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The DEVIL'S GRAVEYARD

by
G. G. Pendarves



"There upon the open grave stood Giles, a gigantic shadow, and bestial, uncouth forms surged forward with horrid effort to pass the barrier of fire."

"**Y**OU don't understand, John! I used to laugh at it, too, but these last months the thought of that old curse has been more and more in my mind."

"Well, dear, why worry yet? It will be time enough if this proves to be a boy; after all, we may have a daughter at last."

"No! I feel convinced it will be another boy, and the words of that old saying go round and round in my head:

"When Radcliffe's heir has brothers six
And seeks to take to wife
The only child of Blackmore's line,
The Curse shall wake to life."

"But, Agnes, you are really inventing worries. Supposing this seventh is a boy! According to the silly jingle you quoted, the worst will only happen about twenty years hence, if our eldest boy should happen to fall in love with Blackmore's small daughter. And after all, it's absurd," he went on. "She might have any number of brothers and sisters in the interval—or she might even die," he added hopefully.

"You may make light of it, and I know it sounds absurd; but I feel so afraid, so miserably afraid, as though some black shadow was by my side, always whispering and threatening."

"My dear," said Radcliffe, now

W. T.—3

genuinely alarmed, "You mustn't let go like that! It's only a foolish old story, kept up by one generation after another. All old families boast of hidden treasures, or a curse, or a ghost, or something of that nature—it goes with the estate. You must not get fancies like that into your head, dear."

He got up and crossed the room to where his wife was sitting in the sunny window embrasure, and stood looking at her in a puzzled way, as though she were a new hybrid which had appeared among his treasured plants, and could not be accounted for. He was devoted to his wife, but hitherto she had been so normal and well-balanced that this strange fantastic notion of hers worried him considerably. It was so utterly unlike her.

"Better have Dr. Green up tomorrow and have a chat with him."

His wife suppressed a sigh. It was impossible to make him take her seriously. It was of no use to try to explain the awful weight that pressed upon her heart—the monstrous fear that oppressed her. He put it all down to her health, and brushed aside her premonitions as mere fancies.

But at the same time it comforted her that he should take this attitude. His unimaginative practical outlook on life, and careless way of disbelief-

ing what he did not understand, actually did, for the moment, make her feel that perhaps after all her fears were only imaginary.

She smiled at her husband in the sudden relief of her thought, as he bent down to kiss her and, drawing her wrap about her shoulders, said:

"It would do you good to have a turn round the grounds, Agnes. I'll take you down to the potting sheds. There are some new hybrids there that will surprize you. Perfect specimens! Even old Burns was almost cathusiastic about them; he never believed I could get that blue dahlia."

THE stillness of a golden October evening enveloped the big room where so many generations of Radcliffes had first seen the light. Mrs. Radcliffe lay dying in that room now.

Her husband, bewildered and helpless, faced with the first great sorrow in a hitherto placid existence, stood over by one of the windows, staring out over the far-stretching acres of the Radcliffe estate.

The six elder sons had come and gone, she would see them no more; and on them, especially David, her first-born and dearest, the mother's thoughts were centered.

She glanced from time to time at the cot, where slept her seventh son. Who was he? What was he? Why did her whole being shrink from the tiny helpless thing? She had turned from him with loathing, when the nurse showed him to her first—how long ago was that? A day, or an hour? It was all a mist and confusion in her brain. But after that they had troubled her with him no more.

She looked again at the child. What was that dark shadow? Why did it move when everything else was still in that quiet room?

A little cloud resting on the cot. A vapor exhaling from the body of the child. Rapidly it darkened and spread, and soon loomed gigantic to

the ceiling. Very slowly, almost imperceptibly, it took form and shape! Its vague outlines became sharp and definite, and presently something dimly approaching the semblance of a man towered there—a leering unholy thing! Its menacing bulk, shapeless and uncouth as one of the lesser animals in the far-off days of the primeval world! Its cold unsmiling eyes in dreadful contrast to the mouth distended in silent horrid laughter! Its bloated features a travesty of man even at his most vile!

The evil hour had dawned. This was the horror which had haunted her so long, this was the doom that would haunt her first-born!

She tried to call out—to move, and the pale eyes of that accursed thing gleamed evilly upon her efforts.

One last awful struggle with the icy numbness that pressed upon her limbs, and then the mother gave one great cry, pointing a shaking finger at the cot.

"The Curse! Kill—kill the child!"

John Radcliffe turned instantly; he saw nothing but the awful look on his wife's face as she fell back, and before he could reach her side she was gone—her heart had stopped in that supreme effort; and all unseen as Radcliffe stooped over the bed, that fell shadow moved about the silent room, and presently withdrew itself once more to the human habitation which sheltered it.

2

FAR up among the heather which spread its rich carpet to the very verge of his own fields and parklands, David Radcliffe sat, and by his side the girl who had just promised to marry him.

