

# WEIRD TALES *The Unique Magazine*

EDWIN BAIRD, *Editor*

Published monthly by THE RURAL PUBLISHING CORPORATION, 325 North Capitol Avenue, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$3 a year in the United States; \$3.50 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in our possession. All manuscripts and other editorial matters should be directed to WEIRD TALES, 854 North Clark Street, Chicago, Ill. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright, and publishers are cautioned against using the same, either wholly or in part. Copyright, 1923, by the Rural Publishing Corporation.

VOLUME II

25 Cents

NUMBER 1

## Contents for July-August, 1923

*Thirteen Thrilling Short Stories*      *Two Complete Novelettes*  
*Two Two-Part Stories*      *Interesting, Odd and Weird Happenings*

SUNFIRE	-----	FRANCIS STEVENS	2
	<i>Harrowing Events Which Startle Five Adventurers Who Land Upon a Faroff Island</i>		
THE OUTCASTS	-----	GEORGE WARBURTON LEWIS	14
	<i>A Story of Stark Adventure With an Uncanny Climate</i>		
THE ROOM OF THE BLACK VELVET DRAPES	-----	B. W. SLINEY	18
DOCTOR X	-----	CULPEPER CHUNN	21
	<i>A Good Short Story</i>		
THE TWO MEN WHO MURDERED EACH OTHER	-----	VALMA CLARK	23
	<i>A Remarkable Novelette</i>		
THE STRANGE CASE OF JACOB ARUM	-----	JOHN HARRIS BURLAND	33
	<i>A Sardonic Novel of Witchcraft</i>		
BLACK CUNJER	-----	ISABEL WALKER	46
	<i>A Short Tale of Black Superstition</i>		
SHADES	-----	BRYAN IRVINE	49
	<i>A Realistic Ghost Story</i>		
VOODOOISM	-----	WILL W. NELSON	55
	<i>A Special Article About a Weird Oult</i>		
SEÑORITA SERPENTE	-----	EARL WAYLAND BOWMAN	57
	<i>A Strange Tale of the Mayan Snake Worshipers</i>		
THE ROOM IN THE TOWER	-----	D. L. RADWAY	61
	<i>A Terrifying Ghost Story</i>		
RIDERS IN THE DARK	-----	VINCENT STARRETT	63
	<i>A Grim Tale of Self Sacrifice</i>		
MANDRAKE	-----	ADAM HULL SHIRK	66
	<i>An Uncanny Tale of a Flesh Colored Plant</i>		
PEOPLE VS. BLAND	-----	THEODORE SNOW WOOD	69
	<i>The Mysterious Midnight Visitor Played an Important Part in this Murder Trial</i>		
THE EVENING WOLVES	-----	PAUL ELLSWORTH TRIEM	73
	<i>Final Installment of this Exciting Tale of Chinatown</i>		
THE CORPSE ON THE THIRD SLAB	-----	OTIS ADELBERT KLINE	76
	<i>Weird Tale of Happenings in a Morgue</i>		
THE GUARD OF HONOR	-----	PAUL SUTER	79
	<i>The Author of "Beyond the Door" Spins Another Eerie Tale in His Masterful Style</i>		
THE CAULDRON	-----	PRESTON LANGLEY HICKEY	85
	<i>True Adventures of Terror</i>		
THE EYRIE	-----	THE EDITOR	87

# THE STRANGE CASE OF JACOB ARUM

By JOHN HARRIS BURLAND

**I**T WAS SAID—openly enough—in the village that there was something wrong about Jacob Arum; but I always put that down to the natural impulse of simple country folk to regard any eccentric person with suspicion. I should be sorry to tell you all the crimes that were from time to time

laid to the account of this man who had, for no apparent reason whatever, come to live among us.

Some said that he was wanted by the police for fraud or burglary or even murder. There were others—and those a little out of date—who averred that he had been a pirate, and that the gold and jewels he had taken from dead men on the high seas were kept in great iron-bound boxes in his cellar.

Then there was one old woman who was certain that he had made a compact with the devil, that he would never die, and that he would live on in agony until the end of the world.

“And mebbe,” she said, “that little ugly black fellow be the devil himself.”

The “little ugly black fellow” was Jacob Arum’s only servant. His name was Brike, and when he went into the village to purchase anything for his



master, the boys hid themselves behind walls and hooted at him.

“You be the devil!” they would shriek. “Take care as the parson don’t see you.”

But Brike, a hump-backed, limping little man, with long, powerful arms and

thick legs, took no notice of them whatever. He was not black but a grayish yellow—a half-breed of the negroid type. And he spoke English perfectly.

Well, that will give you some idea of how Jacob Arum stood in the estimation of the ignorant and uneducated portion of Harthaven's five hundred inhabitants. The rector, of course, looked at Jacob Arum from an entirely different point of view. He had never been admitted into the house, and Arum, by repute a wealthy man, had not only never entered the church, but had definitely refused to subscribe sixpence to any parochial fund.

"The man is a heathen," the rector said to me, "and that's all I care about. It is very sad."

The doctor, a rather cynical young fellow, was inclined to regard Arum as a joke.

"He'll never send for a clergyman," he once said, when we were discussing Arum; "but one of these days he'll have to send for me."

Then there was an old professor who was writing a gigantic work—at least, one presumed it was gigantic, because it was known that he had already spent twenty years of his life over it—on the witchcraft of all countries and ages. He was a funny little old fellow, quite bald, and with a set of false teeth that reminded one of the chorus girls in dentifrice advertisements.

"My dear boy," he said to me in his squeaky voice, "Arum's under a spell, and that black servant has some hand in it."

I can pass over the opinion of three maiden ladies who lived at Laburnum Villa, and "never, never passed by the gates of that awful house," lest they should see something that ought not to be seen. They looked upon Jacob Arum as "improper," and they "feared the worst." There was much shaking of gray heads, and murmuring of half-finished sentences, but nothing definite.

"He's spoilt the village," Miss Mary said. "We were so happy before he came, like a little colony of friends."

To tell you the honest truth, I rather envied Jacob Arum his notoriety. I had lived in the village most of my life, and my forefathers had lived there for three hundred years. A good deal of the land, and most of the cottages belonged to me. I had fought in the war, and had been wounded. My life had merely been that of any simple country gentleman. But I am sure I had never caused any excitement in Harthaven. No one talked about me. I was just taken as a matter of course. There had been a Hart of Harthaven for so many years, that I

was of no more interest than the house in which I lived, of the creek that ran through the level marshland to the sea.

I had not even the satisfaction of being Arum's landlord. He had bought the house and the three acres of ground that surrounded it from the executors of an old woman who had died after being seventy-five years in the village.

I knew the house well enough, for the old woman had been a friend of my grandmother's. I had even bid for it at the auction, but, unwilling to give a fancy price, I had allowed it to be knocked down to the queer, hump-backed little fellow who had given his name as Brike. Even at that early stage in the proceedings, Jacob Arum had kept himself in the background. And the auctioneer afterward told me that the whole of the purchase money had been paid in gold and silver.

No one ever saw Arum move into his house. Brike arranged everything, and we saw a good deal of Brike while the place was being decorated; and, later on, when van-loads of valuable furniture stood outside the newly-painted gate in the old brick wall. But no one in the village could name the day, much less the hour, of Jacob Arum's arrival.

And, once inside the house, he never left it. Brike explained that his master was an invalid, but Brike was not inclined to be talkative, and answered very few of the questions that were put to him.

For my part, I pictured Arum as a man who wished to be talked about and regarded as a man of mystery. No one had even seen him, and everything that he purchased was paid for in cash. We had not even set eyes on his signature.

Well, Jacob Arum purchased the property in January, 1919, and it was not until the October of that year that I met the man for the first time.

I well remember that night. For three weeks the weather had been very wet and windy, and then there was a sharp frost, and the wind dropped, and the marshland was hidden in a white mist that crept in upon us from the sea.

Professor Turton and young Saltby were dining with me, and we were discussing Jacob Arum over our glasses of port, when my footman entered the room, and said that "Mr. Brike" wished to see me.

"Hallo!" said Saltby. "What about that for telepathy?" And the professor laughed so heartily that he nearly choked himself with a small piece of walnut.

"Where is the fellow?" I asked the servant, when we had restored the professor to normal state.

"He's round at the back, sir," the man replied. "Where would you like to see him?"

"In the library," I replied; and then, turning to the others, I asked them to excuse me, and left the room.

The library was a long, narrow room at the back of the house. The walls were covered with books, rarely touched except by the servant whose duty it was to dust them; for I am no greater reader, such as my father was.

There was a big fire of logs burning in the open grate, but the heat of it was not sufficient to dispel the fog that had crept in through the shuttered windows. I took up my position with my back to the fire and waited for my strange visitor. I could not imagine any reason that could possibly account for this unexpected visit.

I had often seen Brike in the village, but I must confess that when he was shown into the library, and the door closed behind him, and he stood there with his hat in his hand and a thick black overcoat that almost touched the ground, I received a new impression of the man. That end of the room was badly lighted, and the atmosphere was far from clear; so, of course, a good deal of Brike's appearance was left to the imagination.

