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The Lord of the Tarn

by G. G. Pendarves.



"No trace of man or monk was left, and only monstrous snarling cats leapt and circled about the girl."

[Miles Warriner to his godfather, Sir Donald Fremling.]

The Green Palace Cinema,
Liverpool, Sept. 30.

DEAR PATER:—
It's tremendously decent of you to offer to go up to Cumberland and see Coral yourself. This cellist, Torkel Yarl, who drifted into the Hydro after I left, sounds a dangerous sort of bounder, and I'm not only jealous but really afraid for Coral.

It's so foreign to her nature to make sudden friendships with anyone—she's as shy as a blue-jay—and that's why this violent intimacy alarms me.

She is wrought up to a fever-pitch of excitement over Yarl and his

music, and seems to spend the whole day working with him. Our orchestra broke up when the summer season was over at Brackenfells Hydro, but both Coral and myself are booked for the Xmas season there. I took a temporary job of playing first violin at this cinema because the pay was so tempting, and means marrying Coral six months earlier.

She stayed on at Brackenfells at a nominal salary to entertain any stray visitors that might drift in, and to rest before the Xmas rush begins . . . They're tuning up, and the big drum I am using as a table is wanted. So am I.

Do go as soon as possible.

Your very worried

MILES.

625

[*Coral Deane to Miles Warriner*]
Brackenfells Hydro,
Oct. 7.

DEAR MILES:—
What soul-searching questions you ask! I can't answer them now because I have so much to tell you about the music I have been doing.

Torkel Yarl is marvelous! Even the great Casals seems to fade into a mere amateur beside him! It's not only his playing—he improvises superbly, too; it quite frightens me sometimes, for I can't understand how any man *can* do what he does!

He plays from memory everything you and I have ever done. Not only cello solos, but arrangements of big orchestral things as well. The Lalo Concerto, Boellmann's Variations, Saint-Saens' Allegro and Chopin's Polonaise in C are a few examples of his repertory!

Do you remember the Mendelssohn Fugue in E flat for strings? He produced a piano part for me in script and he does the rest! Don't ask me how—it is quite beyond me! His genius is so great that it is almost terrible. Particularly in his own compositions. They are more like the wildest sort of Slav music than anything else I have heard, but far more barbaric! I always dread playing his own works, though I don't know why I do!

Torkel says I have a certain amount of genius, but am too sentimental to use it properly. I was furious when he said this, but he only laughed, and then took up his bow and played so divinely that I forgot to be angry any more.

Of course I love you and miss you, Miles! Why do you ask me so often? I went up to the Red Tarn on Monk's Rock last week—that place has an extraordinary attraction for me now. I got a nasty deep scratch on my arm when I was by the tarn

which won't heal up. I can't remember how I did it though.

With love,
Yours,
CORAL.

P. S. Did I tell you Torkel has a finger missing on his left hand? I can't imagine how he does the stretches.

[*Sir Donald Fremling to Miles Warriner.*]

Brackenfells Hydro,
Oct. 15.

MY DEAR BOY:—

As I have often told you, it gives me the greatest happiness whenever you turn to me for help. Your pride and independence make it difficult for me, now that you are no longer a schoolboy.

You have been quite frank with me about Coral, and I will be equally frank with you—chiefly because you must be prepared to play the hardest part in the awful little drama which Torkel Yarl has staged. Your part is to wait and do nothing! No matter how desperate the crisis, you can not help—only hinder.

Torkel Yarl is not a man as you and I understand the word! He is not a human being—but superhuman, literally *superhuman*.

Physically he has all the characteristics of his Danish forefathers (his name—Yarl or Eorl—gives you the clue to his ancestry, of course). He is powerfully built and tall in proportion, and moves with the ease and grace of a panther. His eyes add to this illusion, they are unnaturally bright and gleam under drooped eyelids in a horribly compelling fashion.

As to his music—it is a weapon of such supreme power that it would rouse the dead to follow him over the edge of the world!

Why am I not under his spell, you ask? Ah, because years ago I learnt what Power inspires such as Torkel Yarl—and behind those gleaming

eyes of his I see his devil seated, lustful and mocking.

The missing finger on his hand is a distinguishing mark which may help, when it comes to the final proving of my theories.

Don't forget to be cautious in your references to me when you write to Coral. She has no idea who I am.

Your affectionate godfather,
DONALD FREMLING.

