewhat testily. "You sound as though you'd seen spooks. What's it all about?"

Harry leaned forward.

"You know the Collingwood scruitor, of course," he began.

And of course I did. A wonderful and priceless piece of furniture; one of the prizes of Harry's collection, which he has had in his possession for all of twenty years. It stands in his bedroom, and he uses it for a writing desk, but it is willed to the Metropolitan Museum, to be added to that institution's collection after Harry's death. . . . I nodded, therefore, without answering.

"What would you say," Harry went on, "if I were to tell you that I have just discovered a secret drawer in it?"

It was my turn to lean forward. "Not really!" I exclaimed. "When? Where? How?"

"It was quite accidental. You know the desk has been sounded, time and again, for any possible secret cubby holes or recesses—always unsuccessfully. Last night I'd been very prosaically making out checks to pay my various bills, and I reached for one of my old books of stubs in another receptacle. Something happened. . . . I was awkward, perhaps, and lost my balance. Anyway, my elbow struck sharply against a corner, and at the same instant a panel of wood moved smoothly across, and a tiny drawer came sliding out. I think I sat there staring at it for fully five minutes, before I appreciated the evidence of my eyes. Think of it, man, after owning it for twenty years. A secret drawer!"

"It was—empty, of course?"

Harry shook his head. I could see that he was enjoying the whole thing vastly. "No. Interesting and exciting though it was even to discover such a drawer, there was a further thrill to come. The drawer held a miniature and a letter. Wait—I'll get them and let you see them."

For a minute I suspected Harry of tricking me, and believed the whole affair an elaborate joke at my expense. When he returned, therefore, and placed a small miniature in my hand, I accepted it silently and took it over to the table, where I examined it with critical attention under the shaded lamp.

The miniature was undoubtedly authentic—a lovely bit of early Eighteenth Century work, in perfect condition. The portrait was of a boy, a charming, aristocratic, rather haughty youth of not more than eighteen or twenty years. I turned the miniature over. Pasted to the back was a slip of paper, and on it written in characters so faded as to be almost indecipherable, the following words:

*Lennox. Born July 18th, 1694.  
Died, by his own hands, April 10th, 1713.*

As I stood there, staring wordlessly at the inscription, a vague pity swept over me; an intolerable sadness for some unknown and long-forgotten tragedy which I could never hope to comprehend. Who was this handsome lad who had, at the age of nineteen, ended his own life? Why, how, and where? . . . I looked over at Harry, who was watching me from across the room.

"Rather pathetic, eh?" I said brusquely.

He merely nodded. "Yes. Handsome boy, too. I'd like to find out who he was. But here's the prize find—this letter. Read it, and tell me what you make of it."

I took the letter, a folded slip of paper, written apparently by the same feminine hand that had inscribed its tragedy on the back of the miniature. As well as I can remember, it ran as follows:

Kirkwood:

All is well. A merciful God hath seen fit to spare us frightfull shame and ignominie. No slightest shade of suspicion hath fallen upon Lennox, and he may proceede safely to Philadelphia. He is doubly safe in that the suspicion of the people hath fallen upon a poore half-wit, whom yesternight they did take and burn alive. So once againe the family fate is averted.

Our bond-man, Foulke Barton, goes to Fort La Tour within the week. I give him £50, and household belongings. Also, in obedience to your wish, the Deville Bed.

A thousand fonde kisses to you and our poor boy,

ANTOINETTE.

I read this strange letter once, standing up beside the table. Then I seated myself, lit another cigarette, and read it over. Harry still watched me, enjoying my complete mystification. "Well? What do you make of it? Tell me just your impressions?" he demanded, finally.

"I can't make anything of it," I said, in exasperation. "Unless—well, let's see." As Harry waited impatiently, I groped for words to convey

my bewildered impressions. "This young man of the miniature—Lennox—has apparently committed a crime, and fled from the scene. A terrible crime, I'd imagine, since the people burned alive a half-wit whom they suspected of it. . . . But the second paragraph is meaningless, to me. What has this bondman to do with the affair? There's no way of telling whether he was an accomplice, or a witness. Yet it seems irrelevant, doesn't it, that the mother should mention his leaving for some fort, and that she gave him household furnishings? And what in the name of all that's holy, is a Devil Bed?"