Still, I fancy that that could hardly account for the fact that he seemed to me to be someone of much greater importance than the hunchbacked servant of a rather eccentric master. His dark face and body blended with the shadows, and the way in which he stood there, without speaking or coming forward directly the door had closed behind him, may have contributed to my impression of a very strong and distinctive personality. It was almost as though he had expected me to cross the room to greet him.

Of course, as you may well imagine, I did not move an inch; and, after a few minutes of silence, I said sharply:

"Well, what is it? What do you want?"

He came forward, then, into the light, and he was no more than the quiet and deferential servant, bearing some message from his master. His face was ugly and deeply lined.

"Mr. Arum—sir," he said, in a rather soft, pleasant voice, "he asked me to come and see you. Mr. Arum would be honored and obliged if you could spare him a few minutes."

"Where is he? Not outside, surely?"

"No, sir; he is at home and not very well. I think he wants to talk to you on some matters of importance."

I did not want to go, and I fell back on the true British line of defense:

"I do not know Mr. Arum," I said stiffly. "I called on him, and he has never returned my call. I am sorry he is ill, but his private affairs do not concern me."

The man looked at me as though I were some curious specimen of humanity, and so, doubtless, I should have seemed to the simple mind of a savage.

"He is in trouble, sir," Brike continued, "and there is no one in this place that he would care to speak to about it except you, sir."

"I am honored," I said coldly, but I felt that I was making a ridiculous ass of myself. "I have two friends to dinner. One of them is Dr. Saltby. If Mr. Arum is ill, perhaps Dr. Saltby—"

"It is *you*, sir, that my master wants," he interrupted. "Of all those who live in this village, you are the only one he feels that he can trust."

Flattery of this sort did not appeal to me. I had a natural curiosity to see this mysterious Mr. Arum, but I could not forget the intolerable rudeness of the fellow, and most certainly I did not like the look of his servant. Even as Brike stood there before me, pleading quietly and respectfully, it seemed to me that he was only wearing a mask of humility, and that all the time he was regarding me rather as an enemy than a friend.

"You cannot tell me the nature of your master's business?" I queried, after a pause.

"No, sir; I am only his servant."

There was something so Oriental about this reply that I almost expected to see the man bow low with outstretched arms. But he stood there as stolidly as any Englishman.

"And, I suppose," I continued, "you cannot tell me why your master has chosen me for his confidence?"

"He had heard well of you, sir."

"From you, eh?" I laughed.

"I only repeat what I hear from others, sir."

"That I am a simple-minded fellow," I said to myself; and I began to understand why Jacob Arum had sent for me.

Either of my two guests would have been a bit too sharp for him. The young doctor was a remarkably clever fellow, and the professor had a world-wide reputation. They were both intellectual men. I was merely a "turnip," to use a word commonly employed in reference to country gentlemen. This idea put me on my mettle. It did not occur to me that I might be entirely mistaken. I had got the idea into my head, and it stayed there.

"I will come with you," I said. "I am a justice of the peace, and I suppose that is really why Mr. Arum wants to see me. If you will wait in here for a few minutes, I will take you back in the car."

The man bowed, but seemed in no way surprised that I should have asked a servant to wait in my library, instead of sending him back to the servants' quarters. I returned to the dining-room and told my guests that I was going round to see Jacob Arum.

"Well, that's a bit of luck for you," said Saltby. "Can't I come?"

"I'm afraid not," I replied. "I don't know what the fellow wants; it's all very mysterious. Anyhow, you'd better stay here. I'll be back in less than an hour. Make yourselves at home; perhaps I'll have a story to tell you when I return."

Saltby laughed, but Turton followed me out of the room into the hall.

"Keep your eyes open," he whispered, in that thin, high-pitched voice of his. "Something queer about that fellow, Brike. Very interesting to me; wish I could come with you. Keep your eyes open. Crusty old man, Arum will seem to you, but look for something else under the surface. The devil is about, even in these days!"

"All right, old chap!" I laughed. "I'll find him for you if he's in that house!"

## CHAPTER TWO

MY HOUSE, Harthaven Hall, is about half a mile from the village—that being the exact distance between my front door and the inner entrance to the park.

Though the fog was very thick, Walters, my chauffeur, drove us along at a rattling pace. Naturally enough, he knew every inch of the road, and even if the wheels ran off it, there was only level grass on either side. The moon showed like a white globe of frosted glass, in which the lamp burned dimly. Our powerful headlights made a confusing glow of vapor ahead, and were worse than useless; but we reached the lodge gates in one minute, and two minutes later we drew up outside the small door in the high red brick wall of Brent Lodge. Brike alighted, and opened the door with a key. Then he stood to one side so that I could pass him. I leant over the seat and told Walter to wait for me.

"But don't wait too long," I added. "If I'm not back here in an hour, get over that wall and ring the front door bell; and if no one answers the bell, come and look for me. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," he replied, for all the world as though such instructions were a commonplace order.

I passed through the door, and it closed behind me. Brike took an electric torch from his pocket, and showed me the path. It was paved, and on the other side of it the grass was thick and tall. I caught an occasional glimpse of neglected flower beds, and bushes that sadly needed pruning. Certainly Jacob Arum took no pride in his garden.

As I have told you, I knew the house well enough in the days when old Miss Unwin lived in it. It had been built in the reign of George the Third, and though it was only of moderate size, it had the tall windows and lofty rooms of that period.

The old lady's furniture—heavy, ugly stuff made about the time of the Great Exhibition—had been sadly out of keeping with the fine proportion of the walls and the ceilings, decorated, so it was said, by the great Robert Adam himself.

But now, when Brike had unlocked the front door and I had entered the hall, I saw that everything had most wonderfully changed. There was a Persian carpet on the floor, and rare Chippendale chairs against the walls, and one of the most beautiful Sheraton tables I have ever seen.

He showed me into the drawing-room, and left me there while he went upstairs to tell Mr. Arum of my arrival. The room was sparsely and severely furnished, but every piece of furniture in it was a treasure. Mr. Arum was evidently a man of taste. But it was equally clear that his room was hardly ever used. There was no fire in the grate, and not even the materials for a fire. There was not a paper or book, or any sign of recent occupation. And the dust lay thick over everything.

I remembered what it had been like in the old days—the woolly mats and the waxen flowers on the big hideous center table with its one great leg; the vast sofas and chairs, the appalling pictures! But, for all that, it had been homelike, and a fire had roared there at all hours of the day, and old Miss Unwin had played patience on an ugly little table, or had executed monstrosities in Berlin wool upon a piece of framed canvas.

In those days there had been the cheerful glow of several very inartistic oil lamps. Now there was a splendid eighteenth century crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and two wax candles burnt mournfully in it like candles in the room of the dead.

"It's jolly cold," I said to myself, and then I heard a woman's voice in the hall

outside. It was raised in anger, but I could not distinguish the words.

The next moment the door burst open, and a girl closed it behind her and locked it. For a moment she stood there, breathing hard. Then she came forward and said:

"You must think we're all mad in this house."

"Oh, no," I laughed—"not *all* of you."

She was evidently frightened or angry, but she was the sort of girl that made a man feel pleased with himself. She was very young and slim, and beautiful, with her golden brown hair and gray eyes and perfectly poised head. It would have been a pleasure to protect her from anyone who had frightened her, to save her from any danger, to make her smiling and happy. And it would have been equally pleasant to have just sat and looked at her, laughing, as I was sure she generally laughed, and glad to be alive.

"One does not usually enter a room in this way," she explained, "but I wanted to talk to you, and Brike—well, Brike wanted to take you away upstairs at once. He's outside—now—listening. You are Mr. Hart, aren't you?"

"Yes—and you?"

She came forward; and she did not speak until she was close to me.

"I only came here this afternoon," she said, "and my arrival was in keeping with everything else in this queer house. I left the train at the junction, and Brike rowed me down the creek with my little box. And I landed at the bottom of the garden. I don't think anyone in the village knows I'm here."

"I did not," I replied. "And you are—"

"Audrey Pinson; I'm Mr. Arum's niece, his only relative. My mother was his sister. She died twenty years ago—well, it doesn't matter about all that, Mr. Hart. It's that horrible man—"

"You mean Brike?" I queried.

"Yes. He didn't want me to come in here just now. But I heard the car stop outside the garden door, and I saw you both come up the path. And I made up my mind that I *would* see you."

"Splendid idea of yours," I said with a smile.

She flushed and an angry sparkle came into her eyes. One could just see it by the light of the two candles.

"Oh, if you're going to treat me as a silly child," she said; and then, after a pause, she added, "I'm sorry. I have no right to talk to you like that. But I don't think you understand how serious it all is. My uncle is very ill, and he will not see a doctor. I don't know why he sent for you, but I implore you to use

your influence with him, and get him to have a doctor. I believe that horrible man Brike is keeping everyone away from him."

I interrupted her to point out that if Brike had wished to do that, Brike need not have fetched me.