[*Coral Deane to Miles Warriner.*]
Brackenfells Hydro,
Oct. 30.

DEAREST MILES:—
You always warned me not to let my dreams blot out reality too far, and I seem to have done it! I have wandered out into space, and when I want to return I find there is no room!

You bring me back always—but I know that soon even the memory of your love will not draw me. I shall just go on and on—and never return! Will that be death, Miles? But that's absurd, of course—I am perfectly well.

I have changed my mind again about our wedding; if you still want me, I will marry you when you come back at Xmas. I hope Coral Warriner will be better worth your loving than Coral Deane—but I am afraid you are taking a risk, dear!

Don't you think it is curious that I have grown to love the Red Tarn so much? Do you remember the first time we saw it together, one late autumn day last year? What a desolate, wind-swept place it seemed then—the water of the tarn cold and gleaming under the gray sky—the tall yellow reeds rustling and shivering on its banks! I was never so afraid of any place out in the open before. Do you remember what a coward I was, and how I thought I saw figures crouching and stealing about among the stunted trees and patches of gorse?

And yet I love the tarn now more than any other spot in Teordale. Torkel has written music about it for me, called *The Voice of the Tarn*. It is the wildest music in the world and the sweetest—in B flat minor, my favorite key!

The theme steals in like a ghost wandering lost and lonely by the tarn. The four winds carry its lament until it swells to longing and despair, in great, crashing chords that make me tremble. The modulations are very abrupt—breathless swoops from one height to another—and it finishes with a wild burst of gayety in a major key, like mocking laughter high above the tarn.

The curious thing is that I can never recall a single phrase of the music unless I am on the Monk's Rock. The instant I set foot on the ascent from the valley I hear vague murmurs which get clearer as I climb up. Sometimes I am dizzy and bewildered by the rushing harmonies that greet me as the deep waters of the tarn come into sight. It is almost more than I can bear to hear. Once I must have fainted—for I discovered later the deep scratch on my arm of which I told you, and I can't remember doing it! It still won't heal up!

One of the guests at the Hydro is a Mr. Donald. He has traveled all over the world and we have long talks together. I was telling him about you just before I began this letter. He seemed to bring you much nearer to me.

That's why I can write and tell you how much I love you, Miles, in spite of my queerness—never believe that you are not the only one that really counts in the whole world to me!

Good-bye, Miles darling! The tarn would be mysteriously beautiful by moonlight—I must see it!

Your

CORAL.

[*Miles Warriner to Sir Donald Fremling.*]

27 Avon Sq., Liverpool,
Nov. 6.

I'M LIVING in a perfect hell of doubt and fear, Pater! Coral has just sent me a letter which brings her back to me, as she used to be before this infernal Yar! started in! But two things in it worry me horribly.

First—what is the matter with her arm?—why won't the scratch heal up? Is it blood-poisoning on top of all the rest?

And has she told you about wanting to see the Red Tarn at night? For heaven's sake don't let her do that! At night the shadows would make the path impossible—it's more or less dangerous even in the daylight. I am appalled at the idea!

It's slow torture—this waiting business. Why can't I come and do the devil out once and for all? I'd rather be hanged for it than let Coral go on like this from day to day.

MILES.

P. S. Don't curse me for worrying you! I know you can't do more! But this is plain unadulterated hell!

[*Telegram. Fremling to Warriner.*]

Teordale, Cumberland.

JUST sent latest report by express. It explains much. If you see Coral now you destroy her only chance. Wait.

[*Sir Donald Fremling to Miles Warriner.*]

Brackenfells,
Nov. 7.

MY DEAR BOY:—

You can not realize at a distance, in spite of my daily letters, how things are going; and I am afraid you find my methods slow and dangerous, when Yar! is using every hour! So am I, however . . . but Yar! must be allowed to show himself in his true colors before I can act.

The scratch on Coral's arm might be described in a rather dramatic way as a "devil mark." Yar! has evidently made an attempt to get her when she went to the Red Tarn on one of her solitary walks. He failed because his hour is not yet come. It will heal when Yar! ceases to exist, and not until then. It is not dangerous in itself—simply a brand!

If it were of any use to kill this man outright, I should not hesitate to do so; but if he were sent out of life now, he would return in another human form—and with added power and malevolence!

For your comfort I can tell you plainly that there is an hour, and a place, where I can come to grips with the devil that dwells in him; and for that hour I am waiting!

