

### The Fearsome Island

Her yellow visage changed to a deep orange, and great veins stood out on her lean cheeks and forehead.

"Thou wilt enter yon chamber, that I swear, either alive or else dead! but enter yon chamber thou shalt!" and her voice choked short in her neck.

"I shall not!" said I, quite cold.

"Thou shalt!" she shrieked. I smiled broad into her face, so that, losing all prudence and all self-command, she spat and boiled at the mouth, hissing like a serpent in pain.

I watched her with an indifferent eye.

"Thou shalt enter!" she cried; "living or dead, thou shalt enter!" and so saying she snatched the dagger from her girdle and flew at me in a fury of hate and bitter rage.

Well I remember how the long, lean blade flashed 'twixt my face and the sky, and how, an instant later, I had her wrist tight in my two hands; then there was a noise as of a twig snap-

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ping, and the bone of her arm, dry and brittle with age, broke into two pieces, while I fell forward as the strain gave way. Quickly I arose to my feet, and she was at me again, yet this time the dagger lay on the ground, and she came to me with wide-open mouth, the brown fang on either side bare to the roots; the fingers of her one hand were apart and curved like claws, and the other arm hung loose at her side, the lower half flapping idly to and fro as she moved. Like to a tigress, with the white froth on her parted lips, she sprang at me, and I, mad with hate and rage, forced my one hand through her wide open jaws, while with the other I clasped her lean legs at the bend. High I held her in the air and ran thus, she swinging above my head, hissing and writhing with pain and hatred. High above my head she twisted and turned, and then I flung her with all my strength, whirled her

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clean and clear through the wide-open doorway of the Chamber of Riches, where were the coloured jewels and the chests of gold. As the lean shanks were freed and my hands drew across the toothless gums, the two fangs on the sides of her mouth snapped short and fell at my feet, while overhead there swished through the air that cursed Hag of the Turret, to light with all force amid the gold and precious gems. To earth she fell with a rattling sound, and that was the last I saw or ever shall see of her lean carcase, for, in the self-same moment as she touched ground, a broad sheet of flame, yellow as the gold within, filled the entire chamber, dropped from ceiling to floor a curtain of fire. I gazed breathless and awestruck at this spectacle, yet with a keen joy in my heart as I thought of the Hag of the Turret, who must now be roasting within as later she would broil in Hell. For the

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space of ten seconds the broad flame licked and waved, then it expired and all was clear and simple as before, only the Hag of the Turret was nowhere to be seen, and for that I thanked God and His Son and the Blessed Virgin.

At my feet, that had left deep marks in the turf by reason of my last great effort, were the two yellow fangs that had broke short on my hand. These I picked up and placed carefully within my pouch as a remembrance of the She-fiend from whose mouth they had dropt; and you, who have seen them at my house in Stade Street can now understand why I troubled to bring home with me ivory of so worthless a nature.

I knelt long and devoutly, praying to the God that had rid me of so curst a companion, voicing my thanks with much direct and grateful speech; and, even when I could no more think of fitting phrases, I still knelt with closed

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eyes, as my thanks swelled in my heart and spoke for me—aye, and perhaps with a sweeter tongue than the bald utterances which were all that so simple a man as myself could think of and weave into a prayer. At length, these devotions and some tears having eased my heart, I looked up, and in front of me and on all fours was the hairy man looking humbly into my face. As our glances met, he pranced around like a colt that is out at pasture, put his face to the ground and placed my hand to his head, so that I wondered whether he did not mistake me for a priest and was seeking my blessing. I knew that he had seen me at prayer, and that, perchance, I had misled him into holding that I was a priest.

“I am no friar,” I cried, “but plain Silas Fordred, master-mariner of Hythe, that suffered shipwreck on this accursed island some months since.”

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The hairy man spoke not, but, instead, he made strange noises as do the beasts of the forest, and signs with his arms like unto a negro trader.

Once more he pressed my hand to his head, and he was about to lay his cheek against my feet, when I arose with some choler.

“Hairy man,” said I, “thou art little better than a fool! Bear thee as a man, and not as a dog that has been lately whipped!”

Yet again and for some time longer he pranced for joy, and pointed first to his eyes and then into the chamber with the wide-open door, wherein the witch had lately disappeared.

“Did’st see the somersault she turned?” I asked. “’Twas bravely done, aye, thou naked one?”

He recognised the cheery tone of my voice and once more skipped joyfully toward me, while I, somewhat weary of his too evident pleasure, smote him

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heavily in the ribs, so that he was gratified, yet not too much so. After I had taken this precaution, he kept at a safe distance from me, and though ever and anon there came a smile into the corner of his eye, he ventured no more within reach of my foot or fist till his joy was of a calmer nature.

After awhile I went into the castle, the savage following close at my heel.

I had that day triumphed over the Hag of the Turret, and the presence of a companion—aye, even of a companion that spoke no real tongue, and, moreover, was hairy from head to toe,—had given me new hope and courage; so much so, that I resolved forthwith, and while my revived manhood was still hot within me, to mount the turret stairway and see whether I could not conquer the evil-eyed monster beyond the curtain, as I had conquered the hag, his friend.

