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noxious gas that I had breathed, and at sunset I laid me down to rest, somewhat sick of body and greatly weary and worn out.

It was yet more lonesome than before to lie thus lone and companionless, and often in the night I awoke, and, wondering at the emptiness of my arms and missing the familiar breathing at my side, I cried aloud: "Satan, old friend, where stay you?" till I remembered that he had been slain by black magic, and that on the morrow I would up to the turret and slay the hag that dwelt there, without question or other word.

Chapter IV

THERE was little of mercy and little of sweetness in my heart when I next ascended the stairway that led to the chamber where dwelt the Hag of the Turret. Three steps did I take at a time, and in my right hand was a sword of good steel, the best of those that hung on the walls in the great hall below. Carefully I had sharpened and ground the edge, and there was little flesh that was human that the keen blade would not divide.

Well I remember how my eyeballs were aflame with hatred and lust of blood, how my throat was hard and dry and my teeth firm set. There was no softness in me as I thought of the

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woman's years and helpless state, and swiftly the stone stairs fell back under the spring of my stride. She had sought to kill me—I that had done her no wrong,—and my cat, Satan, she had slain with as black a cunning as any that I had as yet encountered. The blood of Thomas Snoad cried loud for vengeance, and the grip on my sword-hilt tightened at the thought of how it would cleave and make a parting in the yellow wisps of hair, then downward to the chin through the coarse beard—and the Hag of the Turret would work no more evil, whatever else might befall.

I flung open her chamber door, and she advanced to meet me with the same cunning smile that was her wonted mask. Then she read the message in my eyes and in my hand, and down at my feet she flung herself, sore afraid and trembling.

“Speak!” she cried. “Nay, look

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not at me thus! What have I done? What is my fault?”

I made no answer to her question.

“I give thee one minute's grace for prayer,” said I; “and pray thy hardest, for afterwards thou shalt die a swift death.”

Again she asked me for reason and explanation of my harsh conduct, but I uttered no word. Still I stood with lowered blade, counting the seconds till I should have counted sixty. The last ten I spoke aloud, so that the torture and the suspense might be the greater.

“Fifty-seven!” I said. “Fifty-eight!”—I hardly knew my own voice, 'twas that stern and hard. “Fifty-nine!” “Six——” I began, but stopped short, for the hag had sprung to her feet, and with a terrible cry as of a wild panther at bay, she crossed the room to where hung on the wall the heavy curtain of red silk.

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“ Don Diego, my father, I crave thy help!” she cried aloud, and her voice shrieked high and unearthly — such a voice as neither human man nor woman has ever heard or uttered. With her lean hand she drew aside the curtain, and there stood before me a man with coal-black eyes, so hard, so piercing, that they froze the blood in my veins, and the marrow in my back so that I was held fast, and stood still and rigid, as I have seen birds pause, fixed and motionless, when held fast by the glassy eyes of a serpent. The naked blade dropped from my ice-cold hand on to the floor, for I was transfixed and rendered without strength; and perforce had I to gaze and yet gaze more, with both my eyes sealed fast to the eyes of this apparition.

I recall this new figure well, and, indeed, with good reason. 'Twas a man of middle age, clad in black velvet, and

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with a bare head. The face I shall never forget; so proud, so fierce, so saturnine was its expression that even now, with eyes closed, I can see it as distinct to-day as I could on that, our first and last encounter. The complexion was dark, swarthy as that of a Spaniard; on the chin was a peaked beard, and the hair on the man's head was coal-black; yet beyond all stood out the two eyes that held me fast as if by magic.

Thus stood I, spellbound and unable to stir hand or foot, and round me walked the bent hag, gleeful of mood, rubbing her two hands round about each other, and mewling with pleasure like some great cat. For awhile she hovered round about me, enjoying to the full my discomfiture; then, from a chest, she brought out a mirror, and for an instant she held it 'twixt me and the coal-black eyes that gripped mine own. The face that I saw was ghastly

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white under my brown beard, on my brow stood glassy beads of sweat, the lines of fear made my face lowly and mean, and mine eyes were wide open and without life or power. She withdrew the mirror, and once again I was spellbound by the sable figure with the evil glance.

"Shall I draw the curtain?" she whispered in my ear.

"Yes."

There was no sound, but she marked the words on my lips.

"You have seen sufficient; would you not like yet one more look?"

She held the silk in her bony hand.

"No! for the sake of the Virgin—"

The words stuck in my throat for I was hoarse with terror.

"Swear thou wilt leave me in peace, and never more enter this chamber!"

"I swear!"

I would have sworn away my hopes

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of life and Heaven in that moment, so empty was I of power and courage.

"Now go!" she cried, and the curtain was drawn once more over those hell-born eyes. Her hand still clutched the silk, and at any moment the man in black might once more stand before me.

Hastily I turned to the doorway, yet before I left the chamber she held the mirror once more before my face; but all that I saw was a mist on the glass, and there was no reflection either of my face or aught else.

Fearfully I sprang down stairs, in haste and as though pursued by ten million devils, for had I not been on the near confines of hell and gazed on what no human eye ever was fashioned to gaze upon? For the eyes in my head were without true sight, and all before them was yellow and formless, as though I had stared into the face of the sun and been blinded by its glare.

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Terror-struck and abject, I kept far away from the castle till such time as hunger forced me to the store-room and the cellar. To drown my fear and anguish, I drank deeper on that day than I have ever drunk before or since. My head was afire and my gait haphazard when, with a flask of red wine under each arm, I once more set out for my lair in the woods. As I passed through the great hall my attention was aroused by a mirror, alike in form and size to the one that the Hag of the Turret had held before my face in the morning. It lay on one of the couches.