Now read the enclosed account of the early history of Cumberland and you will understand whence Torkel Yar! derives his power.

I must go back to the year 936 A. D. when Hywel Dda, a prince of South Wales, made a law for the protection of cats; with the result that the *chazza* (the old High German name for cat) was brought over in increasing quantities from the Baltic shores, and became domesticated in our island. New and terrible superstitions sprang up—the old Egyptian worship of cats was revived in crude revolting forms by our barbaric ancestors; and the *chazza* was the center and excuse for a thousand nameless obscenities.

This cat worship lingered in remote parts of the country—and as late as the Twelfth Century there are traces of it in a few of the so-called religious houses of those days.

One such abbey, given over to Satanism and every evil practise, was built here in Teordale by the Red Tarn, which served as a fish-pond for the monks—and was known as the Tarn of Chazz (or Chazza).

This abbey was built by a Danish

Earl of Cumberland, the Lord of Chazz, who was immensely wealthy and powerful, and dominated the place to such an extent that its real spiritual head, Father David, was sacrificed at one of the abominable orgies for which the abbey was renowned.

This roused the countryside, and an organized attack was made under Father Ambrosius (the chronicler of the event) which surprized the monks in the very act of their demon worship.

Father Ambrosius leaves much unsaid, and refers briefly and with pious horror to monstrous cats speaking with the voices of men and women, blasphemous prayers to Lucifer, wild hell-games played round the stately cloisters, shameful litanies recited in the abbey chapel, and the celebration of the Black Mass at the high altar—once dedicated to the Glory of God!

Father Ambrosius and his devoted band of followers burnt the abbey to the ground; and the smoke and flame of it lit the whole of Cumberland, according to the chronicler. The cats or monks or both, they slew by the sword—for against their blades, dipped in holy water, the power of Satan was useless. They flung the bodies into the Tarn of Chazz, until the black pond was red with blood, and it has been known as the Red Tarn ever since.

But the fiercest and most devilish of all that monstrous crew escaped! He fled spitting and snarling before the good father's sword—and, leaping off the face of Monk's Rock, vanished into the darkness of the night!

My belief is that this was the ruler of that infamous abbey—the Lord of Chazz—and that he lives still—in the person of Torkel Yarl! He is sustained by the power of those he serves, and in return for their protection, he sacrifices a victim at certain intervals!

The last Friday of this month is the Night of Sacrifice—and I need hardly add that Coral is the destined victim!

Do not be led by blind love—or fear—into coming to interfere with my plans. It would be entirely fatal to Coral.

Your affectionate godfather,
DONALD FREMLING.

[Coral Deane to Miles Warriner.]
Brackenfells,
Nov. 21.

DEAR MILES:—
Your last letter was a rather queer one, I thought. And you hardly mentioned all the new music I am studying—aren't you interested?

Torkel has promised to give me the Ms. of *The Voice of the Tarn* on condition that I take him up to see the Red Tarn itself. We are going on Friday and I can think of nothing else! Torkel wants to see it by moonlight—and as the moon is full tomorrow night, it ought to be a marvelous sight.

Think of it, Miles! . . . that strange, shadowy tarn with its fringe of reeds all silvered in the moonlight and the water glëaming white and silent! I can hardly breathe as the thought of it burns in my mind!

What did you mean about my promise to marry you at Xmas? I have never mentioned it to you that I remember!
CORAL.

[Miles Warriner to Coral Deane.]
27 Avon Sq., Liverpool,
Nov. 23.

MY DEAR!
How stupid of me not to have said how deeply interested in your new musical efforts I am. I never could write a decent letter—so I am not surprized at your reproaches.

However, you'll have to use your imagination to fill up the blanks, and remember that I'm working hard in a cold, uninteresting, dirty city, and missing you every hour of the day! The heat of the theater makes me more dull-witted than usual, too. But don't think that I am ever indifferent to anything that interests you.

I'm glad you've made friends with Mr. Donald—your walks and talks with him ought to be a soothing contrast with the excitement of all your musical studies.

The theater music here is deadly stuff! Jazz, punctuated by Rachmaninoff's C Sharp Minor Prelude when the hero fights a duel, or crosses the rapids, or crawls from a blazing house with the heroine in his arms!

My violin sings very low now. You spoilt me entirely for an ordinary pianist, my bad little Coral! I was down for a solo last night—and upon my word that accompanist was as near sudden death as she will ever be!