They were both extremely happy. The sun seemed to be shining for their especial benefit, the deep glowing colors of sky and moor to be painted just as a background for their joy.

"There is nothing to wait for, Maisie dear," said the man. "Now that my father is dead I must live at The Turrets altogether, and curb my desire for travel and expeditions. But you must marry me soon—very soon! I can't face the great lonely old place for very long without you. There's only Hirst at home now, and I see as little of him as possible."

"I shall feel dreadful about leaving my poor old dad by himself, though," answered the girl. "I know he would never consent to come and live at Radcliffe Turrets with us; he would never have a happy moment away from all those old Blackmore ancestors who gloom down on us from the walls. You've no idea how I dislike some of them."

"I expect you will dislike some of mine even more," laughed David, as he turned to kiss the sunburnt cheek so near his own.

"Well, for sheer ugliness I think the Blackmores score; your family was really rather handsome. But, of course, that horrible portrait you boast of is worse than all mine put together."

"Oh, you mean the man who was nick-named 'Giles the Thruster,' because he fought so many duels. He had a rather sinister reputation, and his face matches it. It is a very famous portrait, though."

"I hate it," said Maisie with a little shiver. "That sneering mouth and those long narrow eyes. Oh, it's a wicked face!"

David put a protecting arm about her.

"Well, it's only a picture after all; he's dead, hundreds of years ago."

"Yes, and I am very glad too. That old legend of the Radcliffe Curse is about him, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered David. "He said he was coming back to haunt us. I'm the one he ought to haunt, too! The eldest of seven sons, and you are a Blackmore, and an only child."

"Oh, David, what a perfectly horrid idea! Are you really the one that is meant in the Curse?"

He replied laughingly, "Yes, I really am. But, of course, it's only a fairy tale."

"What was the whole story of the Curse, dear? Why did your ancestor curse anybody at all?"

"Well, if you will promise not to take it seriously, I will tell you. I read it in some old manuscripts I found once in a secret drawer. The story goes that in the Thirteenth Century there was, as now, a family of seven Radcliffe brothers, and the youngest was this Giles the Thruster. He was betrothed to a girl, the only daughter of a Blackmore, whose land adjoined ours then, as it does now.

"The eldest Radcliffe also loved this girl, and the two of them ran away together. Giles pursued them, caught them up on the road, and the two men fought a duel in which Giles, blind with fury, missed his stroke, and was fatally wounded, and died, and was buried there in the clearing by the roadside, where they had fought. In dying, he cursed his brother bitterly, and swore that he would come again to earth and take his revenge.

"He prophesied that history would repeat itself, and that in the future once more seven Radcliffe brothers should be born, and the eldest again desire to wed a Blackmore's only daughter. Giles vowed that then he would return to snatch the girl from that eldest born, and cheat him of his love as he himself had been cheated."

"Oh, David! How awful if such things really could happen!"

"Well, they can't. We don't live in the Dark Ages now, darling. I am afraid old Giles would have a rough time of it if he returned to England in these post-war days. Everything got killed in the war. Religion and superstition alike. People only be-

lieve in what can be seen and paid for now."

"Nonsense, David! — Of course they——"

She broke off and turned to look at him. He had let his arm drop from her shoulders, and was sitting up stiffly, his eyes fixed on something ahead.

"Why, what's the matter? What are you looking at, David?"

She caught his arm, her own rosy color fading as she saw his dreadful pallor and the stricken look in his eyes.

"David! David! Answer me. Oh, do speak! There's nothing there!"

She beat with her little hand on the man's clenched fist, but he neither moved nor answered her.

"Oh, you must be ill. What shall I do? Can't you speak to me—just a word, dear?"

But he sat in frozen silence, his face a mask of horror.

At last she got up and moved toward the spot on which David's eyes were fixed so intently. Suddenly the wide sweep of moors seemed desolate, almost menacing. A dark cloud blotting out the sunshine, and a little squall of wind rushed up angrily against her as she moved forward.

"Come back, Maisie. A—a—h—h! come back."

The voice rose almost to a scream, and she turned to see David plunging over the heather toward her. He seized her roughly by the arm and dragged her away, and then stood holding her, panting as though he had run a race.

The reaction of finding him apparently recovered made her irritable, and she said, "I'm not going to run away; you needn't clutch me like that. What on earth is the matter with you, David?"

The man did not answer, but clasped her to him, his lips moving silently. He did not heed her questions, but began to walk away rapid-

ly, holding her hand in his, and urging her to greater haste.

Once or twice he pushed up against her, as though to avoid someone or something at his other side, his hand gripping hers convulsively.

Maisie was first frightened and then annoyed at his behavior. Why couldn't he explain? It was ridiculous—dragging her across the moors like this.

She wrenched her hand free at last, and said, "I can't go so quickly. Leave me, David; I would rather go home alone."