Harry laughed. "Your deductions are admirable, Dr. Watson," he said. "But I must say that the crime and the burning alive do not interest me. It's the reference to the bed—the Devil Bed—that has me fascinated. Don't you realize that the writer of this letter is probably referring to something that I've been trying to find for years—one of those marvelous old carved oak bedsteads with gargoyle heads that we know were brought over from England by a few wealthy families, and have never been able to trace? Great Kingdom, Charles! Just think! This hidden drawer and this letter may be the means of our discovering one of those beds. I tell you, I'd give ten years of my life, and all I own, if I could be lucky enough to find one, or even part of one. It would be the most wonderful thing in my life. It would make my collection the most famous in America!"

I sat wordless before Harry's unexpected enthusiasm and excitement. To tell the truth, the personal side of the story unveiled by this mysterious letter interested me far more than the reference to the bed. The sinister hints of a nameless crime, its innocent victim, and the unhappy, guilt-burdened Lennox reached out to me across a span of two silent centuries,

and held me enthralled. But I realized that Harry had valid cause to place more stress upon the reference to the bed, that collectors' will-o'-the-wisp. What, after all, did it matter who had committed a crime two hundred years ago? The guilty man had paid the price of his sin long years past, having died by his own hand. But the bed, if it could be traced, was a matter of living importance. . . . Still, how could the fact that one Foulke Barton, a bondman, had taken such a piece of furniture to Fort La Tour, two hundred years ago, lead one to believe that it might be traced now, after such a lapse of time? I said as much to Harry.

"There's just a chance," he replied, quickly. "Just one chance in ten thousand. God alone knows why the bedstead was given to him, but the man must have realized its value, and been overcome by such a gift. Even then a carved bedstead of that type would be worth an enormous amount of money. He, and possibly his descendants, could not help but recognize its beauty and worth. Just think! It may be standing, even yet, in the bedroom of some little New Brunswick farmhouse!"

"New Brunswick?" I repeated, stupidly. "You mean New Brunswick, in Jersey?"

Harry shook his head impatiently. "No! Fort La Tour is the old French settlement in Canada where the city of Saint John, New Brunswick, now stands. I tell you, Charles, if it's the last thing I do, I'm going up to the province and hunt for that bed!"

I remember laughing a little at Harry's impetuous manner.

"Starting tonight?" I asked, lightly.

And then Harry Ware gave me the surprise of my life.

"I've already packed," he said, "ready to leave in the morning. Why don't you skip business for a week or so, and come along with me?"

As it happened, I was not in a position at that time to leave the city, my firm was working under heavy pressure and I could not possibly hope to take a vacation. It was rather regretfully, therefore, that I declined Harry's invitation, for the Devil Bed had me interested, and even a wild goose chase can be exciting under certain conditions and with certain companions.

However, I accompanied Harry to the Grand Central Station next day, and wished him the best of luck in his search. Even at the last minute, standing in the noisy train shed, he tried again to coerce me into the hunt. "I'm going to scour every inch of New Brunswick," he said. "Lord knows what other finds I may run across in the meanwhile. Come along!"

I hated to refuse, but business was business, and unlike Harry I was dependent for bread and butter upon my profession. So I let him go, alone, and in the heavy stress of work during the next few weeks I put the whole affair out of my mind completely, so that the secret drawer and the miniature and the Devil Bed faded slightly in my memory, and lost something of the entrancing glamor they had held that evening in Harry's library.

It was sometime during March that I next heard anything of interest from my adventurous friend. He had written me one or two brief letters during that time, describing his various attempts to trace the descendants of Foulke Barton, which attempts had been, so far, a complete failure. Now there came a note that was almost jubilant in tone—the baying of the bloodhound in full scent:

I think I've found them, and strangely enough, through another crime, or rather a series of crimes. This time, it's something rather ghastly. A man named Amos Barton, whom I have found to be a direct de-

scendant of Foulke Barton, was hanged in the prison here in 1848, having been condemned for the wanton murder of (just imagine!) a family of nine people. I've found all sorts of details concerning him and his forbears from the old files of newspapers. They were a bad lot, and Amos wasn't the first to end his days inside prison walls. The whole family, from away back, seemed tainted with homicidal mania, which cropped out every few generations in some atrocious crime. Amos Barton was a farmer, settled in a small place called Rothsay. He was apparently a mild and peaceable man. One night, so the old records say, he ran amuck and slaughtered a houseful of neighbors, against whom he had no discoverable grudge or grievance. When found, he made no attempt to disprove his guilt, and was summarily hanged by the neck until dead, a week later. Justice moved more quickly in those days, apparently. Well, the interesting and hopeful fact remains that he left a family of generous size, which is doubtless scattered through the province. The deuce of it is, they are supposed to have changed their name, because of the disgrace. However, I'm out to find them, and I feel in my very bones that some one of them will be found, and I'll still trace my Devil Bed. Why don't you come on, now, and help in the search?