Think of me sometimes, my little girl. It's pretty lonely here. Good-night, my Elfin Queen! Don't go off with the moon fairies if you meet them on the crags. I want you whenever you are ready to come to me! I hope that will be soon.

Your friend and lover,
MILES.

[Miles Warriner to Sir Donald Fremling.]

Liverpool,
Nov. 23.

I'M A fool . . . forgive me, Pater! Coral's last letter proved how right you are. I took three hours to answer it! It's awful to think of the risk you are taking for us—I am horribly anxious!

You'll know all about Coral and Yarl going to the tarn on Friday

night—she is almost delirious about it!

Your repentant and devoted
MILES.

[Coral Deane to Miles Warriner.]
Brackenfells,
Nov. 27.

MILES! . . . It's come at last . . . the lovely silver night! I wanted to write to say good-bye to you—I don't feel as if I should see you again.

I sit in my bedroom writing this, waiting until the full moon rises over the top of Monk's Rock. The great crag stands out, black and splendid against the sky, and lights flicker to and fro across it!

I can hear the music of the Red Tarn floating down to me from that distant height. That magic music! It is calling to me . . . and I must follow . . . follow!

The moon is up—I see the golden rim above the dark ridge at last . . . the music calls more clearly now!

Good-bye, Miles! I am divinely happy!
CORAL.

[The Vicar of Teordale to the Bishop of Carlisle (extract)]

The Vicarage,
Nov. 30.

. . . Sir Donald Fremling and I reached the summit of Monk's Rock early in the evening. As the moon rose and the shadows deepened, the wide moorland grew more and more sinister.

It was a terrible vigil! I saw the reeds bend under the foot of some half-visible passer-by, and heard the whispering voice of evil at my elbow and echoes of high squealing laughter. And from the ghyll close by, the biting wind shrieked and tore its way—adding its fury to the terror of the night.

“The Hour and the Power,”

quoted Fremling in my ears, as he pointed across the waving grasses. I gasped as the fresh horror dawned slowly before us.

There, only a few hundred yards or so away, a huge bulk began to blot out the sky and stars. Walls rose and were roofed over. Courtyards and cobbled garths covered the windy heath. Gable and turret, tower and cloister all built themselves before our very eyes—until at last a stately abbey stood complete in every detail—its weather-vane gleaming in the moonlight, and every window brilliant with the lights within.

“The stage is set,” replied Sir Donald, in answer to the clutch of my fingers on his arm. “It remains now for the Lord of Chazz to arrive and summon his guests to the revelries.”

I must confess, my lord, that my faith burnt very dim in that hour of waiting. Had it not been for the unshaken courage of my companion, I should have fled from the unhallowed place and left my small part in the drama unplayed.

Suddenly I heard a laugh—a happy little sound which made the obscene mirth, echoing about me on the wind, more terrible by its contrast. I knew it was the girl Coral Deane, and Torkel Yarl, approaching the tarn at last.

In a few minutes they neared the tarn and stood in the strong moonlight, not far from the hollow where we lay hidden.

The girl stood silent and enchanted—her delicate lovely face lit with a white fire of ecstasy—her hair streamed back in the wind like a halo of light—and her clear eyes were those of one who watches the gates of heaven opening to let her in!

I was ashamed of my own fears as I saw her there, so unaware and innocent, and on the brink of such

nameless horror; and I longed to dash that grinning devil by her side into the dark bubbling water of the tarn.

Suddenly Yarl stepped forward and gave a great ringing cry, which echoed and re-echoed, until I thought every hill in Cumberland had caught and thrown back that infernal summons.

As it died, the tarn rose in leaping waves, flecking the reeds which fringed it with blood-red foam.

The girl's face lost its rapt dreaming look and she stared in horror at the tarn—for from its depths emerged an evil face and head, followed by the body of a man in a brown habit girdled with rope. He scrambled out of the water and up the bank—and at his heels followed a long procession, every one of which was more brutish and ugly than his fellow.

They were the monks of Monk's Rock come to make merry in their old haunt once more!

Yarl waved them on toward the abbey—and at his gesture the girl turned her stricken face and appeared to see for the first time the great illuminated building towering against the sky. She gave a long, incredulous look and turned to Yarl with a little cry. Then as she saw him truly at last . . . a devil—mocking, lustful, and triumphant, she covered her face and sank to the ground.