"And remember," I continued, "that most likely Brike sent the telegram or posted the letter that brought you here."

"Well, in any case," she continued, "Brike did not wish me to talk to you. I have seen my uncle for a few minutes, and it seemed to me that he thinks all the world of Brike. And there is something wrong. I'm sure of that."

I asked her why she imagined anything of the sort, and she merely answered:

"The man isn't a servant at all. He's the master."

There was a gentle knock upon the door.

"He is going to take you upstairs," she whispered, "but when you are in the room, you must get rid of him. I want you to talk to my uncle *alone*. You can open the door."

I crossed the long, dimly-lighted room, and, turning the key in the lock, swung back the door.

"I beg your pardon, sir," Brike said humbly, "but my master particularly wants to see you at once. I have been upstairs with him, and you must please to come and see him at once."

He held a lighted candle in his hand. He had changed his heavy boots for a pair of felt slippers. He had removed his overcoat, and his crinkled black hair was neatly oiled and brushed. In spite of his coloring and deformity, he seemed to be a very superior servant. And he could not have been outside the door all the time.

"I hope I have not offended Miss Pinson, sir," he said, when he had closed the door. "The fact is, sir, that the master did not wish her to see you or know anything about your visit. Sometimes he gets queer ideas like that into his head."

I made no reply; I followed the man up the broad shallow stairs, and when he paused on the spacious landing, I walked past him and examined a very beautiful picture, which was hanging on the white paneled walls. It was the portrait of a young and handsome woman in the costume of the eighteenth century, and looked to me very like a Romney. I was not really very interested in the picture just then, but I thought it as well to show Brike that my thoughts were not entirely occupied with his affairs.

"The master's great-grandmother, sir," he said, coming to my side, and he

held up the candle so that I could get a better view of the portrait.

And then, after a pause: "Will you please step this way, sir."

### CHAPTER THREE

I FOLLOWED Brike to the other side of the landing, and he knocked on a door. I heard a voice call out:

"Come in—come in."

Brike entered the room, turned and beckoned to me. I followed and found myself, not in a bedroom, as I had expected, but in a very comfortably furnished sitting-room.

The cold severity of the eighteenth century had been subordinated to more modern ideas of comfort. There were fine pictures on the walls, two magnificent pieces of lacquer—one a chest and the other a cabinet, a Heppelwhite bookcase, several exquisite Chippendale chairs. But there were also big Chesterfields and armchairs, and novels littered about on little tables, and pipes and tobacco jars, and all the little odds and ends that a man likes to gather round him in his "den."

Of course, I did not take everything in at a glance, and I am recounting what I saw during my interview. Indeed, directly I entered the room, I saw only Mr. Arum sitting by the fire, with a rug drawn up over his knees. He was a good-looking man of about sixty with a pale clean-shaven face, and restless gray eyes. There was not much light in the room, and it was all behind him, where six candles burnt in six silver candlesticks. Yet I could see his face clearly enough in the firelight.

"Thank you so much for coming," he said in a slow, quiet voice, "I was rather afraid you would not come. You can go, Brike. I'll ring when I want you."

Brike left the room without a word, and I smiled as I thought of what the girl had said to me. There was nothing mysterious about this part of the business, at any rate. I had expected a certain unwillingness on the part of Brike to leave his master alone with me. I had even invented a plan whereby I could get rid of Brike. But here was Brike perfectly willing to go, and Jacob Arum just an ordinary gentleman, ill, no doubt, or he would not have kept that rug over his knees, but receiving me courteously, and behaving just as any other man would have behaved under the circumstances.

"If I can be of any service to you," I said, "I shall be glad."

Arum laughed.

"Take a cigar," he said, "and you will find whisky and soda on that table behind me. You will excuse me sitting

here like a log, but I'm ill—yes, I'm very ill, Mr. Hart. Well, that doesn't matter. Help yourself to a cigar and something to drink."

I did as he wished, and when I had seated myself in the chair on the other side of the fireplace, I said:

"I'm afraid I can't stop very long. Two fellows are dining with me. They are waiting for me to return."

"That makes it all the more kind of you to come," said Arum. "Well, I shan't keep you long."

He thrust his left hand into one of the inner pockets of his coat, drew out a folded document and handed it to me.

"That is my will," he said, "and I want you to keep it for me. I have never cared for banks or lawyers, and I dare say people have told you that I never write a check."

"You surely don't keep all your money in your house," I exclaimed.

It was an unpardonable remark, but I could not help making it.

"I beg your pardon," I continued, "I had no right to say anything of the sort. It is no business of mine."

"Yes, it is your business, Mr. Hart. I have appointed you the sole executor of my will, and have left you five hundred pounds for your trouble."

This was an astonishing piece of information.

"Oh, really, Mr. Arum!" I said.

"If you can't accept the job," Arum continued, "I shall put my niece in your place. She inherits practically everything. But she is rather a silly child. I'd like to have a man's help in this matter."

I hesitated for a few moments and then I said:

"All right, Mr. Arum. It's really uncommonly good of you."

"Well, that's settled," he said cheerfully. "Now I want you to read the will."

I opened out the thick sheet of paper, and began to read the contents. There was a legacy of a thousand pounds to "my old and faithful servant, William Brike," and there was a further legacy to "John Hart of Harthaven Hall" in consideration of his undertaking the duties of executor. Everything else was left to Audrey Pinson.

And then I came to the signature, and it was that which startled me. It was hardly legible—an untidy scrawl that would have disgraced a child of ten. I looked up at Jacob Arum, and he laughed.

"Not much of a fist, eh?" he said. "I never could learn to write with my left hand." Then he moved his right arm, covered halfway to the elbow with the

rug, and showed me an iron hook—one of those old-fashioned things that I imagined had long ago been cast into the dustheap.

"That's one of my troubles," he said, "and the other is my heart."

"Bad accident," he said. "Years ago. One doesn't care to go about among people and have them ask whether one was wounded in France or Mesopotamia. Besides, I hate people. I like my own society—my books, my furniture, my pictures. All that will be sold when I die. That's all I've got except a little cash to go on with—last my time, I expect. The contents of this house are worth forty thousand pounds."

He leant his head back and closed his eyes, as though he had exhausted himself by so much talking.

"You'd better have a drink," I said. "Shall I mix one for you?"

"Thanks," he said faintly. "I believe it would brighten me up a bit."

I gave him a strong brandy-and-soda, and told him that he ought to see a doctor.

"I don't know if a doctor can do you any good, Mr. Arum," I said; "but if you have a bad heart you certainly ought to see one."

He shook his head.

"They're all rogues," he replied. "I don't believe in them at all. My faith in God won't let me believe in them. How can they interfere with God's will?"

I had heard this talk before, from the "Peculiar People" who lived in a village not more than ten miles from Harthaven.

"What about your hand?" I queried. "I suppose you ought really to have bled to death."

"Ah, then—I did not know the truth," he said simply. "I can see now that I was meant to die. Please don't argue with me. It is a matter of faith with me. But I am glad to be able to tell you what I believe. I don't want my faithful Briks to be blamed for my death."

I saw that there was nothing to be gained by argument. I suggested that he should give me an inventory of the things in the house.

"You see," I explained, "if the contents of this house represent your fortune, I think I ought to know just what there is in the place."

It seemed that I had only anticipated his own request. I followed his instructions and found a thick quarto volume, bound in green morocco, in one of the book-cases.

"That is a full catalogue," he said, "and there are photographs of the most valuable pieces. If you care for such

things, you will find it of considerable interest. Now, Mr. Hart, if there is anything you wish to ask me—well, there is no time like the present. We may not meet again."

"Oh, come, come," I said cheerfully. "You're not so bad as all that."

"I do not know when my time will come," he replied; "it may be soon or late. But in any case it is doubtful if I shall see you again."

I offered to call and look him up any time he chose to send for me, but he shook his head.

"That is most kind of you," he replied; "but habits of long standing are not easily broken. I am very grateful to you for having come to my assistance."

I opened out the will, which I still held in my hand, and looked at the names of the witnesses.

"Shall I have any difficulty in finding these people?" I asked.

He assured me that there would be no difficulty. They were both young people, and, so far as he knew, they were both alive.

I folded up the document and placed it in my pocket. Mr. Arum touched the button of a small electric bell. Then he held out his left hand to me.

"Again I thank you," he said gently.

"It is I who have to thank you," I answered with a smile, "for your very handsome legacy. I only hope that it will not come my way for many years."

"Ah, you will have to work for it, Mr. Hart. There is so much to be arranged. Good-night and good-by."

The door opened and Brike came softly into the room. He came to his master's side and said:

"Ah, you have been tiring yourself, sir. You ought not to have let this gentleman stay here for so long."

"We have said all we wished to say," Arum answered. "Please accompany Mr. Hart to the car."

I followed Brike out on to the landing and down the stairs. The door of the drawing-room was open, and I could see Audrey Pinson standing by a table with a letter in her hand. She was trying to read it by the feeble light of the candles in the chandelier, but, as I paused a moment gazing at her—admiring the exquisite picture of that slim figure against the background of an old mirror—she looked up at me.