That letter made a deep and strange impression upon me. I'm no believer in ghosts, the Lord knows; no one could be more skeptical or cold-blooded in that sort of thing than I am. And yet—

Well, I didn't like this constant shadow of murder connected with the Devil Bed. The laughing, charming face of the boy in the miniature rose up before my mind's eye. What evil impulse could have caused such an innocent-looking young chap to commit a horrible crime? What could have made this unknown farmer, Amos Barton, wantonly slay an entire family? What legacy of evil had descended through the Barton family? Was there a pursuing demon—

So far my reverie went, and then, with a conscious effort, I turned my thoughts deliberately from the whole affair. Yet the lurking horror remained in the background. I found myself wishing that my friend Harry had never discovered the secret

drawer in his scrutoir; had never started out on his mad hunt for the Devil Bed. And I wrote Harry, what was quite true, that an important case forced me to remain indefinitely in New York.

## 3

AND then, perhaps two months later, came a triumphant telegram. The search was over; the Devil Bed had, unbelievably, been found at last. The message was sent from the village of X—. I cannot for obvious reasons give the correct name of the little New Brunswick hamlet in which the bed was discovered.

Come at once. Search successful. Want you to verify and help in packing and crating. Have notified Blank at the museum. Reply immediately when you will arrive. (Signed) WARE.

Of course there was nothing else to do, in the light of my friendship and various obligations to Harry, but to comply. I dropped everything, put my affairs in hurried order, and having sent a wire in response I took the train the next day for Boston.

Harry met me at the station, in Saint John. He was glowing with triumph, almost ecstatic in his delight. "Wait till you see it," were his first words. "Man, I can't believe my own luck! It's too marvelous—the bed, you understand. Almost perfect condition; the most exquisite carving in oak I've ever seen. But I mustn't rave. I mustn't spoil it for you. Just think, though. Out in the hay-loft of an old barn; hidden behind the filth and débris of years. I tell you, when I first saw it I couldn't speak, or think. I just stood there and gibbered like a madman!"

Harry's enthusiasm was contagious. "They're tremendously excited at the museum," I told him. "Are you sure the present owners will be willing to sell?"

He nodded briefly. "Oh, yes. They have no idea how important, how

priceless, it is. In fact, they dislike it." Talking constantly, he led the way from the station to his hotel. It was then early evening—we were to stay at the hotel overnight, and proceeded to X—by train in the morning.

Over our dinner, and later, in my somewhat rococo sitting room, Harry described his search and all its heart-breaking disappointments and failures. "I had the devil's own time, tracing the children of Amos Barton," he said. "There were six of them, five sons and one daughter, and they'd changed their name to Shilling, after their father was hanged. I thought from the first that if any of the children got the bed, it would be the daughter. As events proved, I was right. . . . But, in the beginning, I couldn't find any of them. Lord, what a job! Searching birth records, death notices, newspaper files. Yet the thing had me fascinated, and I couldn't give up. Finally I found them—first one, then another, and so on. You see, there was one thing that made the whole affair comparatively simple; they hadn't any of them left New Brunswick. They're quiet, unprogressive, narrow people. The whole stock seems sort of stunned by the family disgrace and trouble that's followed them so long. Even—"

"But tell me," I interrupted, as Harry fell silent, "how did you finally locate the people that had the bed?"

Harry stretched his long, lanky frame in a spindling gilt chair, and stared up at the ceiling. "Well, there was that daughter of old Amos," he said. "She was the oldest, and the only girl. After infinite trouble I found she'd married a man named Lyons. They'd been married before this wholesale murder affair, and her husband didn't like the disgrace, or else he objected to the sort of family he married into—anyway, he ran off, leaving his wife with a boy about two

years old. She left Rothsay, sold the house there, and went into service as housekeeper for an old farmer in X—, named Nagle. The important thing for us is, that she took with her all her household belongings, including the Devil Bed. She must have been canny enough to realize its value. This old fellow whom she went to work for must have taken a liking to her, for they got married, later on, and he left the farm to her when he died. And the boy (Fanny Barton Lyon's son, you understand) took the name of Nagle and got possession of the place when his mother died. So there you are. Tomorrow, at X—you'll meet him; he's still alive and as spry as a cricket. He's the owner of the bed, and his granddaughter, who lives with him, is the one who helped me find it in the hay-loft. Pretty piece of work, eh?"