He laughed loudly at her terror, and picking her up in his great arms, strode on toward the abbey—the mad, shouting crew of monks at his heels.

When the last capering figure had disappeared under the arch of the central door, Fremling and I followed and gained the abbey by a small door at the east end. We crept into the chapel and stood behind the high altar, hidden by a massive screen.

The reek of incense filled the place, and the flare of torches lit monstrous presentments of heathen gods and devils, on walls and pillars.

Abruptly the main door was flung open—and to a burst of wild music, the monks came trooping in. Behind them followed Yarl—leading the girl with mock courtesy by the hand. She looked like a white flower in this fiend's abode; and swayed, half blind with terror.

Yarl led her to a great throne at the foot of the altar steps. The poor child sat, her hands clutching the skulls which formed the arms of her black throne, and her wide blank gaze followed each monk in turn, as he knelt at her feet, and with horrid jest and leer made homage to her.

Then they filled priceless jeweled goblets with foaming liquor, and crowded about Yarl and Coral as she shrank back in her place. Lifting their goblets high they shouted:—"Hail! Hail, Chazza, Eorl of Cumberland! Lord of Life and Death! We drink to your Queen and our Feast tonight! Hail, Lord of Chazz! Hail!"

They drank deep—and as that magic draft worked in his veins, every monk changed his human form, until at last no trace of man or monk was left—and only monstrous snarling cats leapt and circled about Yarl and the girl.

Then I heard Yarl laugh, and saw him touch the girl on the arm—and a long scratch on it began to bleed.

Yarl laughed again and all the beasts with him.

Instantly Fremling withdrew by the door we had entered—and I came out of my hiding-place and stood at the high altar, and lifted the sacred host above my head. A great silence fell—the squalling brutes were dumb—and I called loudly to Coral to come to me . . .

I called her in the name of God and that holy thing I held!

She stood up swaying, and looked from Yarl to me—and back again. Yarl tried to hold her, but his power failed, and his arm dropped to his side.

Again I called—and then, with a child's cry of terror and appeal, she stumbled down the steps of that hateful throne and fell at my feet. I stooped and held her, while Yarl stood speechless, glaring at me, and his devils crouched as if turned to stone!

Then, warned by some sound, Yarl turned to see Sir Donald Fremling standing behind him—a short dagger in his hand.

In a flash Yarl stooped and lifted a flagon to his lips; and in a moment crouched transformed and beastlike before his enemy.

Then the lights of the abbey chapel faded—the walls melted into thin air—and I found myself standing with Coral on the bleak moorland by the tarn, whose deep waters foamed blood-red over the bodies of monks as they sank beneath its waves.

I caught a glimpse again of Fremling struggling on the ground with his loathsome antagonist—and the spitting, hissing sound of the fight rose above the wind's shrill cry. Then I saw man and beast roll off the edge of the Ridge of Monk's Rock, and disappear into the depths below! . . .

[*Extract from the Cumberland Comet newspaper.*]

MONK'S ROCK in Teordale, Cumberland, has been the stage for as strange an incident as has occurred in recent times. The Vicar of Teordale made the ascent to the Red Tarn last Friday evening, together with two members of the Brackenfells

Hydro orchestra—Miss Coral Deane and Mr. Torkel Yarl; and lastly, Sir Donald Fremling, the world-renowned mystic and savant.

The latter appears to have had a fight of unprecedented horror with a wild cat, which met the party on the summit of the rock.

Sir Donald Fremling was carrying a dagger (a remarkable occurrence in itself). He killed the beast, but in the death struggle they both rolled off the fell-side, and were discovered next morning by search-parties, far down the screes in a tangle of bushes. The monster cat was cold and stiff, but horribly menacing even in death. The handle of the dagger protruded from its body and has been left there at Sir Donald's express wish. The latter seemed

peculiarly interested in the fact that a joint and claw of the creature's left foreleg were missing.

Sir Donald Fremling's leg was broken and he was badly mauled but is recovering rapidly.

The vicar hailed the search party from the summit of the Monk's Rock, where he had for hours vainly tried to restore Miss Deane to consciousness. She was carried home and appears to be making some progress toward recovery.

No trace has been discovered of the fourth member of the party—Torkel Yarl the cellist. It is feared that in searching for Sir Donald Fremling after his fall from the rock, Yarl himself lost his footing and fell to the unplumbed depths of the gully between Monk's Rock and Greenfell.