"I have a word to say to Miss Pinson," I exclaimed abruptly. "Perhaps you will kindly go on and tell my chauffeur to start up the car. It takes some little warming on a cold night."

The fellow began to protest, but I cut him short with a curt, "Kindly mind

your own business," and he walked slowly to the hall door.

I waited until he had left the house, and then I entered the drawing-room.

"I've seen your uncle," I said, "and I don't think he's nearly so ill as he imagines. And Brike made no attempt to remain in the room. I think you're wrong about Brike. How long are you going to stay here?"

"I don't know," she replied. "As long as my uncle wishes, I suppose. I did not wish to come, but my aunt insisted. She is my father's sister, and I live with her. You see, we are very poor, and uncle said something about leaving me all his property."

"Yes, yes, but your aunt ought to have come with you. I've heard there are no women servants in the house—no servants at all but this fellow Brike. And he seems inclined to dislike you. Well, what I really wished to say, Miss Pinson, was that I am always at your service, if you want me. Anyone in the village will bring a message to me."

"It is very, very kind of you," she said, with a smile, "but I can look after myself. It's my uncle I'm worried about. You must send in a doctor."

"Your uncle won't see him. He's one of the 'Peculiar People'—a little sect that is pretty strong about here. It's a matter of religion with him. And I really don't think his life is in any danger. Good-night, Miss Pinson."

We shook hands, and then I said:

"Look here, I don't suppose you'll want my help, but that's no reason why we should not meet again? You'll find it very dull here, but you'll go for walks, I expect, and—and, well, I expect I shall meet you in the village somewhere. I am often about in the morning."

She smiled, and I was content to carry away the memory of that smile with me, without any further words. I left the house, and found Brike talking with the chauffeur. There had evidently been no attempt on his part to overhear our conversation.

During the short drive back to the house, I thought a good deal of Audrey Pinson and very little of Jacob Arum. And I felt that I had made rather an absurd exhibition of myself—that I must have appeared to her as rather a stammering, awkward fellow; and I had tried to make a kind of appointment with her.

But I consoled myself with the thought that it was my duty to see her again very soon, and find out just what was going on at Brent Lodge. In spite of all the evidence in Brike's favor, I mistrusted the man.

I FOUND the Professor and the young doctor playing billiards when I returned to the house, but they put their cues against the wall when I entered the room.

I told them of my "adventure"—that is Saltby's word, not mine—and answered such questions as they cared to ask me. Saltby seemed to be more interested in Audrey Pinson than anything else. He was indignant that any young girl should be forced to stay in a place like that in order to get money from a dying man.

"You may depend upon it," he said, "that her aunt is a pretty rotten sort of woman."

Turton, on the other hand, was very interested in Brike. He was even annoyed that I had not asked him into the library to have a talk with Brike.

"Of course, I have seen him in the village," he said, "but only twice. That's a very remarkable man, Hart, and perhaps a very dangerous man."

Neither of them seemed to take much interest in Jacob Arum, and I think they regarded him as a mere crank—a fellow soured by physical defects, and unwilling to get out of a groove of self-pity and melancholy.

"And, of course," said Saltby, "if he is one of the 'Peculiar People,' he'll just die without calling me in, and very likely Brike and the girl will be punished for his folly."

My guests did not leave me until nearly midnight. And I must confess that I was not sorry to be alone. I sat by the fire in the library—a fire that had sunk to a mere glow of red embers. My strange impression of William Brike as he had entered that room came back to me.

I wondered if there was anything in Turton's rather far-fetched idea that this misshapen fellow was not quite as other men—that he had powers not given to ordinary human beings.

Well, of course, Turton's head was full of that kind of thing. He had marked down the wife of an old man who worked on my estate, and had labeled her as a witch. And she had confessed to a mild kind of witchcraft—the making of love-potions.

But Brike was a very different proposition. If Brike had any superhuman powers, I felt sure that they would be employed solely in the working of evil.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

A WEEK passed before I met Audrey Pinson in the village, and she told me that she was glad we had met, and that if she hadn't just happened to come

across me, she had intended to come up to my house.

Her face was pale, and I could see that she was thoroughly upset.

"I have only seen my uncle once again," she said, "and then only for a few minutes. He was very strange in his manner. He—I don't think he's quite right in his head, Mr. Hart."

"He was all right when I saw him," I replied.

"Well, I am going home tomorrow," she said. "I can't stand the place any longer. My uncle has got it into his head that he is dying, but that God will not allow him to die. And that horrible Brike talks in the same fashion. Yesterday he made me pray with him—fall on my knees and pray that some miracle might be performed. I—I felt it was all so blasphemous. There are no miracles in these days, and if my uncle is really so ill he ought to have a doctor."

I suggested that perhaps Brike was going to pose as a worker of miracles, and was preparing the stage for an exhibition of his powers.

"I've known a charlatan of a doctor to do something of the same sort," I continued. "He told his patient that he had consumption, but that it might be possible to effect a cure. Well, of course, the wonderful cure was effected, because the patient never had anything the matter with him. Perhaps Brike is at some game like that."

Audrey Pinson laughed, and then her face grew very grave.

"Brike seems in earnest," she said. "I can only think that he is mad, and that my uncle is mad. Oh, there is Brike now!"

I looked down the long, wide street, which runs along the edge of the creek, and saw Arum's seryant with a big basket on his arm. And, at that same moment, Professor Turton came out of the cottage close by, and raised his hat.

"That's a very old friend of mine," I said to Miss Pinson. "We'll go and look him up. Then we shall escape from Brike."

And the professor, as though he had heard what I was saying, came quickly toward me. I introduced him to Miss Pinson, and he said:

"I believe it's going to rain hard in a minute. You'd better take shelter."

And when we were inside his cottage, he laughed.

"Shelter from the enemy, eh?" he chuckled.

Audrey Pinson frowned and glanced at me with reproach in her eyes, as though she fancied that I had been gossiping about her affairs.

"Professor Turton is an old friend of mine," I explained. "He may be able to help us—suggest some explanation. I wonder if you'd mind telling him what you have just told me?"

"One moment," said Turton. "Just think it over while I have a good look at our friend, Brike."

He left the room and trotted out of the house. Through the window I saw the two men meet a few yards to the left of the garden gate. They conversed for quite five minutes. Brike was evidently in a very humble mood, for he frequently touched his cap.

"I just told him that you were in here, Miss Pinson," said the professor, when he came hurrying in out of the rain, "in case he wanted to find you. A curious type, Miss Pinson. I should think he was more than half a negro; childishly superstitious—at least, he would seem so to you. Now, if you would just tell me—"

Audrey Pinson repeated her story, but apparently with some reluctance. The professor smiled and rubbed his hands together.

"That's the idea," he said. "He's going to perform a miracle—bring the dead to life."

"My dear Turton!" I exclaimed.

"I've paid special attention to that kind of thing," the professor said. "In fact, I have quite a lot of notes on the subject. But the evidence is not very reliable—all native evidence, mind you. What happens, or is supposed to happen, is this: A man dies and is brought to life again by the witch-doctor. Of course, if there is any truth in the evidence—and I really believe there is—the witch-doctor has some method of producing the appearance of death—of stopping the beating of the heart and the breathing—for quite a long while. Then he pronounces his incantations, and the dead man comes to life again."

I laughed and suggested that this semblance of death would hardly deceive an English doctor. It might be good enough for a pack of ignorant niggers, but with young Saltby, for instance—

"Still, Brike is going to have a try," said Turton.

"But, my dear Turton," I exclaimed, "whatever has put such a ridiculous idea into your head?"

"Because Brike asked me where he could find a black fowl, and a black bird is one of the articles required in this ceremony."

Audrey Pinson began to laugh—rather hysterically, so it seemed to me. I do not think she was scared at all by this talk about witchcraft and ju-ju, but she

was relieved to find that Brike was up to nothing worse.

I cut into her laughter with another question:

"Why," I asked Turton, "should Brike want to perform these ridiculous rites?"

The professor did not answer immediately, and I glanced at Audrey Pinson, as much as to say: "I've got him there."

But the professor was one of those men that are very difficult to drive into a corner.

"I should say," he replied, after a pause, "that Brike is not an impostor, like the witch-doctors. Brike firmly believes that he can bring the dead to life. He has seen this trick performed, and he does not know that it is merely a trick. He knows what has to be done—what he has possibly seen done on several occasions among his own people. He intends to wait until Mr. Arum is really dead, and then he hopes to bring him to life again."

"Would this be of any advantage to Brike?" I asked.

"Brike fancies that it would," Turton replied, "because Brike really believes that he can bring Arum back to life. Brike would naturally expect Arum's gratitude to take some concrete form—the gift of a large sum of money, or perhaps his master's entire fortune when Arum dies again."

I thought it better to say nothing of Arum's will. I could not betray the trust that had been placed in me, just to make a point in an idle argument.