He turned a white face to her, as she stood looking up at him, her brown curls all blown about her pretty face, her gray eyes wide and indignant.

Her heart melted when she saw his look, and she said, "Oh, my dear, what is it? Do tell me. I can't bear to be treated like this. You look as though you had seen a ghost!"

Then as David recoiled, the horror on his face was reflected on her own, and she said, in a terrified whisper, "Oh, David, have you seen something? What was it? Tell me!"

The man's lips moved, but no sound was audible. Maisie clasped his arm.

"Was it really a ghost?" she whispered, with a horrified glance over her shoulder. "Oh, let us go then, quickly; it may come back; it's so lonely here."

For answer David put his hand to his throat with a sudden sharp intake of breath.

"Go away—go away," he managed to gasp out. She fell back a few paces, her frightened eyes glued to his face.

"But why won't you let me touch you? I want to be near you, David."

"No, no," he muttered. "Keep away. It's—it's—oh, Maisie, it's the Curse!"

At the last word he shivered like one in an ague, and backed away still farther from the girl, his outstretched

hands repelling something terrible and unseen.

She covered her face and stood trembling and shaking in every limb.

David stood looking at her miserably, then he sprang to her side and, taking her in his arms, said, "Kiss me good-bye, Maisie. Quick, ah, quick! Before he——"

But as the girl raised her face to his, David jerked back violently, with such abruptness that Maisie almost lost her balance.

"Go home—run—run, darling," came David's voice, low and urgent. "It's no use. We may not be together."

At that she turned, and ran obediently in the opposite direction, looking over her shoulder at intervals to see him walking away, his head bent, his whole figure shrunk together like that of an old man.

3

A WHOLE week went by, and still Maisie, beside herself with constant anxiety, saw and heard nothing of David.

The memory of his face with that gray shadow of fear upon it, and the agony of his eyes haunted her night and day. She had never known how dear he was to her until now, when this awful invisible agency had thrust them asunder.

Her heart was torn between the longing to see him and the fear of adding to his sufferings if she did so.

Every day she wandered aimlessly about the moors, seeking the high levels where she could command a view of the country round, and perhaps catch a glimpse of his tall figure.

When dark came, she kept watch from the window of her room, staring for hours in the direction of Radcliffe Turrets, where the many lighted windows shone; and she pictured David alone and wanting her. All night she would keep the vigil, with the feeling that so she might help him, that her

love would protect him when night and its evil shadows closed in around him; and when dawn came she would fall into heavy sleep, troubled by many dreams in which she and David fled over land and sea, pursued by a monster which would not let her go.

Then one day she saw him! It was late afternoon when she came upon him, sitting on a rough boulder, apparently watching the sun sinking into a smoky gray cloud-bank, which like a forest of dreams rose on the western horizon.

"David!—Oh, at last, my dear!"

She ran eagerly toward him, and he rose at the sound of her clear voice, and made as if to meet her. But at the first step he fell back suddenly, clutching the rock behind him with one hand and holding the other arm before his face, as though to ward off some invisible opponent.

"Don't come near me, Maisie," his voice came in a choking cry.

The girl stood rooted, and a great nausea swept over her as she watched the unspeakable loathing on the man's face, the blind terror with which he resisted some unseen foe.

Instinct warned her that in some way her presence was harmful to David, that her nearness increased his danger and suffering—and she retreated until she saw that he no longer struggled with that hateful enemy, but was sitting on the rock with his head bowed on his hands.

There she left him, and stumbling, with tears blinding her eyes, she went slowly home.

The bitterness of despair filled her as she realized that she had actually been the cause of torturing David afresh. She must never see him again. She would write and tell him so to-night.

4

"HERE is a letter for you, David, I found it on the hall table and brought it as I happened to be coming up."

Hirst Radcliffe, the youngest of the Radcliffe sons, entered his brother's study as he spoke, and stood, a tall, arresting figure, his pale cold eyes gleaming as he noted the bowed shoulders and drawn features of the man in the chair by the fire.

"It looks like Maisie's writing. I have wondered why we have seen so little of her lately—perhaps this will explain."

Hirst crossed the room and stood leaning up against the fireplace. He held the letter carelessly, and as David stretched out an eager hand, with a sudden glow of color in his sunken cheek, Hirst slipped, stumbled, and in some way too quick for David to see, the letter fell into the heart of the flames and was destroyed in a moment.

"Oh, I say! How stupid of me! My dear chap, I am sorry. What a perfectly rotten accident."

There was a wild light in David's eyes as he sprang to his feet.

"You're not sorry! I believe you did it on purpose. Get out of my room. I loathe the sight of you."

"That's nothing new, is it? No one would ever accuse us of being a David and Jonathan! But it's no use letting your feelings run away with you like that."

"Will you or won't you get out?"

"Yes, when I am ready to go. I just came up to bring your letter, and tell you I thought of strolling over to see old Blackmore and Maisie."

