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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Last of Mrs. Debrugh

By H. SIVIA

*Mr. DeBrugh was dead, but he still regarded his promise as a sacred duty to be carried out*

"LETTY," Mr. DeBrugh remarked between long puffs on his meerschaum, "you've been a fine maid. You've served Mrs. DeBrugh and me for most of fifteen years. Now I haven't much more time in this life, and I want you to know that after Mrs. DeBrugh and I are gone, you will be well taken care of."

Letty stopped her dusting of the chairs in Mr. DeBrugh's oak-paneled study. She sighed and turned toward the man, who sat on a heavy sofa, puffing on his pipe and gazing across the room into nothingness.

"You mustn't talk that way, Mr. DeBrugh," she said. "You know you're a long time from the dark ways yet." She paused, and then went on dusting and talking again. "And me—humph—I've only done what any ordinary human would do to such a kind employer as you, sir. Especially after all you've done for me."

He didn't say anything, and she went on with her work. Of course she liked to work for him. She had adored the kindly old man since first she had met him in an agency fifteen years before. A person couldn't ask for a better master.

But there was the mistress, Mrs. DeBrugh! It was she who gave Letty cause for worry. What with her nagging tongue and her sharp rebukes, it was a wonder Letty had not quit long before.

She would have quit, too, but there had been the terrible sickness she had undergone and conquered with the aid of the ablest physicians Mr. DeBrugh could engage. She couldn't quit after that, no matter what misery Mrs. DeBrugh heaped on her. And so she went about her work at all hours, never tiring, always striving to please.

She left the study, closing the great door silently behind her, for old Mr. DeBrugh had sunk deeper into the sofa, into the realms of peaceful sleep, and she did not wish to disturb him.

"Letty!" came the shrill cry of Mrs. DeBrugh from down the hall. "Get these pictures and take them to the attic at once. And tell Mr. DeBrugh to come here."

Letty went for the pictures.

"Mr. DeBrugh is asleep," she said, explaining why she was not obeying the last command.

"Well, I'll soon fix that! Lazy old man! Sleeps all day with that smelly pipe

between his teeth. If he had an ounce of pep about him, he'd get out and work the flowers. Sleeps too much anyway. Not good for him."

She stamped out of the room and down the hall, and Letty heard her open the door of the study and scream at her husband.

"Hector DeBrugh! Wake up!"

There was a silence, during which Letty wondered what was going on. Then she heard the noisy clop-clop of Mrs. DeBrugh's slippers on the hardwood floor of the study, and she knew the woman was going to shake the daylight out of Mr. DeBrugh and frighten him into wakefulness. She could even imagine she heard Mrs. DeBrugh grasp the lapels of her husband's coat and shake him back and forth against the chair.

Then she heard the scream. It came quite abruptly from Mrs. DeBrugh in the study, and it frightened Letty out of her wits momentarily. After that there was the thud of a falling body and the clatter of an upset piece of furniture.

Letty hurried out of the room into the hall and through the open door of the study. She saw Mrs. DeBrugh slumped on the floor in a faint, and beside her an upset ash-tray. But her eyes did not linger on the woman, nor the tray. Instead, they focussed on the still form of Mr. DeBrugh in the sofa.

He was slumped down, his head twisted to one side and his mouth hanging open from the shaking Mrs. DeBrugh had given him. The meerschaum had slipped from between his teeth, and the cold ashes were scattered on his trousers.

Even then, before the sea of tears began to flow from her eyes, Letty knew the old man was dead. She knew what he had meant by the speech he had said to her only a few minutes before.

"His heart," was the comment of the doctor who arrived a short time later and pronounced the old man dead. "He had to go. Today, tomorrow. Soon."

After that, he put Mrs. DeBrugh to bed and turned to Letty.

"Mrs. DeBrugh is merely suffering from a slight shock. There is nothing more that I can do. When she awakens, see that she stays in bed. For the rest of the day."

He left then, and Letty felt a strange coldness about the place, something that had not been there while Mr. DeBrugh was alive.

She went downstairs and made several telephone calls which she knew would be necessary. Later, when Mrs. DeBrugh was feeling better, other arrangements could be made.