"My dear Turton," I said, after a pause, "you forget that Arum refuses to let even a doctor save him from death. Is it likely that he would be pleased with this unholy interference with the course of Nature?"

"Perhaps that has not occurred to Brike."

"Oh, the man's not a fool!" I said sharply. "And I think that disposes of your theory."

But one could not dispose of Turton so easily as that.

"No doubt Brike will keep his rites and incantations to himself," he replied. "He will make it appear—and he will have witnesses to prove his assertion—that he effected this miracle by prayer."

I smiled.

"You are an expert swordsman, Turton," I said, "but the whole idea is too fantastic. You are really building up this wonderful structure on nothing more than the fact that Brike is of negro descent, and that he has asked you where he could purchase a black fowl. You are a very learned man, Turton, and have been engaged on research all your

life, especially in this sort of thing. To gentry like you a very small detail will indicate a promising line of inquiry."

Turton nodded.

"There's no other way of getting at the truth," he said.

"Oh, yes, there is!" I laughed.

And then Audrey Pinson, who had been standing at the window, and apparently taking no interest whatever in our discussion, suddenly exclaimed:

"Here's Brike, back again!"

The professor remained by the fireplace, but I crossed the room to the girl's side. It was still raining, and Brike passed, his head bent down and the basket on his arm. A gust of wind blew aside a corner of the cloth that covered the basket, and the head and neck of a black fowl popped out and disappeared again.

"I expect," I said to Miss Pinson, with a laugh, "that you will have chicken for dinner tonight."

"He's got them, eh?" said Turton.

"One, at any rate," I replied.

Turton chuckled and rubbed his hands together.

"If only I could get into that house," he said. "Very remarkable, a civilized negro, in these days—and in England. Miss Pinson, I implore you to stay at Brent Lodge a little longer. If you go—well, you're the only link between that place and the outside world."

Before Miss Pinson could reply, I said:

"It's not a fit place for her, alone with that black devil! Great Scott, Turton, have you no imagination?"

"I intend to stay," Audrey Pinson said quietly. "I do not think the professor is right, but he has excited my curiosity. One could picture Brike doing *anything*."

"That's just it," I answered roughly, "and I insist—"

"You insist, Mr. Hart?" she queried stiffly.

"I insist on your having some kind of weapon," I said humbly. "I know those brutes, and if Brike worked himself up into a sort of religious frenzy—well, I'm going to give you a pistol so that you can protect yourself."

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I should probably shoot myself," she said, "and I'm sure I'd never hit what I aimed at."

The professor went to a drawer in a mahogany cabinet.

"Please, Miss Pinson," I said gently, "you don't understand. Brike may be all right when he's in his senses, but when he's worked himself up over some devilish business—I have a jolly little auto-



matic pistol up at my place, and I'll teach you how to use it."

The professor came forward with a small glass tube in his hand. It was sealed at one end, and appeared to contain nothing but cotton-wool.

"Pistols are out-of-date, Miss Pinson," he said—"relics of the last century. Now, this"—he held up the little tube—"is a weapon that any lady might handle. If you pull out the cork, you will find that the head of a needle is stuck in it. The point is guarded with another small cylinder of cork. A single scratch from that point will cause death."

We looked at him, Audrey Pinson with horror in her eyes; and I must confess that I shivered just a little. This seemed an ugly kind of death, and yet, of course, it was much neater and less violent than bloodshed.

"Of course," Turton continued, "you would only use it in an emergency, but it is the sort of thing you could always carry with you. I have a little metal case for it, so that you could never have an accident."

For a few moments there was silence, and then Audrey Pinson held out her hand. Turton went back to his cabinet and returned with a small, metal cylinder.

"There you are," he said, with a laugh. "You can carry it in that pretty little bag of yours; takes up no more room than a thimble-case."

Audrey Pinson placed it in her bag, and then she suddenly laughed.

"What queer ideas people do get into their heads!" she said. "Well, I must be going home."

I walked back with her to the door in the wall of Brent Lodge. I made her talk about herself—her past, her future plans. But, when we had said good-by, I gave her a word of advice:

"There may be nothing in all this nonsense of Turton's," I said, "but you must keep your eyes open. I will be at Turton's cottage every morning now, at twelve o'clock. If you are not there, we shall come and look for you."

She opened the door with a latchkey, smiled at me, and disappeared.

Somewhere in the distance I could hear the *cluck, cluck cluck* of a very self-satisfied fowl.

## CHAPTER FIVE

OF COURSE, Saltby laughed at us. He was rather a jolly young fellow, hard-working and hard-headed.

"Poor old Turton!" he said to me, when I told him of Brike and the black fowl. "His head is stuffed with that kind of rubbish—lumber, I call it. For all

his medical knowledge and his M. D. of two universities, I don't believe he could prescribe for a patient with measles."

And when I spoke of the little glass tube, Saltby was furious.

"That's going too far!" he shouted. "Turton's an old lunatic; he ought to be locked up. Of course, it's *curare* or something like that."

And he was all for going round to Brent Lodge and taking this little metal cylinder away from Audrey Pinson.

I quieted him down a bit, and at last he admitted that there was no knowing what a nigger might be up to, and that, perhaps—well, if only the girl could be trusted not to scratch her own finger with the rotten needle—

I turned the conversation to Audrey Pinson herself, and he said he'd like to meet her, if it was only to tell her to clear out of Brent Lodge and go home to civilized folk.

"I can't believe she's only down here to try and get old Arum to leave her his money," he said, the next day, after we had met Audrey Pinson in the village. "She doesn't look that sort at all. As for you, you old rogue, I believe you want her to stay! You like to just sit and look at her."

As the days passed by, I began to think that Saltby was right. I did not wish Audrey Pinson to leave Harthaven. Every day I looked forward to meeting her in the village, and then one morning I told her that she had better go—that there was no need whatever for her to stay on at Brent Lodge and try to get on good terms with her uncle.

"He has already made his will," I said, "and he has left you everything but two thousand pounds. The will is in the safe in my library."

And then, as she turned and looked at me, I felt as though I had struck her a blow.

"You think that of me?" she said, rather piteously.

"Well, you told me——"

"Yes, yes; my aunt insisted on it! But my uncle told me all about his will the first time we met. He only wanted to look at me and see what I was like; then he said I could either go or stay, whichever I liked."

"I'm sorry!" I muttered. "But why do you stay?"

She colored a little at that question, and then she said sharply:

"I think I ought to be there to protect him!" and walked hurriedly away from me down the street.

And I was fool enough to wonder whether she really meant what she said. She could hardly imagine that she was able to protect her uncle from Brike.

Why, it was a very remote chance that Brike threatened any harm to his employer. Even old Turton's nonsense did not make out Brike to be a criminal.

The next day Audrey Pinson told us that her uncle was very ill—that he had had a bad heart-attack, and had remained unconscious for over an hour.

"Saltby must go round at once," I said. "You are in a position to insist."

"Yes, perhaps," she replied, "but only if my uncle were unable to give any orders. You cannot force a man to see a doctor against his will. My uncle definitely refused to see one just before I left the house."

I turned to Turton with a look of inquiry.

"Saltby must go round when the poor chap is unconscious," he said; "incapable of resistance. Miss Pinson, the next time your uncle has one of these attacks, you must leave the house at once, and go to Dr. Saltby. You know where he lives, don't you?"

"Yes—that pretty little house near the lodge gates. His name is on the door."

"Saltby will probably not be at home," said Turton. "I am a qualified doctor, if degrees have anything to do with it. But, of course, I have no surgery or medicines. Still, if Saltby is not at home, I might be able to help you, Miss Pinson. And in any case I should like to go with Saltby, if I may."

Audrey Pinson raised no objections. I do not think she had any great confidence in Turton as a doctor, but she liked the old man.

"And you can come, too," she said to me. "You can wait downstairs."

I shook my head.

"Ah, well, Miss Pinson," I replied, "I live some way off. There will be no time to waste. Of course, if I am here in the village, I will come. But to get a doctor quickly is the important thing."

I walked back with her to Brent Lodge. She asked me to come in, and I saw Brike pottering about the garden. I went up to him and asked for information.

"Oh, he's better, sir," was the reply, "and no doctor can do him good. I pray for him, sir—night and day. I will see that he does not die."

"Look here," I said, for I thought it best to be quite plain with the fellow, "if Mr. Arum dies, and it's proved that you've kept a doctor from him, you'll be tried for manslaughter."

Brike was unconcerned by the threat. He was neither angry nor afraid.

"I shall do nothing to prevent the doctor from coming to see my master," he replied, with quiet dignity. "Let the young lady send for any doctor she

chooses. But Mr. Arum, sir, will not see him. I will show the doctor into the bedroom—I can do no more than that.”

Then he clasped his hands together, and raised his eyes to Heaven. A wild torrent of prayer came from his lips. My suspicions were almost carried away by the earnest force of it. And when the man had finished he pressed his hands to his face, and cried like a child.

I left him, and said a few words to Audrey Pinson. While I was talking to Brike, and listening to the outburst of religious forces, she had asked her uncle if he would see me. Jacob Arum had refused, so there was nothing left for me but to take my departure.