David's fists clenched, and he made a spring forward, but a sudden blackness descended upon him, and from out its murk, that which he knew and dreaded began slowly to take form. He collapsed, suddenly limp and shaking, into the chair behind him, as with a sneering laugh Hirst sauntered out of the room, closing the door softly behind him.

For long David sat, staring hard at the fire, as if out of the flames

themselves he could reconstruct the precious letter they had consumed.

At last he rose shakily to his feet and rang the bell.

"Send Reed to me, will you?" he asked the footman.

The valet appeared almost at once, an old servant of the Radcliffes, and devoted to David as he had been to his father before him.

"Reed, I have made up my mind to go away. I want you to pack for me at once, and also take a message to Miss Blackmore."

"Yes, Mr. David."

"I won't write the message. You must remember it, Reed—it's safer so. Tell her I am going to try to escape if I can! I am going to that little place in the Carpathians where I stayed once with a college chum. She knows where it is. Ask her to write and—give her my love, Reed."

The old man stood hesitating.

"Take me with you, sir," he burst out at last. "You must not go alone."

But David shook his head.

"No, no, Reed. You can do more for me by staying here at home. I think you know or guess something of what has fallen on me. I am cursed—a doomed man, Reed."

The faithful old servant nodded dumbly, and David continued, "Look after her for me. You and she are the only ones who know or understand. And now come, we must be quick; I want to start in a few hours."

5

MAISIE BLACKMORE was in the train on the way to London. It was some weeks, the darkest she had ever known, since David had fled from England. The faithful Reed had given his master's message and she had written again and again to him, and waited now in the greatest suspense for news. It was a few days only since the wonderful idea had dawned which had impelled her to take her present journey.

It was her father who had been the unconscious means of sending her on it. At breakfast one morning, he had looked up suddenly from his *Northern Mail*, saying, "Well, well. I am sorry to have missed that. If I had known I would have gone up to town to hear him."

Maisie was absorbed in her own thoughts, wondering if David would write, if he had escaped from the Curse, and if she would ever see him again—and she answered abstractedly, "Would you?"

Mr. Blackmore continued with increasing enthusiasm, "Of course. Old Fremling was the best chum a man ever had. I shall never forget those years at Oxford together. And apart from that, his lecture must have been well worth hearing."

The girl's listless interest was roused at the name of Fremling, and she asked, "What was he lecturing on, father?"

"Devil Worship and Ancient Rites among the Nomadic Tribes of Central Asia."

"I would like to have heard that, too," said Maisie, her eye kindling with an almost painful interest.

"Nonsense, child! Not at all the sort of thing for you. The tales Fremling tells make even me—well, if not afraid, something very like it. It's appalling to think such things exist, even in foreign countries. Of course I consider Fremling exaggerates a great deal. He's an extraordinary man—a genius!—and knows more about Asia than any man alive."

"I remember him very well, coming to stay here once, when I was a child," answered Maisie reflectively.

"Yes—about ten years ago," agreed her father. "He was very much interested in the strange illness of the vicar of this parish, who was said to be haunted."

Maisie's voice shook as she asked, "And what happened? What did Sir Donald Fremling do?"

Blackmore buttered his toast, and helped himself to marmalade before replying, "Well, I never pretended to understand Fremling or his fantastic theories. He did explain his view of this particular case, but I have forgotten."

"But the vicar! Did Sir Donald save him?"

"There was no question of saving," said her father testily. "The vicar was mad—and he got better. Fremling helped in one way, soothing influence and all that, no doubt. But as to casting out devils—well it's not the sort of thing that happens to a decent Englishman. All very well for the colored races, with their hot climate, and priests, and opium."

And with this final statement the old man had risen from the table and gone out into the garden.

Maisie had swiftly made her decision; and accepting a long-standing invitation from a friend who lived in London, she left home two days later, determined to see Sir Donald Fremling and tell him the whole story of the Curse.

Sir Donald Fremling! The name rose up now in Maisie's mind, as a harbor light to a storm-tossed mariner. Could he really cast out devils? Would he be able to save David?

6

THESE two questions still burned in her mind as, on the following afternoon, she reached Sir Donald's house. He was sitting alone by his study fire, with a Great Dane stretched by his side, and an old worn book in black letter on a small table at his elbow.

He showed no surprize at her visit, and greeted her with a gentle Old World courtesy which gave her courage. She sank into a chair on the opposite side of the fire. The dog looked at her solemnly, then stalked over and put one heavy paw on her knee.

"You see you are among friends,"

Sir Donald said with a smile in his deep-set eyes, as they met the hesitating doubt in her own. "You can speak freely! Tell me why you are here, in London, instead of enjoying your moors and heather at home? You don't look as though the city agreed with you, either. Why are you so unhappy, dear child?"