I stared at Harry with infinite admiration. "You should have been a detective," I declared. "You're wasting excellent talents in the mere tracing of old furniture." Then a new thought struck me, or rather a thought I had so far deliberately submerged. "Harry," I said, "what do you make of the fact of these—murders? Here are several nasty crimes in connection with this bed, or in connection with the owners of it. Is there—can there be—any *real* connection?"

Harry stared at me, very oddly I thought. He started impulsively to say something, then checked himself.

"Pure coincidence," he said, lightly. "What else can it be? . . . *What are you trying to say?*"

Something angry, something almost furious in his eyes and voice, a strange, half-suppressed rage, made me draw back from him.

"Why, why, Harry, my dear old chap!" I stammered. "I don't mean a thing. Just a fancy of mine!"

The subject was changed immediately, but I went to bed that night



with somber, undefined horror lurking in the shadowy depths of my consciousness.

## 4

WE STARTED out early the next morning, complete harmony restored between us, and arrived about noon at the little village of X—. From there we took a carriage, hired at a local livery stable, and drove out through pleasantly hilly and wooded country to the Nagle farm. It was an unkempt and run-down place, hidden snugly between low, rolling hills; the farmhouse itself a dull, indefinite-looking yellow building, with barns and outhouses in an almost inconceivable state of dilapidation.

As our carriage drove up, a huge mongrel dog darted out, barking vociferously, and ran along at our horse's heels. A moment later a sturdy young woman came out to the side door, and called the dog away. Behind her I could see an old wizened man, who later came hobbling down the pathway to our carriage. His faded eyes stared at me in blinking amazement, and at our introduction he bowed and scraped most obsequiously. I, in turn, stared back at him. So this was the descendant of that almost mythical bondman, Foulke Barton, and of the strange murderer, Amos Barton! Well, there was nothing of murderer about this poor, doddering old nondescript, surely. The girl, his granddaughter, Sophie, rather pleased me. She was a rosy-checked strong young thing, and whatever the outside condition of the place, the interior, due to her efforts, was spotlessly clean and tidy.

I was shown to a pleasant though sparsely furnished bedroom, but almost before I could set my luggage down, Harry was insisting that I come out to see the Devil Bed. He had, himself, gone straight to the barn as soon as we arrived, to assure him-

self that his discovery was quite safe. Now, his suit powdered with cobwebs and dust, he stood in the doorway, commanding that I hurry.

Nothing loth, I followed him down the narrow staircase and out through the back yard to the barn. The place seemed unusually dark and gloomy after the cheerful radiance of out-of-doors, and my eyes, blinded by sunshine, were at first unable to make out my surroundings. Gradually becoming accustomed to the dimness, I looked about me. Rusty rakes and hay-forks leaned disconsolately against the sweating walls, and the empty stalls were piled high with discarded farm machinery of all sorts. Though the place had obviously been long unused, a faintly ammoniac odor filled the air, struggling through a dank, mildewed atmosphere, and creating a ghastly combination of filth and decay. At the rear of the barn stood a ladder that reached up to the hay-loft above. Harry ascended this, deftly as a monkey, and I followed, protesting faintly; my hands were reluctant to take hold of the dirt-encrusted sides. At every step, huge spiders drew back cautiously into quivering webs, and as I halted for a moment at the top, I experienced again that strange, indescribable fear which had tormented me the night before. Then I threw the unreasonable horror from me, and stepped up into the hay-loft.

There, in a pale, hazy light, stood the four carven pieces of oak that made the Devil Bed. Harry had pulled them out from their ignominious hiding place to the center of the loft floor. For an instant, as he had done, I merely stood there looking at it, and "gibbering like a madman." The bedstead was truly a gorgeous thing, the most marvelous piece of furniture I have ever laid eyes upon. Only those who love the rare and exquisite work of old-time craftsmen, who gave their whole lives to the fashioning of beautiful objects, can

understand the thrill that tingled through me. Never, anywhere, have I seen human handicraft of greater loveliness.