Two days later the summons came from Brent Lodge. I was just going to bed, when a servant brought in a hastily scribbled note from Turton.

“Saltby is away,” he wrote, “called to a case of childbirth right out in the marshes. I am going up at once. They think Arum is dead. Come as quickly as possible to Brent Lodge.”

Five minutes later the car was at the door, and I went out on my short journey. It was a beastly night—the wind blowing half a gale from the east, and the rain, cold as ice, coming down in torrents. The hood gave but little protection, and I was glad of my fur coat, for dress clothes were no more than tissuepaper on a night like this.

“You must drive as fast as you can,” I said to the chauffeur, “but don’t take any risks. I don’t want to walk.”

But that was just what I had to do, after all. A hundred yards from the lodge gates, the car came to a standstill. We spent two minutes in trying to locate the trouble, and then I decided to walk. It was not much over half a mile to Brent Lodge. I told the chauffeur to follow me when he’d got the engine running again.

One does not walk quickly in a fur coat, even on a cold night, and though a car can deal with storm and darkness, a man on foot is handicapped by having to grope his way through pools of water, without even a glimpse of light to guide him.

The village street was as dark as the marshland beyond it, and only the riding lights of a few smacks betrayed the existence of a creek. And even when I reached the long wall of Brent Lodge I wasted a minute in trying to find the door. It was open, and I stumbled toward a glimpse of light in the hall.

But it was not until I was inside the house, and the door had shut out the wind and rain, that I received the impression of something evil and unholy in the atmosphere of the place. As I stood

there in my dripping coat, I could not hear a sound. The drawing-room door was open, but there was no light in the room. Save for the lamp burning in the hall, there did not seem to be any light at all. No doubt Brike and Turton and Audrey Pinson were upstairs with the dead or dying man.

I experienced a feeling of awkwardness—of being where I ought not to be. I did not quite know whether I ought to grope my way up to the room where I had seen Arum for the first and only time in my life, or to wait until someone came down to look for me.

I took off my coat, and then, shivering with the cold, put it on again. A door opened, and a glow of light streamed across the landing. I saw a shadow against the light, and then, quite suddenly, there came the booming of a tremendous voice.

I could hear the words: “*Oh, Lord, if it be Thy Will to give him back to us.* . .” and then the door closed, and Turton emerged from the darkness. He came slowly down the stairs, and told me to take the hall lamp into the drawing-room.

“I’m glad you’ve come,” he said, when he had closed the door. “The poor old chap is dead. Of course, I had no medicine—no stethoscope or anything. I gave him brandy, but he could not swallow it. He’s dead right enough—curse that fool Saltby—I think you’d better fetch him in your car.”

I explained that the car had broken down. And it did not seem to me that Saltby could be of any use if Arum were dead.

“You’ve not left that girl upstairs alone with—” I began.

“No, no!” Turton replied. “I persuaded her to go to her bedroom. Will you come upstairs? I think we’d better stay here until Saltby comes.”

“Yes, but I’ll stay in this room. Do you hear that crazy nigger shouting and groaning? I couldn’t stand that. I should want to kick him.”

“Still, we ought to know what is going on,” Turton insisted. “I think I’d better see. Perhaps I can calm him down a bit. It’s terrible for that poor girl.”

He struck a match and lit all the candles in the chandelier; then he picked up the lamp in his hand.

“This is the darkest house I was ever in,” he said.

When he had left the room I lit a cigarette. My nerves had never been quite what they should be since the war. The roaring of the wind, and the whining of it in the chimney, and the rain beating against the shuttered windows, and that howling negro upstairs pro-

duced the sort of effect that shatters all power of thought.

I felt dazed and stupid and very cold. And this pandemonium of sound was horrible—in a house where there should have been silence. I longed for a sight of Audrey Pinson—something fresh and sweet in this abode of queer men and strange noises. The dead man, Brike, even old Turton were fantastic and grotesque.

It was even possible that Brike, at that very moment, was performing his rites and incantations to bring the dead to life again. No, Turton must have been wrong about that. The nigger was praying in an ecstasy of religious madness.

Turton entered the room.

“Door locked,” he said. “Can’t get in—can’t make that fool hear, I suppose. I don’t think he’s in the room where poor Arum died. He’s in the bedroom beyond. I thought I heard the squawk of a fowl, but I wouldn’t swear to that. But he’s singing the song of the witch-doctors all right. I know it well. I’ve left the lamp in the hall.” Turton spoke with triumph in his eyes. “If only one could see,” he said. “I’d give anything to see what’s going on.”

I suggested that he should break the door open, but Turton would not hear of it.

“Of course, he’d stop at once,” he said. “What about the windows? Is there a ladder anywhere?”

I lost my temper.

“Look here, Turton!” I said sharply. “You seem to forget there’s a dead man in the house, and a girl crying upstairs. This isn’t the time for experiments.”

The door opened suddenly, and Audrey Pinson walked unsteadily into the room. Her face was white and her hair disordered, and she pressed her fingers to her ears.

“Stop him—stop the brute!” she cried. “I can’t stand it—I can’t stand it!”

I led her to a chair. I could see that she had been crying, but there were no tears in her eyes now. She moved her hands and caught hold of my arm.

“It is horrible!” she whispered. “And my poor uncle—”

There was the sound of dancing overhead, and the clapping of hands. It seemed as though there must be several people in the room above. The chandelier rocked, and a lighted candle fell on the floor. I picked it up, and the sounds suddenly ceased. There was nothing to be heard but the roaring of the wind, and the *swish* of the rain on the windows.

“Thank Heaven,” I said in a low voice. Turton did not speak. He dashed

## CHAPTER SIX

out of the room and up the stairs—strangely agile for so old a man—and we could hear him knocking on the door. Audrey Pinson let go of my arm, and bent forward, her hands clasped round her knees. There was fear in her eyes, and I think the sudden silence must have come as a shock to her.

"Brike has worn himself out," I said. "We must see that this kind of thing does not happen again—I must speak to the police. This is *your* house now."

There was the ring of a bell in some distant passage, and a loud knocking on the hall door. I opened it and saw Saltby in a thick overcoat. The rain was running in little streams from his hat.

"Am I in time?" he said.

"No; you are too late," I replied, and then I closed the door behind him, and took him to the far side of the hall, intending to tell him just what had happened.

But Audrey Pinson came out of the drawing-room.

"Oh, Dr. Saltby," she exclaimed, "it may not be too late! Please go upstairs."

I glanced up at the landing, but could see nothing. In the excitement of Saltby's arrival I had forgotten that Turton was up there knocking at the bedroom door. The knocking had ceased; I could not see Turton; and I concluded that he had been admitted to the room.

Saltby flung off his wet coat.

"I came across your car," he said, "just by the lodge gates. That saved a few minutes. I'll go and have a look at the poor old chap. But I don't suppose it's any use. Turton isn't a fool."

He picked up his little bag and began to mount the stairs. I moved as if to follow him, but Audrey Pinson caught hold of my arm.

"Please don't leave me!" she cried.

And Saltby, pausing and looking back at us, said: "You'd better both stay down here. We can't have a crowd in that room."

We returned to the drawing-room. The girl looked worn out, and I suggested that I should fetch her a glass of port or some brandy. She shook her head.

"Don't leave me," she whispered; "please don't leave me."

There was the closing of a door on the landing, and light, quick footsteps coming down the stairs. Then Turton appeared in the doorway. His face was working convulsively, and for a few moments he could not speak.

"The devil's work," he stammered at last. "Something in it, perhaps—I don't know—anyway, *Arum is alive*—"

SCARCELY half a minute had passed before Saltby entered the room. His face was flushed, and there was an angry light in his eyes.

"The man's alive," he said. "And he was well enough to order me out of the room. I could see he'd been near to death, but he aired his religious views, told me not to interfere with the will of Heaven—all that sort of stuff. Upon my word—"

He paused, remembering that Audrey was present.

"You'd better get to bed, my dear young lady," he said, after a few minutes of silence. "You need not worry about your uncle. I've left medicine and instructions with Brike, if there is another attack. But no need to worry, just go to bed and rest. I'll look around here in the morning."

Audrey was unwilling to take his advice, but we were all against her. At last she smiled and shook hands with us and left the room.

"Now we can talk," said Saltby. "Isn't there a fire in the wretched house? We must stay here a bit."

"I don't want a fire," said Turton, walking up and down the room. "*Saltby, he was dead!* Do you think I don't know a dead man when I see one? The heart had ceased to beat, I tell you; there was no breath on a mirror I held to his lips. I had no stethoscope, of course; but I'd swear the man was dead."

Saltby smiled incredulously.

"And what brought him to life?" he queried.

We told Saltby what we had heard, but he jeered at us.

"Some savage rites, eh?" he said curtly. "Do you believe in 'em, Turton?"

Turton admitted that he had always believed them to be frauds practised on simple savages.