"Oh, I am—I am most unhappy," said the girl, clasping her hands with painful earnestness. "It's too awful. It's not the sort of thing that *can* happen, really. I feel you can't possibly believe it."

"There's very little I can not believe," answered the old savant gravely. "Tell me everything, and let me judge for myself. Remember I have spent my whole life in warring against those dark forces which are all about us, and which manifest themselves so terribly at times."

Thus encouraged, Maisie told him all she knew, first of the legend of the Curse—and of its subsequent fulfilment in the haunting of David Radcliffe.

Sir Ronald heard her without comment or interruption, and when she had finished he sat gazing thoughtfully at the Persian rug under his feet, his deep-set eyes almost hidden under his white eyebrows, his thin face showing many a line furrowed by past ordeals and encounters with Evil.

"Tell me all you can about the present Radcliffe family," Sir Donald asked presently.

"Well, as I said, David has six brothers, and they are all particularly nice jolly boys, except Hirst—the youngest?"

"Ah! The youngest! And why is he so different?"

"It is difficult to explain what he is like. But I hate him, and so does David. In fact, none of the brothers got on with him, and as soon as they were old enough they left home rather than live with him. It's been a very

unhappy household since their mother died. The father loved Hirst best, and could see no fault in him; he sacrificed all the rest of the family to his caprices and wishes."

"This is most valuable information," Sir Donald said, his keen eyes alight with interest. "Go on, tell me all you can remember about this youngest Radcliffe."

"He was the strangest child. Even as a baby no one ever knew him to cry or shed a tear. He has never had one hour's pain or illness in his life, and is absolutely callous to everyone else's suffering. In fact, I am sure he enjoys the sight of pain. He is a horrible man—cold, sneering and hateful."

"How did the other boys treat him at school?"

"Oh, no school kept him more than a few days. There were dreadful scandals about it. He had a tutor finally—a Mr. Fane. And that was the worst of all."

"What happened to the tutor?"

"No one knows exactly—that's the horrible part of it. He got to look wretchedly ill and miserable while he was at The Turrets. David once begged him not to stay, because it made him feel so angry to see how Hirst treated him."

"And why didn't Fane go away then?"

"He told David he couldn't go—he would give no reason, simply said he couldn't go. Then he disappeared, and they found his body later, lying in the woods among the bracken and dead leaves. The doctor said he had died of shock, and his face was terrible to see, I believe."

"And was Hirst held to blame for the tragedy?"

"Well, no! Not exactly. And yet everyone who knew Hirst well, and had seen Fane with him, felt uneasy. The poor man had so obviously been in his power, and cringed before him in a most painful way."

"And is this Hirst Radcliffe living at home now?"

"Yes," answered Maisie. "He rarely leaves The Turrets; he has a suite to himself, and is supposed to be studying astronomy. He's got telescopes and all sorts of apparatus fixed up on a flat roof, very strange instruments some of them look, but I have only seen them from a distance."

After a few more questions Sir Donald said, "It's well for David Radcliffe that you came to me. He will not find a place of escape in Europe, or on any spot on earth until the Curse is broken and its power destroyed. Will you give me his address? I will go in search of him and bring him home. The Curse must be undone where it was first uttered, and David must help me to find that place."

Maisie rose, her white face raised imploringly to Sir Donald's.

"And do you think there is any hope of helping David?"

"Yes, my child," Sir Donald said, putting a hand on her shoulder. "There is always hope, and you have done much to help him already by coming here. In the meantime stay in London, do not return north. You must not see David again until he is a free man once more. Another meeting between you would mean danger to you both in the highest degree. And as to Hirst—I will explain more fully later, but if you value your immortal soul keep away from him. He is not what he seems."

7

DAVID RADCLIFFE stopped walking and stared around him. He realized suddenly that for the last few minutes that long-drawn-out sound had persistently forced itself upon his consciousness, but, absorbed in his own despairing thoughts, he had paid no heed to its appeal.

The broad highway over the Car-

pathian Alps stretched out before him, flinging its endless leagues about the shoulders of the mountains that towered in proud desolation to the wintry sky.

David stood for a minute, trying to penetrate the gloom of the dense fir-forests that marched on either hand; then, guided by that repeated cry, he turned off the road and plunged in among the trees. It was some minutes before he could locate the call accurately, but at last on the edge of a clearing he saw that an old man was there on the ground, leaning up against a tree and evidently in pain.

The stranger explained to David that he had walked out from Borviz, a small mountain hamlet about three miles distant, but had unfortunately slipped and wrenched his ankle, and found himself unable to walk or even stand.

Radcliffe, a great fair giant well over six feet, looked down on the slight figure of the injured man with considerable interest and sympathy; and for the first time in many weeks he felt the burden of his thoughts lifted, and an unwonted sense of security enveloped him.

"There's only one thing for it, I think, sir—I must carry you, if you will trust yourself to me."

The other man smiled up at this modern Sir Christopher.