And then, even as I stood there, that perfect feeling of delight passed, and a chill came over me. For there was something nameless, something horrible and full of evil coming to me, like a sluggish wave, from the direction of the Devil Bed. I came closer to it, staring intently. The carvings that at first glance were so admirable in their perfection, I now saw to be of a most perverse and suggestive obscenity. Here were strange, writhing forms struggling in bestial embraces; snakes, knotted and upreared; a thousand morbid visions emanating from an unclean mind. . . . And all the while, the power of that evil, hypnotic spell drawing me! . . . I looked up, suddenly, as one does who feels the steady gaze of human eyes. And then I saw what had, undeniably, given the Devil Bed its name. All along the sides of the tester ran a carved series of faces, the evil, the vileness of which, I can never hope to express. Contorted, leering faces; faces of imbeciles in lustful paroxysms; faces only half human, yet doubly disgusting in their perverted humanity. The most hideous gargoyles of Gothic architecture were angels of serenity beside these frightful visions. No nightmare could evoke a more terrible crew.

And then, abruptly, came Harry's triumphant voice. "Well, what do you think of it?"

It was with a definitely physical effort that I drew my eyes away.

"Marvelous, but how evil!" I cried. "No wonder they called it the Devil Bed. . . . It's—Harry, can't you see?—it's wicked! It's the most wicked thing I've ever seen."

He brushed me aside. "Yes, perhaps so. Perhaps you're right. It's hardly the thing to grace a Victorian bedroom, eh?"

A thin, mocking laughter filled the hay-loft, and tinkled into silence. I looked up. The leering lips of the grimacing devil nearest me seemed still curved in malicious scorn. Yet it must have been Harry who laughed.

Something within me protested. "It's a gorgeous piece," I said slowly, almost grudgingly. "You're lucky, Harry, to have discovered it. And yet it seems to me that it were better if it had not been found. It's decadent. It hasn't the splendid sturdy quality I had expected to find in it. I'm disappointed."

No sooner were the words said than I regretted them. For Harry glared at me with a rage and contempt beyond words. His face, usually so pale and calm, was mottled with angry red, and his eyes fairly bulged from their sockets. I think he suspected me then of the rankest jealousy.

"Doubtless I should leave it here," he suggested, furiously. "Or better still, burn it up, because it offends your prudish taste! Or perhaps you're afraid of it!"

And then, instantly, I knew that Harry had hit upon the truth. I was afraid of it. As God is my judge, I hated and feared that inanimate thing—that mere bulk of carved wood! And I felt, somehow, that Harry was afraid of it also, and was masking his own inexplicable horror behind this false indignation and bravado. For neither of us would, or could as sane men, admit the truth.

"We're talking nonsense," I said. "It's undeniable that you've made the discovery of a century. The bed is far too valuable to be destroyed, and it will make a tremendously interesting museum piece. I only know that I dislike the ornamentation, and that I wouldn't sleep under those faces for a fortune!"

Harry eyed me curiously. "It's odd that you should have said that," he remarked. "Because I intend to

rope up the bed, and sleep in it tonight, myself."

## 5

THERE was no deterring him. He had made up his mind, and like many men of his type he was as immovable in his intentions as a block of granite. I don't know what subconscious premonition made me attempt to dissuade him, but at all events my vague objections were quite ignored. Harry had determined to set the Devil Bed up in one of the farmhouse bedrooms, and he carried out that purpose without further discussion.

Between us, with infinite pains and precautions, we carried the tremendously heavy pieces down that tottering old ladder, out into the yard, and into the farmhouse. I remember that the old man and his granddaughter watched us closely at our task, but made no offer of assistance. When the bed was finally set in place in the spare room, its bulk filled almost every inch of available space, and it towered aloft, barely missing the ceiling. Harry and I stood together in the doorway, breathing gustily from our efforts. I must admit that here, between practical, sunny walls, something of horror and mystery seemed to have departed from the great bedstead. The carved heads were just as appallingly hideous, but less terrifying. I remember thinking that I had been rather a fool to have felt any horror of the thing. After all, a bed was nothing but a bed, no matter how peculiarly ornamented, and if Harry wished to sleep in it, what possible harm could ensue therefrom?

A minute later we went downstairs to supper in the best of spirits. The table was laid in the kitchen and Sophie bustled cheerfully to and fro, serving us. As I ate, I marveled at the equable manner in which Harry and I had been accepted in this

quaint home. Even the mongrel dog had become friendly, and now sat at Harry's feet, begging for an occasional scrap with pleading eyes. Through the window at my right, I could see the old man pottering about in the yard, puffing peacefully at a villainous-looking pipe. In this simple, homely atmosphere, how shadowy and far away seemed the annals of horror and bloodshed connected with the Barton clan! And how ridiculous seemed my own vague fears of the Devil Bed!