"But, mind you," he added, "I wouldn't go so far as to say that there isn't a possibility of something real, some power given to certain—"

"Oh, rats!" Saltby interrupted.

"Well, then, what about prayer?" I queried. "An honest religious belief that prayer, under certain circumstances, will work a miracle?"

Saltby merely shrugged his shoulders.

"The facts are these," he said. "Brike and Miss Pinson could easily be deceived. Only Turton's evidence is worth anything, and he made a mistake. His mind has been kept off *practical* matters for years. Tell me just what you did see,

Turton. I apologize for the way I spoke to you just now."

The Professor smiled.

"I knocked half-a-dozen times at the door," he said, "and could not hear a sound on the other side of it. Then I turned the handle gently and found that the door was unlocked. Arum was lying on the sofa in exactly the same position as when I had last seen him. We had bound up his jaw with a clean white handkerchief, and there he lay, with a white face and closed eyes, looking as dead as any dead man I have ever seen.

"And a few feet away from him Brike was kneeling on the floor. The nigger was quite motionless except for his lips, and they moved without any sound coming from them. His hands were clasped across his chest, his eyes were closed, and the sweat was simply pouring off his gray forehead. I tell you, chaps, that I was really sorry for the man.

"And then I saw Arum's eyes open. Well, I am not easily frightened by man or animal, but that did give me a start. However, I kept quite still, and Brike went on praying, and the eyes closed, and then opened again. And then the right hand moved very slowly from under the rug—I call it a hand, but it was really only an iron hook. And then the hook went slowly up to the handkerchief and dropped back. I can tell you it was a horrible sight; and to see Brike still praying, and unconscious of it all, was, I think, even more horrible.

"And then, just as I was going to rush forward, Arum groaned, and Brike heard him, and sprang up from the floor as though he had been shot. And then you never saw such a scene, Brike crying and laughing and kissing his master's left hand, and my efforts to pour out some brandy, and the way we rubbed his limbs to restore the circulation. I was so excited I caught my sleeve on Arum's iron hook. And Arum, if you please, looking at us all the time as though he did not know what had happened, and then Saltby walked into the room."

"Yes," said Saltby, "and I merely said that I was the doctor and that I was glad to see that Arum was so much better. I thought it just as well not to make a fuss. But it was Arum who made the fuss. He cried out when I tried to put my fingers on his pulse. Then he told me to get out of the room. He looked very strange, and a sudden flush had come into his cheeks. Well, I've told you what he said to me, and I thought it best to go. I didn't want to excite him, you see. He might have had an-

other attack, and have gone off altogether."

The door opened and Brike entered the room.

"Very sorry, gentlemen," he said, "but my dear master, he is worried about you all being in the house. I think you will understand."

"Going to turn us out, eh?" said Saltby.

"The master is very angry, sir, with me and Miss Pinson, and everyone. I hope you won't get me into any further trouble, gentlemen. I am in your hands."

"I shall be glad to get to bed, at any rate," I said, with a yawn. "Come along, Professor. We cannot do any good by staying here. You'd better all come round to my place, and we'll have some hot drinks."

Saltby muttered something about the possibility of a doctor being required, but two minutes later we were in the car.

"I think we'll keep all this to ourselves," I said to Saltby, who was sitting by my side in the back seat. "All this nonsense, I mean, about Turton's heathen rites and ceremonies."

"You're right," the young doctor replied. "Turton's a one-idea man, and that makes a fellow a bit queer, you know. I'm sure he believes that Arum was really dead."

THE next morning Audrey Pinson called on me at eleven o'clock.

"I am leaving today," she said, "and I've come to say good-by. I—I am sorry to go."

I told her that no doubt she had come to a right decision.

"After last night," I said—"well, I wondered you even stayed in the house last night."

"Oh, it isn't that," she replied. "My uncle has told me to go. He was furious with me for bringing Dr. Saltby and Professor Turton into the house, trying to fight God, instead of praying to Him, as he puts it. He is going to alter his will."

"Oh, I must talk to him about that," I exclaimed. "It would be most unjust—most unfair. I will take all the blame on myself. And I must let him know the truth about Brike."

"The professor's ideas?"

"Yes. Your uncle thinks that Brike's prayers—well, he shall know the truth. I am very sorry you are going. I shall miss you."

She was silent. She might have said, "It's very nice of you to say that." But she said nothing, and I was glad. Such a commonplace remark would have thrown cold water on my hopes, on my belief that she had stayed on at Brent

Lodge, not because she wished to protect her uncle, but because she wished to see more of me.

"It's very dull and lonely in this village," I continued, "and I think I shall go up to London for a time. Will you give me your address?"

She gave it—a house in an obscure street in West Kensington—and I wrote it down in my address-book.

"You look as if you wanted a really good time," I went on, "and when I come to London I'll see that you get it."

For a few minutes neither of us spoke. I do not know what she was thinking about, but my own thoughts were clear enough.

"If I ride too hard," I said to myself, "I ride for a fall."

I really did believe that Audrey had stayed on in Harthaven because she wished to see me and talk to me, and find out just what sort of fellow I was. But as yet we knew very little of each other. That did not matter to me. I knew the one essential thing—that I was in love with her. But I was not vain enough to think that she could decide so easily on the most important matter in her life.

"I want waking up a bit," I continued after a pause. "They've offered me a job at the Foreign Office. I think I shall take it. Anyhow, I must go to town, and you'll come to some theatres, won't you?"

She laughed and held out her hands.

"I shall be awfully glad to see you," she said. "One can be just as dull in London as in Harthaven. And, really, I have had quite a lot of excitement down here."

I smiled grimly and took her hand, and held it for a few moments.

"I think you've behaved splendidly," I said.

A servant entered the room, and said that Brike wished to see me.

"I'll see him in here," I replied; and then I turned to Audrey: "You'd better stay. I think I know what he wants."

Brike was shown into the room. He handed me a note. It was from Jacob Arum, just a few scrawling lines to ask me to return his will and the inventory.

"How am I to know that you did not write this?" I said bluntly to Brike.

The man was quite unmoved by the insult. He turned to Audrey.

"I think," he said gently, "that the young lady knows that Mr. Arum is going to make a fresh will."

"Yes," the girl replied. "My uncle told me so."

I handed over the will and the inventory to Brike.

"I have a nice story about you," I said sharply. "Your master will be pleased to hear of all that happened last night."

"It was the mercy of God, sir," said Brike; and he took his departure.

He was out of sight when I walked through the Park with Audrey to the lodge gates. She seemed to care nothing for the loss of the money. And I looked on that as a good sign. It was as though she had made up her mind to marry me. No doubt she regarded me as a rich man. She knew nothing of my losses during the war, of the extravagance of the uncle, from whom I had inherited the property.

Well, there would be enough for us to live upon anyway, and I could earn more. Poverty is a good thing if it makes a man work.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

DURING the next few days I tried hard to obtain an interview with Jacob Arum, but he would not see me, and he even wrote me another letter, stating definitely that he had no intention of breaking the habits of years, and requesting me not to annoy him.

I wrote back a full account of what had happened on the night when he was so near to death. And I knew that he received it, because he acknowledged the receipt, and said that he had every confidence in "my God-fearing and trusty servant, William Brike."

The whole plot seemed now quite clear, and Turton had contributed to the success of it. Jacob Arum really believed that Brike's prayers had worked a miracle. And Brike had admitted the doctor to the room simply in order to set Jacob Arum against his niece.

Perhaps Brike knew his master was not dead. Perhaps, on the other hand, Brike had performed those heathen rites and ceremonies, believing that he could restore the dead to life. But, from whichever point of view one looked at it, Brike had come out on top. In the eyes of his master he was a man whose prayers had been answered.

There was nothing more to be done in the matter, and a week after Audrey had taken her departure I went up to London.

I made myself very pleasant to Audrey's aunt, and I had a long talk with her about Jacob Arum. She knew little or nothing about the man, and had never even set eyes on him. She had not even known Audrey's mother, but was "looking after the girl" for her brother's sake.

During the month that I stayed in town, I saw Audrey nearly every day

and took her to theatres, dances, and music-halls. Our friendship gave place to the close ties of love, and the day before I returned to Harthaven we were engaged to be married.

On the very day that I left London I received a letter from Turton, telling me that Jacob Arum and Brike had taken their departure from Brent Lodge, that the house was not to be sold, but that most of the contents were to be put up to auction at Christie's. I called to see Turton on my way from the station, and he handed me an envelope posted in London.

"From our friend Arum," he said. "It was only delivered here this morning."

I took the letter from its open envelope and read it.

*"Dear Professor Turton" (Arum had written) "It may interest you to know that your conduct has driven me from the house where I hoped to have ended my days in peace. Your talk of devils and enchantments, and horrible savage rites became unbearable. It is such people as you that make village life in England impossible to those who want rest.—JACOB ARUM."*

I laughed and laid the letter down on the table.

"I suppose you have been pretty busy," I said; and then I told him the great news, and he shook me warmly by the hand.

"I suspected it," he chuckled; "I suspected it. Oh, I've got eyes for witchcraft—whatever form it takes."