"I think that would be imposing a little too far on your goodness, I am heavier than I look. But if you could find some conveyance and bring it here to me——"

Radcliffe shook his head.

"No! That would not do at all. These woods are far from safe even in the daylight, and it is already dusk! Night would have fallen long before I could get one of those rascally Tziganes back here with a horse and cart. It is not safe for you to be here alone. Better let me carry you."

The older man looked up at his companion.

"Perhaps if you took me down to the road, someone might pass and give me a lift."

"I don't think there is any chance of that. Won't you let me try to lift you? We ought to start at once, there is a big fall of snow just about due."

As he spoke David knelt and hoisted the stranger on to his broad shoulders, and began to make his way slowly through the increasing darkness to the open road.

But there he halted. The snow-storm had arrived! And a stinging icy wind blew a flurry of sleet against his face as he emerged from the shelter of the forest.

"You can't do it in this. Better set me down again in the shelter of the trees, and make your way to the nearest village," said the stranger.

David answered with quick indignant warmth, "You don't know what a night, or even a few hours, means in these heights at this time of the year, sir. You would die of the cold, even apart from the danger of wolves. No! the only thing is to make a night of it together. I will build a fire, and find some sort of a shelter."

And in spite of protests, David carried his burden back to the woods, and having found a spot comparatively sheltered from the fury of the ever-rising storm, he proceeded to break off the lower branches of the fir trees, and soon made an effectual screen from the wind.

A fire was quickly built, and its cheerful crackle and the fragrant odor of the resinous wood drew a sigh of satisfaction from the man by whom Radcliffe now seated himself.

"You are showing great kindness to an absolute stranger—I owe my life to you," said the former, as he looked earnestly at his young benefactor, noting the hunted expression of the blue eyes, the marks of pain and fear on the young face.

David's color deepened as he made an awkward gesture of denial.

"I can't tell you how awfully glad I am of the accident that has brought us together," continued the old man. "I have come to this part of the world for the purpose of finding you."

"Finding me!" echoed David. "But I don't quite understand, I am afraid. Perhaps your name——?"

"My name is Fremling," answered the other.

"What! Not Sir Donald Fremling the famous traveler?"

Fremling smiled at the young man's enthusiasm.

"Yes, I suppose that describes me."

David put out his big brown hand and clasped that of the older man.

"I can't tell you how awfully glad I am to meet you, sir. It was only the other day I came across some friends of yours in Budapest. They were talking about what you had done for them, and all the strange places and people you had known."

David paused; then, encouraged by the listening attitude of his companion, he continued, rather hurriedly, "Is it true that you are interested in the supernatural, and—well, in what is called Black Magic?"

Fremling's face became very grave as he answered slowly, "Tell me what it is that haunts you."

"Haunts me!" gasped David. "But I did not say—I don't know why you think——?"

He suddenly turned and faced the other man, staring hard into Fremling's deep-set eyes.

"I am haunted! No man was ever haunted as I am. Do you believe in the power of a Curse?"

"I believe in the power of the hate which prompts a Curse," answered Fremling quietly.

Still David looked long and eagerly into the other's tranquil face; then, as if he had found what he sought and was satisfied, he turned away.

"It is not necessary for me to say that I am David Radcliffe," he said

at length. "Evidently you know who I am, and why I am here."

"Yes, I know everything. I have seen Maisie Blackmore—in fact she came to see me, and it was from her that I learned the danger you are in. I am an old friend of her father's, and remembering that I am interested in all supernatural manifestations she brought your case to me."

David flushed with pride and pleasure in this new proof of Maisie's love and ceaseless efforts to help him.

Sir Donald smiled.

"You are very young still in spite of your trouble. A girl whose spirit is so finely tempered as that of Maisie Blackmore, when she loves, loves without counting the cost at all—she would become the haunted one herself if by so doing she could free you from your Curse!"

"And what is your opinion, Sir Donald, now that you know all? What is it that haunts me—and why?"

"My opinion is that you have lived all your life with a demon at your side—your brother Hirst! He is not a human being, as we understand the term. His body is a vehicle borrowed by an Elemental. Your ancestor Giles died in a moment of eternal hate! And after death his strong personality was still bound to earth by its own overwhelming passions. Consequently it would ally itself with those Elemental forces of evil which strive unceasingly to gain access to mankind. Thus Giles has acquired force to project his hate down the centuries; and by infernal aid has at last gained possession of a body so that he may live on earth again."

David tossed a branch on to the fire, adding more and more fuel, until the crackling hiss of the flames almost drowned the moan of the wind, and the encroaching shadows of the forest fell back reluctantly.

Fremling noted the furtive glance the young man threw over his shoul-

der, and the nervous dilation of his nostrils.

"Tell me," begged David at last, "this—this *thing* that haunts me . . . can you destroy it . . . can you lift the Curse? Oh, I can not bear more."