“There will be no fearsome face all white and chattering now,” said I thickly, and I could feel the wine burning under my skin. My heart was light and careless, and I picked up the mirror and gazed into it; an instant later I had dashed it to the ground, where it splintered into a thousand

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fragments; for by all Heaven and earth, I had gazed at the same terror-torn face, all white and bloodless, that I had seen reflected in this very mirror when it was held up between my eyes and the apparition that was in the turret behind the heavy curtain of red silk!

Hastily I left the castle and wandered to a seat in the forsaken garden, where I thought and quaked anew, for the courage that the wine had lent me was all but fled, and I was as a child that has been burnt to the bone and is once more face to face with the fire, only 'twas Sorcery that I stood in awe of, and I had suffered o'ermuch from it. As I sat thus trembling in all my four limbs, may I be lost in the deepest pit if the curst witch did not find me out and make mock of me!

“Silas Fordred, master-mariner of Hythe, where be thy courage and thy cunning now? Ha! ha!” and she laughed long and high in her throat.

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I said no word, and my chin was on my chest, that weary and spent was I.

“It was not well to threaten, aye, and seek to slay an old woman that had done thee no harm! Even if thy evil planning had succeeded it would not have been well; the Hag of the Turret would not have died un-avenged, for thou art but a man—a weak, common man,—with naught but brute strength and a cowardly heart!”

“Get thee away! I have suffered enough, so leave me in peace!”

“Not yet, I have not done with thee yet. Come with me and I will show thee a brave sight.”

“Away old hag, or I shall do thee harm!” I cried.

She laughed all around her mouth, showing her toothless gums, and the roots of the two brown fangs that were on either side. Her hand went to her girdle, and I could see the gleam of a blood-red stone above her fingers

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that were clutching the hilt of a long dagger.

“Come! you will come?” she pleaded, for now her voice took on a wheedling tone; and she turned in the direction of the three chambers that stood separate and side by side with closed doors.

I followed her. Heaven alone knoweth why I rose to my feet at her behest and went the same way as she. All I can say is that I had a lurking hope in my heart that something of chance or justice might deliver her into my hands, and then——

“You come! you obey me, Silas Fordred! Do you hope to push me across the threshold of the Dark Chamber, eh?” and her hand went significantly to the dagger-hilt with the great ruby at its head.

She had read the thought of vengeance from my face, and silently I vowed I would think no more; but,

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when the fit moment arrived, I would act, and she should die whatever dog's death she had intended for me.

By now we had reached the three chambers, and, as once before, and that on a memorable occasion, two of the doors were closed and the other stood wide open. Curiously I gazed within, the witch marking the direction of my eyes, and noting with a great satisfaction their expression of greed and lust of gain; for what I saw was a chamber full of wide-open chests, and caskets all full and over-running with coloured gems and coined gold. 'Twas like what I had seen in the windows of the Lombards that change moneys, only here were precious gems in such a plenty and gold pieces by the bushel and by the gallon; such wealth as I had never gazed on before—aye, and of whose mere existence I had not dreamed. Though I tried my hardest, I could not suppress all desire; and, as

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my eyes lit up, the bearded hag noticed my thirst, and chuckled and made strange noises of satisfaction.

“ 'Tis some other devil's business, of that I have no doubt,” said I inwardly, and calming myself I stood firm and cold before the doorway.

“ Thou canst go and take what wealth that pleases thee,” cried the hag in my ear.

I made no answer, but stood firm and at a good space from the doorway.

“ Thou wilt have riches enough to purchase a whole county; thou wilt be able to build schools and churches, and thou wilt be the first commoner in all Hythe Borough, plain Master Silas Fordred the mariner.”

I smiled disdainfully, the wine I had recently drunk coming once more to my aid.

“ Nay, nay,” I said. “ I have had enough of thy riches and thy lures, I

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will none of them!" and I turned on my heel.

"Surely, friend Silas," she cried, "thou art but a fool, and not the clever knave that I mistook thee for!"

"Aye, aye, that I know well, and more beside," said I with a smile, and moved away from her. She was greatly angered and the corners of her mouth twitched with suppressed rage. Still she hobbled after me, did this bent hag.

"Come back, friend Silas!" she called. "Come back and plunge both thy arms into this wealth; truly thou shalt come to no harm—nay more, I will enter with thee!"

"Thrice have I answered thee, and each time said I nay; let this be my last word and thine!" and I stood away from her with folded arms.

"Truly thou makest me impatient! Enter with me now, or never shalt thou enter the Chamber of Riches, and

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a poor man shalt thou die, naked and with an empty belly!"

I said no word in reply.

"Never in all thy life shalt thou enter!" she hissed in my ear.

"Calm thyself, bent hag, calm thyself; thy conduct befits not thy years!" and I laughed aloud in her face, so that she grew a deep yellow with rage and hatred. With that I set off for the wood, and left her spitting and afume before the open doorway.

I had not gone many steps when I turned round and saw that she was on my heels, her lips white with passion, her expression more evil and menacing than I had as yet seen it, her eyes fierce and glittering as a hawk's.

"Thou wilt enter yon doorway, Silas Fordred!" she cried, and beat on the ground with her staff.

"I will not, thou moth-eaten fury! get thee to the devil!" and I laughed aloud in her face.