I asked him to dine with me that night, and, as I passed Saltby's house, I saw the doctor at the window, and stopped the car. He came hurrying out, and I told him that I was going to marry Audrey Pinson.

"Best of luck, old chap," he said. "By the by, our friend—"

"I know, I know," I interrupted. "You're to dine with me tonight—at half-past seven. A sort of celebration. Old Turton is coming. We'll have a jolly good dinner. I wired instructions yesterday."

I told the chauffeur to drive on. Saltby wanted to talk about Jacob Arum—I was sure of that. And I had had no food since half-past eight in the morning.

I CAN only tell you that Turton bored us to tears that night. He talked about witchcraft and devils and rites and incantations until I really began to think that he had gone completely off his head.

If he had been a young man, we should have thrown cushions at him and sat on his head. As it was, we could only be rude. But Turton, with a certain amount of drink inside him, was as obstinate as a mule and as thick-skinned as a rhinoceros. He wandered off into all sorts of bypaths, but he always returned to the starting-place—his firm belief that Jacob Arum had actually died, and had been raised to life again by Brike's witchcraft.

"I know the man was dead," he kept on saying. "I'm not a fool. If that whippersnapper Saltby knew half as much as I do, he'd be a consulting physician in Harley Street by now."

We were forced at last to take Turton as a joke, and we chaffed him unmercifully. He was more sensitive to ridicule than he was to direct insult, and he lost his temper about half-past ten, when we were in the middle of a game of snooker pool. He flung down his cue, put on his coat, and announced his intention of going home.

"You're a couple of turnips," he said; "and I think a turnip is the most beastly vegetable in the world. I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to spend the rest of tonight in that house, and perhaps the whole of tomorrow, and I'll bet you each a hundred pounds that I find proofs of Brike's deviltries!"

We laughed, but when he had left the room, I said to Saltby:

"He's drunk, or gone clean off his head. You must go with him."

"I'm blessed if I do," Saltby replied. "Let him break his own neck if he likes."

"He is an old man," I pleaded; "and an old friend. And, of course, he's furious that he made that mistake about Jacob Arum. Come, Saltby, be a sportsman."

"He's spoilt our jolly evening," grumbled the young doctor. "Oh, well, I'll go. After all, I don't want him to fall into the creek."

They took their departure, old Turton muttering to himself, and Saltby very silent and dignified. I returned to the library, and sat before the fire.

I was not sorry that the evening had ended so abruptly. I wanted to be alone with my very pleasant thoughts of Audrey Pinson.

THE next morning I walked down into the village, called at Saltby's house, and learned that he had been out all night—that he had returned at eleven o'clock the night before, had put a cake and a flask of brandy in his pockets, and had said that he might not be back until lunch.

Further on, in the village, I went to Turton's cottage, and found that Turton—much to the distress of his old house-keeper—had slipped a scribbled note under the door, saying that he would not be home until late the following day, and that he would like cold pheasant for supper. It was evident to me that they were both at Brent Lodge, and I decided to go there to look for them.

It was a cold morning, and the fog, though not thick enough to prevent one from walking along at a brisk rate, made it impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. And so it came about that when I neared the high brick wall of Brent Lodge, and saw a vague black mass looming through the mist, I thought for a moment that I had lost my way, and was face to face with one of the numerous tarred wooden cottages in the village.

Another half-dozen steps, and I realized that it was only an enormous furniture van. A foreman was sitting on the tail of it, smoking a pipe.

"Hallo!" I said. "Going to move all this stuff to be sold at Christie's?"

"Goin' to move it, sir," the man replied; "but it 'as bin sold, and I 'ear a nice price was paid for it, too."

"Who bought it?" I queried.

"Mr. Ruben, sir, of Bond Street; we're goin' to take it all up today. There'll be two more vans along here before noon."

The news rather surprised me, for Turton had distinctly stated that the contents of the house were to be put up to auction.

"Seen two gentlemen about?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, I saw 'em—diggin' in the garden; no business of mine."

Two workmen came out with a table carefully wrapped in matting.

"Twenty-three," shouted one of them; and the foreman ticked off the number in his book. It was evident that Brike and Arum had indexed and ticketed everything before they left the house.

I passed through the door into the garden. One could not even see the house. A few rose bushes and some shrubs showed indistinctly.

I had no intention of walking through that long wet grass, hunting for Turton and Saltby. If they chose to dig in the garden that was their own affair. I imagined that it was some nonsense of Turton's. No doubt he was looking for the bodies of black fowls.

I entered the house, and saw that everything was packed for removal, and that each label bore a number and a description of the article to which it was attached. I lit my pipe and chatted with the workmen. One of them had seen

Turton an hour before I arrived. Turton had come in from the garden covered with mud, and had washed his face and hands.

"Queer old bloke," said the man. "Asked me if I'd ever seen a witch. I looked a bit ugly at 'im and 'e give me a cigar."

I strolled out into the garden again, stood on the flagged path for a minute, and then saw a man running toward me out of the fog. It was Saltby, muddy from head to foot.

"Here, you chap!" he cried, and then, seeing who it was, he said, "My God, Hart, old Turton was right, after all!"

"Right?" I queried.

"Yes, about Jacob Arum. The fellow's dead enough. We've just come across his body—three feet down. *Ugh!*"

He pulled a flask from his pocket, and drank.

"Come here," he said. "I'll show you."

UNFORTUNATELY, we brought neither of the scoundrels to trial.

I say "unfortunately," because, no doubt, we should have got every detail of the truth out of them in a Court of Law. They were tracked down to a remote village in Cornwall, and Brike shot one of the detectives who had been sent to arrest him.

After that there could be no question of mercy. Brike and the other man were hunted from place to place and, driven at last into an empty cottage, they again showed fight and were both killed in a siege that lasted for nearly two days.

We recovered nearly all the money and the will, which Brike had kept, doubtless with the idea of retaining a hold over his companion.

The "other man" was Michael Arum—Jacob's twin brother. Proof of this was found among the papers in Michael's pocket. Further inquiries, in which the elder Miss Pinson was able to give us some assistance, elicited the fact that he

was supposed to have died many years ago, and that he had been a thorough scoundrel, who had served a long term of imprisonment for forgery.

The likeness between the two brothers was extraordinary, and when it is remembered that Audrey Pinson and Turton were the only persons who had seen both of them, and that Turton had never heard Jacob Arum speak, and that Audrey had only seen Michael Arum in a very dim light, it is not so very odd that they did not observe the very slight difference between the twins.

Well, of course, you will ask why Brike did not just bury Jacob Arum and let Michael take his place without telling anyone of Jacob Arum's death. That, on the surface, would seem to have been the simplest plan. But Brike was far too subtle for that. You see, he wanted a doctor's evidence that Jacob Arum was really dead, in case Brike should have been accused of murdering him, if ever the plot was discovered.

Brike had deliberately made Turton an unwitting accomplice, knowing, as he did, that the old professor was steeped in witchcraft, and had lost touch with more practical matters.

Thus, Turton's evidence of Jacob Arum's death would help to clear Brike of a possible charge of murder; also—and this was equally important—Turton's evidence of the supposed reincarnation would help to throw dust in the eyes of those inclined to suspect foul play. The supposition being that although Turton's word as a doctor might possibly be doubted, his evidence, as a recognized authority on witchcraft, of the reincarnation, would be respected.

Brike had run tremendous risks; for instance, someone might have discovered that Michael Arum had actually sacrificed his right hand in order to get this money. Someone, too, might have seen Michael smuggled into the house. No doubt Brike had rowed him down the creek and landed him, as he had landed Audrey Pinson, at the foot of the garden.

How long Michael had lain hidden in Brent Lodge, waiting for the moment when the breath should leave his brother's body, we never shall know. Most certainly the truth would never have been known if Brike had not been so very clever.

It was his cleverness that was his undoing. Turton had searched the garden, not for Jacob Arum's body, but for evidence of the witchcraft which—so Turton firmly believed—had restored Jacob Arum's life.

Turton had an idea that the carcasses of the two fowls would have been buried in the garden. He found a spot where it seemed to him that the earth was a little higher than the rest of the surface. And there he had elected to dig. Saltby had helped him.

You can picture the faces of these two men when the iron hook and maimed stump of Jacob Arum's arm came through the earth.

There was no trace of foul play. Jacob Arum had died of heart failure. The whole plan had been magnificently conceived, and, but for Turton's dabbling in negro magic, the truth might never have come to light.

And I rather think that my good wine played some part in the matter. It was just a straw thrown into the scale of Turton's sensitively balanced brain.

Of course, everything had been in Brike's favor from the start. Jacob Arum's dislike of his fellow men; the fact that he had lost his right hand and could not write properly; his faith which forbade him to call in a doctor; the nature of his property, which could be sold at any moment for cash; his real affection for his servant—all these combined to put Brike in a very strong position.

Still, it was a bold plan, skillfully conceived and executed, and, but for the bee in old Turton's bonnet, it would have been rewarded with success.

THE END