"Poor boy!" said the older man. "All alone here in the wilderness with *that* ever at your side. I can realize what you must suffer."

At the compassion and understanding in Fremling's voice, the other looked up with tears in his eyes.

"I am going mad. I meant to end it all tonight. To walk on and on into the very heart of the storm, until the cold and snow had frozen the life out of me and I could never wait or fear or suffer any more."

"Only to find your implacable enemy awaiting you on the other side of the door you would thus force open."

"What do you say? No . . . Oh, no! I can't believe that."

"Won't believe it, you mean," corrected Fremling. "I do not wonder that you are eager to meet death—that you long for its merciful oblivion! But believe me when I tell you that there is no such easy way out of it as that. Should your enemy overcome you while you still possess your human body, his hate would cause your death . . . the death of your body, that is! But that would be the end, for in the effort he put forth to kill you, his power would expend itself, and your true self would henceforth continue freed from his malice."

"But on the other hand—should you cut short your span of human life yourself, Giles would meet you as an equal; you would have descended to his level, have pulled down the barriers between . . . and his hate would absorb your very being into his, and add incalculably to the diabolical force which gives him existence."

David leant forward in terrible agitation, and spoke rapidly, "Are you a devil, too? Has he sent you to taunt me—to drive me to greater de-

spair? You have taken away my only hope. Death was my one refuge."

His blue eyes glared at Fremling as he spoke, and it was only too evident that his reason was tottering to a fall.

With all the compassion of a father for a frightened child, Fremling clasped the hand of the unhappy man and answered gently, "I will help you. That is what I am here for. If you have courage and will to obey me, you may yet be saved. I can promise nothing, because so much depends on your own efforts and strength of purpose—but I have saved others in more desperate case even than yourself."

David's brief moment of madness passed, leaving him deeply contrite and ashamed of his outburst, and as the two men sat talking together hour after hour, David felt a spring of hope and confidence well up within him. His former passive acceptance of his awful fate changed to a strong determination to fight the evil which shadowed his existence. And when dawn came at last and the storm died, the quiet stillness of the mountains was reflected in his own heart as he rose to tread out the red fire and prepared to carry Fremling to some place of shelter and safety.

8

OVER the jagged spine of rock which crested the hill known as the "Devil's Teeth," in that neighborhood—the great reddened orb of a harvest moon rose like the eye of some gigantic Polyphemus peering down on that unhallowed spot with wide unblinking stare, eager to witness once again the triumph of deathless hate—to gloat with full-orbed vision on the resurrection of all that was evil and abominable.

Fremling and Radcliffe stood watching the rising of this ill-omened moon, the younger man with beating heart and a feeling of helpless terror which made his hands and feet icy cold, and the breath come short

and quick through his nostrils. His nervous excitement was in strong contrast to the calm of his companion, who looked alternately from his watch to the heavy shadow cast by the hill—a shadow retreating gradually like some furtive guilty thing back into the bulk of the hill which had cast it forth.

Fremling drew from his pocket a roll of parchment yellow with age, and consulted it narrowly.

"In half an hour's time, according to this manuscript," he said, "the outline of the grave should be distinct, and we shall learn the exact spot where Giles' blood was shed. It is there that we must meet the demon-soul which possesses your brother's body—and it is there alone that we can destroy it."

A long shudder shook David's body as he looked furtively round at the trees which encircled the open grassy space on which they stood. He watched the inky shadow of the hill, until its sharp outline became hazy and indistinct and the whole scene swam in a pale mist before his aching eyes. For a moment he shut them to recall Maisie's face—to nerve himself by the thought of her love and belief in him to face what was coming.

"Ah—h—h"—the low exclamation from Fremling made his heart stop beating; then his pulses throbbed furiously as he followed the direction of the other's pointing finger.

A luminous red stain, its shape unmistakable and sinister, was growing momentarily more distinct there on the grass in front of them . . . not six feet distant! Every leaf and blade of grass or weed within that rectangular boundary gleamed red as blood and fiery bright.

Sir Donald picked up from the ground a short, broad-bladed sword, worn and stained, its hilt encrusted with rubies whose fire outshone even the crimson glare of the grave itself.

"Dig . . . dig swiftly," he com-

manded, putting the weapon in the young man's hands. "Do not lose a moment—all depends now on your speed—before midnight that grave must lie open to the moon and stars, or we shall meet Giles unprepared and helpless."

Urged and goaded by repeated warnings, David pursued his dreadful task. The red grass came up easily enough, being rooted in a light powdered soil of the same deep red stain as the grass itself.

As the last sod of that stained weed was cut up and tossed aside, Fremling drew David quickly back from the graveside, and as he did so a great tremor shook the whole place, and a tongue of fire shot with a hissing roar skyward from the uncovered grave.

When it died Fremling went forward and peered cautiously into the grave, beckoning David to his side.