When we had finished our meal, Harry called to Sophie, with whom he was plainly on the best of terms.

"I wonder whether you have a spare mattress for the old bed," he said. "I intend to sleep in it tonight."

Sophie had been standing in the doorway, looking out into the yard. At Harry's words she swung around, and her face turned slowly paler and paler, until it was almost gray in the half-light.

"Oh, Mr. Ware," she said. "You're not going to—to sleep in it?"

Harry laughed irritably. "Yes. Why not? Are you afraid of it, too?"

I waited what seemed an interminable time for the girl's reply. Sophie stood immovable for a moment, then she came quickly over toward us, and stood gripping the edge of the table.

"Yes, I am afraid of it," she said, simply. "I've always been, and so has all our family. We've even been afraid to destroy it. There was an old French priest who saw it once, and he said it was unholy. There's a curse'll fall on anybody who sleeps in it. Oh, Mr. Ware! Buy it if you want, and put it into a museum for people to look at, but don't sleep in it. Something terrible will happen to you. I know!"

There was a certain quiet earnestness in the girl's voice that brought back to me, with sickening force, all

my own indefinable dread. I hoped against hope that Harry would accept her warning. But his first words showed that hope to be vain.

"There's nothing you could have said," he returned, lightly, "that would have made me more determined to sleep in the bed. I tell you, Sophie, that you and other people have allowed yourselves to be frightened by the cowardly superstitions of priests and old women. Don't think me discourteous in saying this. I know how ghost stories can persist, unreasonably, from one generation to another. A horrible tragedy is often connected with an inanimate object, but I for one have no faith in such nonsense as haunted houses, and accursed beds. How much will you wager that I sleep better tonight, and have better dreams, than you or my friend, here—either of you?"

Sophie seemed to realize that there was nothing more to say. Without answering she turned away and went upstairs. Half an hour later she came out to us, where we were smoking and chatting on the porch in the fragrant dusk, and announced that the big bed was ready to be slept in.

## 6

**A**ND NOW I come to that part of my story which must tax the credulity of the ordinary reader. I can only say that these eyes have seen the sights I tell of; these ears have heard the sounds.

At 9:30, Sophie and her grandfather having gone up to bed, Harry and I extinguished our last cigarettes and walked upstairs together. At the door of the spare room where the Devil Bed had been placed, we paused and stood for an instant. Then Harry pushed open the door and went in, and I followed him.

The bed filled the room so completely that no other piece of furniture save a plain wooden chair could

be squeezed in. On this one chair Sophie had placed a small kerosene lamp with a plain glass shade. A thin, flickering light drifted across the carved surface of the bed, so that the gargoyle faces seemed ever leering out into the light, and then withdrawing into obscene darkness again. The bed, in that first hurried glimpse, struck me as more ghastly than ever before. I can only say that it seemed—living.

I commenced speaking hurriedly, stammering in my excitement.

"Harry! Call me an old woman—an old fool—anything you want!" I said. "But don't sleep in that infernal bed. I don't believe in ghosts or spooks any more than you do, but I tell you this thing has *got* me!"

Harry shook his head obstinately, without answering.

Yet I couldn't give up.

"Humor me this once, for old friendship's sake," I pleaded. "Sleep in the bed some other time. Not tonight."

"This is my only chance," Harry replied. "Tomorrow it is to be crated, remember. And once in the museum—well, I couldn't very well sleep in it there! No, Charles, my mind is made up." We looked at each other for a moment, in complete silence. Then Harry stepped closer to me, and gripped my shoulder. "Don't think me just an obstinate fool!" he said. "I have reasons—for wanting to sleep in the Devil Bed! If you could guess the things I've heard whispered—and it's all nonsense, Charles! Nonsense!"

"You're quite sure?" I said, grimly.

"Positive! But the only way to prove it, is by sleeping in the thing myself. So—good-night, Charles, old fellow! We'll be laughing over this scene, tomorrow morning at breakfast!"

There was no use in wasting any further words; I bade Harry good-

night, and went to my own room. Here I undressed, and lay down. For a long time I remained awake, listening for—what? Eventually, I fell into a restless sleep.