She straightened the furniture in the study, pushing the familiar sofa back in place, from where Mr. DeBrugh invariably moved it. Then she knocked the ashes from the meerschaum, wiped it off, and placed it carefully in the little glass cabinet on the wall where he always kept it.

Times would be different now, she knew. She remembered what he had said. "You will be well taken care of." But there had been something else. "After Mrs. DeBrugh and I are gone."

Letty could no longer hold back the tears. She fell into a chair and they poured forth.

But time always passes, and with it goes a healing balm for most all sorrows. First there was the funeral. Then came other arrangements. And there was the will, which Mrs. DeBrugh never mentioned.

His things would have fallen into decay but for the hands of Letty. Always her dust-cloth made his study immaculate. Always the sofa was in place and

the pipe, clean and shining, in the cabinet.

There was a different hardness about Mrs. DeBrugh. No longer was she content with driving Letty like a slave day in and day out. She became even more unbearable.

There were little things, like taking away her privilege of having Saturday afternoons off. And the occasional "forgetting" of Letty's weekly pay.

Once Letty thought of leaving during the night, of packing her few clothes and going for ever from the house. But that was foolish. There was no place to go, and she was getting too old for maid service.

Besides, hadn't Mr. DeBrugh said she would be taken care of. "After Mrs. DeBrugh and I are gone." Perhaps she would not live much longer.

And then one morning Mrs. DeBrugh called Letty in to talk with her. It was the hour Letty had been awaiting—and dreading.

There was a harsh, gloating tone in Mrs. DeBrugh's voice as she spoke. She was the master now. There was no Hector to think of.

"Letty," she said, "for some time now I have been considering closing the house. I'm lonely here. I intend to go to the city and live with my sister. So, you see, I shan't be needing you any longer. I'll be leaving within the next two days. I'm sorry."

Letty was speechless. She had expected something terrible, but not this. This wasn't so! Mrs. DeBrugh was lying! It was the will she was afraid of. Letty remembered Mr. DeBrugh's promise.

She did not complain, however. Her only words were, "I'll leave tomorrow."

That night she packed her things. She had no definite plans, but she hoped something would turn up.

SLEEP would not come easy, so Letty lay in bed and thought of old Mr. DeBrugh. She imagined he was before her in the room, reclining on the sofa, puffing long on the meerschaum. She even saw in fancy the curling wisps of gray smoke drifting upward, upward. . . .

It was sleep. Then, with a start, she was suddenly wide awake.

She had surely heard a scream. But no.

And then, as soft and as silent as the night wind, came the whisper: "Letty."

It drifted slowly off into silence, and a cool breeze crossed her brow. She suddenly felt wet with perspiration. She listened closely, but the whisper was not repeated.

Then, noiselessly, she got out of bed, stepped into slippers, and drew a robe about her. Just as silently she left her room and walked down the hall to Mrs. DeBrugh's bedroom.

She rapped softly on the door, fearing the wrath of the woman within at being awakened in the middle of the night. There was no answer, no sound from inside the room.

Letty hesitated, wondering what to do. And once more she felt that cool, death-like breeze, and heard the faintest of whispers, fainter even than the sighing of the night wind: "Letty."

She opened the door and switched on the light. Mrs. DeBrugh lay in the bed as in sleep, but Letty knew, as she had known about Mr. DeBrugh, that it was more than sleep.

She quickly called the doctor, and sometime much later he arrived, his eyes heavy from lack of sleep.

"Dead," he remarked, after looking at the body. "Probably had a shock. Fright, nightmare, or something her heart couldn't stand. I always thought she would have died first."

Letty walked slowly from the room,

down the stairs, still in her robe and slippers. The doctor followed and passed her, going through the door into the outside.

She walked, as though directed by some unseen force, into Mr. DeBrugh's study. She switched on a lamp beside the sofa on which he had always sat; and she noticed that it was moved slightly out of place.

There was something else about the room, some memory of old days. First she saw some sort of legal document on the table and wondered at its being

there. The title said: *Last Will and Testament of Hector A. DeBrugh*. It was brief. She read it through and found that Mr. DeBrugh had spoken truthfully in his promise to her.

Beside the will on the table was another object, and she knew then what the "something else" in the room was.

The meerschaum! It lay there beside the document, and a thin spiral of grayish smoke rose upward from it toward the ceiling.

No longer did Letty wonder about anything.

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