Clutching the older man with icy hands, the other looked, and drew back with a gasp . . . a dark shaft had opened, reaching to unfathomable depths, in whose yawning chasm a far-off point of green light burned like an evil star of the underworld.

David recoiled with ashen face, while Sir Donald's firm mouth set in its sternest lines.

"It is Gaffarel! Gaffarel the Mighty! Gaffarel and the Four Ancient Ones who come against us," he whispered to his trembling companion. "This place is saturated with unspeakable guilt."

His eyes closed for a minute as he muttered a few low indistinct words. Then taking from his pocket a small phial he turned to David again, and with a certain rare and fragrant oil he rapidly anointed the eyes, nose, and mouth of his companion and himself.

"I warn you," Fremling said, "to wait in silence now for what shall come. Do not utter a syllable, or you will plunge us both into that devil's

tomb where Giles and his legions await us."

Chill eddies of wind swept up against the silent pair as the midnight hour approached . . . the ground under their feet trembled with the thundering march of some invisible army . . . the sound of countless hoarse voices and echoing horrid laughter came faintly to their ears.

Fremling drew forth a rod of ancient ivory, carved with symbols of magic as old as the dawn of the world. Its tip gleamed with pale fire, and as Sir Donald traced on the ground the outline of the sacred pentacle, the rank grass burned fiercely in its wake, and within the fiery five-pointed star David and Fremling stood by the graveside waiting.

Strange flickering lights moved among the trees which hemmed them in. Shadows formed and re-formed in sinister array about them.

The chill of death gripped David's heart, and he turned to look at his companion, standing upright and stedfast, his face raised to the midnight sky, his lips moving rapidly.

Suddenly all noise and movement ceased abruptly, and in the intense stillness which fell, David nerved himself for the last supreme effort. To face Giles the Thruster—to defy him—to pit his own will against the awful power of the demon.

It was coming—coming! In every nerve he felt the dread approach of the Enemy. With cold lips he murmured over to himself the ancient words of power which Fremling had taught him, and with shaking fingers pressed a leaf of vervain to his nostrils.

There upon the open grave stood Giles, a gigantic shadow, his beckoning figure drawing David with irresistible lure.

Like one in a trance, David took a stiff step forward, but ere he could move again, Fremling advanced swiftly and interposed his own body

between the monstrous Shadow and its victim.

At this, the baleful lights outside the pentacle drew closer, and dim forms were visible, bestial and uncouth, surging forward with horrid effort to pass the barrier of fire.

Fremling stood as though carved in stone; not a step did he give back, as with almost imperceptible movement Giles advanced upon him. There was not a hand's breadth between them, when Fremling held up the fire-tipped rod, and in a loud clear voice commanded Giles to return to the place whence he came. Three times Sir Donald repeated the terrible name which can command even the Ancient Four themselves, and slowly Giles the Thruster retreated—his hate powerless against the divine courage of his antagonist.

Inch by inch Sir Donald advanced—inch by inch Giles moved backward to the grave.

Sir Donald's face was awful in its set intensity, his steady eyes fixed on the flaming eyeballs of the demon who opposed him.

Good and Evil matched in a colossal struggle for supremacy.

Back over the brink of the grave Giles was forced, and then with the swiftness of light Fremling raised the magic rod and plunged its blazing tip deep into the Thruster's heart.

A great tongue of flame shot up from the fathomless depths of the grave, wrapping round Giles like a winding sheet of fire!

And in that same moment the phantom lights that pressed about the pentacle vanished utterly—the blazing star itself dimmed, and went out.

David gripped his companion's arm convulsively as they waited.

The black clouds overhead were torn by a blinding glare, followed by

crash after crash of thunder, which seemed to shake the solid earth.

Then came the rain, sudden and torrential—washing the evil of the haunted spot from off the earth, and Fremling and Radcliffe lifted their faces thankfully to its cleansing sweetness.

AT LAST it ceased, the darkness lifted, and from a ragged fringe of cloud the moon shone clear and bright. Grass and trees glistened with the silvery sparkle of some enchanted forest.

How strangely altered was that sullen ring of trees! That ragged, haunted, desolate spot!

Not haunted now—quiet and lonely, perhaps, but not desolate.

A calm sweet peace brooded over the place; the threatening copse had become a friendly shelter from the storm, where the birds cowered and shook their wings, piping encouragement to one another as they dried their wet feathers.

The circle of grass was wholly green. No red stain now, nor gaping depth was there. Green and fragrant the weeds and long waving grasses shone in the moonlight.

But that which had walked among men as Hirst, the youngest of the Radcliffe brothers, would haunt them no more.

Cold and terrible in death they found the mortal body deserted by its demon!

It faced them as they burst open the locked door of the study—sitting upright in a high carved chair—one hand clenched over its heart—the features twisted by inhuman rage.

The pale cold eyes were hardly changed by death, and stared into the horror-stricken faces around—and stared—and stared.