Some hours later, I was awakened suddenly by a most strange and dreadful sound. It can be described only as something between a scream and a howl, and it was not human. . . . I sat up in bed, trembling all over. And at the same time a queer relief came over me. Here, at all events, was actuality at last and no matter what the horror might prove to be it was better than blind dread and waiting. I got out of bed, stumbled across the room in the dark, and lit my lamp with shaking fingers. Then, barefooted, holding the lamp high, I hurried out into the hallway.

The house was now absolutely still. I went first to Harry's room. The bed was empty, and I knew that Harry must be connected in some way with that fearful, agonized, inhuman cry. . . .

At the head of the staircase I halted for a moment, then slowly descended. Since I was quite unfamiliar with the house, I was unaware that these were the back stairs which would lead me to the kitchen. There was not the slightest sound to be heard anywhere—yet I felt, I *knew*, that someone was crawling about, somewhere, in the turgid darkness below.

At the foot of the stairs I met with a closed door. I threw it open, and then stopped short on the threshold. The feeble rays of the lamp showed me that I had found what I sought. On the floor of the kitchen, in a spreading pool of blood, lay the unfortunate mongrel dog whose death scream I had heard. And facing me, his back to the wall, stood Harry, the lamplight flickering on the wet blade of a carving knife he brandished in his hand!

May I never again see, in dreams or in reality, such a face as Harry

presented then to my horrified gaze! His eyes were wide and staring—his lips curled back in a snarling grimace. If I had never before seen blood-lust and fury in a human face, I saw it now. . . . Just an instant we looked at each other, then he came hurtling toward me. I knew him for a maniac, and I set down the lamp, and grappled with him for the possession of the knife.

He was too strong for me. Ordinarily, I could have conquered and disarmed him, for Harry is a lighter man, and possessed of less physical strength. But now he was not a man; he was a killer, and he had gained the terrific force of a maniac. In the implacable grip of his hand about my throat I felt that my last moment had come; I could see the knife in his right hand poised for the thrust that would mean my death! Then, suddenly, I heard running feet on the stairs behind me; a woman's sharp cry, and the deafening explosion of a revolver shot. At the same instant, Harry's grip on my throat relaxed, and he slid grotesquely to the floor. I turned, weak and shaking, toward the direction from which the shot had come. Sophie stood there, at the foot of the stairs, with a smoking revolver in her hand.

"I had to kill him," she cried, hysterically. "I had to kill him, or he would have murdered us all."

## 7

**H**ARRY did not die. The wound which Sophie had given him, and which had saved my life, was merely a deep and extremely painful flesh wound in the shoulder, from which he soon recovered.

But the shock to his nervous system—to his very mind and soul—went deeper. It was only after many days of rest that he could bear to speak of the terrible experience through which he had gone.

And then, strangely enough, he had nothing to tell us which we did not already know. He remembered nothing, from the time he fell asleep in the Devil Bed, till the moment when he dropped to the floor wounded by Sophie's shot. What malignant and mysterious impulse had entered his body, guiding him to the kitchen, putting the knife in his hand, filling him with a fierce lust to kill—he could no more guess than we could. His amazement and horror when we told him what he had done were unspeakably piteous to see, as was his utter remorse over the stabbing of the hapless dog.

"I didn't know what I was doing," he kept repeating dully, over and over. And my mind flashed to the boy Lennox, who also had killed, and all those notorious members of the Barton clan, who had swung for dreadful murders of which they were, in a deeper sense, completely innocent.

On Harry's recovery, there remained but one thing to do before our return to New York. The Devil Bed

was taken apart, and hauled unceremoniously to the yard, where we burned it. Not again should this accursed thing bring death and tragedy to innocent victims! Sophie and Harry and I watched it burn, in silence. The flames licked hungrily about those leering gargoyle faces, and we shivered a little, for the eyes seemed almost human. So heavy was the wood that it took hours before the last vestige of it was destroyed.

There is still one thing to tell. As I was hacking the bed apart for easier burning, I found a crude scrawl carved in the under-bracing of the tester:

BLOODE WARM AND RED  
ON HIS HANDS THATTE CARVED THIS  
BED.  
BLOODE SHALL BE SHED  
BY HIM WHO HEREON RESTS HIS  
HEAD.

Doggerel? Curse? Joke? Who knows! . . . For an instant the old chill and horror went through me as I read it, then I tossed the piece vindictively into the flames, and it too was consumed.