I had read the story of David and

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Goliath, and I was minded to meet this foe even as the Hebrew Harpist had met the Philistine; but I, having neither sling nor stone, took with me instead a heavy hammer of iron, which weapon I resolved to hurl at the evil one's head the moment that the hairy man, whom I should so instruct, had withdrawn the curtain.

Stealthily, so as not to give alarm and warning to the black-browed Sorcerer overhead, we mounted the narrow stairway, and, with some catching at our breath, entered the doorway of the turret chamber. Within this deserted apartment was deep stillness, and at the far end hung the heavy curtain of red silk, lengthways, from ceiling to flagstone as before. With some trouble and after a great making of signs, I at length instructed my newfound ally in his duty, and at a signal from me the curtain was drawn aside, and quick, before the sinister face had

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power to hold me, I flung the hammer at it with all my force. No sooner had the haft left my hand than a great fear seized upon me, and I closed my eyes, wondering what dire consequences would follow on my attack.

I stood in darkness many long seconds, expecting the turret to sway and topple to the earth—aye, yet stranger and more hurtful events and mischances did I think of,—yet through the stillness there came only one sound—the falling of a shower of splintered glass that recalled the breaking of the mirror that I had flung from me in the morning. I opened my eyes, and beyond the curtain that the hairy man still held to his side (and his face was in that moment a fine picture of varied humours) there was naught but an empty space, under which was inscribed in tall letters of ebony:

“DIGO RODRICOVEZ,”

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and on the floor of the chamber lay a thousand fragments of glass. Many of these I stooped over and gazed at with much curiosity. Most of them were portions of a mirror, so that in their depths I caught glimpses of my own face; on others were patches of black velvet; and in one I met the ear and awful eye of the figure that had struck such terror into me on that self-same day. I put these pieces of glass aside and pondered, while all the time the hairy man stood awestruck and silent before me.

“Man of the furry hide,” said I at last, “surely this was a mirror, much such an one as that which carried the imprint of my face this morning, and in it yon demon—and Heaven alone knoweth where and what he be—had gazed at some one time or another. His evil eye it was that, reflected in this glass, transfixed and held me motionless some few hours since. ’Twas

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no real man that I saw, but a shadow wrought by black magic and strange crafts. The witch, praise be to Heaven, hath paid the price of her evil-doings, and there will be no new Sorcery on this island for many a long day!"

I looked at the tall letters of ebony once more and repeated them many times, marvelling greatly as to their meaning and significance. Then a thought came to me—one that I had strangely overlooked—that filled my breast and mind with new alarms: "If the mirror I had shattered held but a reflection of a Sorcerer, where was that Sorcerer's self, and might not he at any moment weave some new spell about me—aye, perchance at this present instant he might be planning my destruction?"

Many times I repeated the two ebon words "DIGO RODRICOVEZ," marvelling the while greatly as to what could be their meaning and significance.

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From the turret we once more descended to the garden, where stood the chamber that was the tomb of the Hag of the Turret. The door was still wide open and the wealth within tempted me greatly, although I was well aware of the uselessness of riches in my present plight. Such is the force of custom and habit I made my way from thence, resolved to let well alone and to touch naught else that might in any way tempt or cause me harm. I passed the third chamber, and this time a fresh doorway stood open, so that I could gaze and satisfy my curiosity. Now I saw clear into a room quaintly alight and all rosy as is a sunset, and within were lovely maidens that neither stirred nor spoke, clad in wondrous thin and gauzy garments, and of a marvellous fair complexion that the tender light made yet more strangely beautiful.

"Hairy man," said I, "let us

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away; this is some new spell!" and I grasped his shoulder and the two of us strode hastily from the spot, onward through the garden. As I pressed forward past the place where I had struggled with the witch I made out something that glittered on the grass. What I picked up was the dagger that the hag had sought to kill me with, a long blade of Spanish steel, and at its hilt was a round ruby. This I stuck into my belt that I had lately taken from one of the rooms in the castle, for my own leathern girdle was still clenched by the brazen fist that swung on the castle doorway. This knife you have seen in company with my other belongings, and such of you as are skilled in these matters can testify as to the fineness of the workmanship and the lustre of the precious stone at its head.

The dusk was fast approaching and the day was well-nigh sped. It had

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been a day of great events and much danger and activity, and many a time within the last twenty-four hours had my heart stuck fast in my throat and my teeth chattered in my mouth, for it is not given to every man to perform deeds of valour without misgiving and inward qualms; nay more, I dare swear that the bravest hero—one that can face human enemies without knowing dread or fear—would have shrunk aghast at the black sorceries and other superhuman dangers wherewith I had that day done battle. Now my mind was somewhat at rest, maybe that it shared the same weariness that beset my body; also was my hunger great and my thirst of a similar quality. Long did the hairy man and I sit together in the store-room making a giant's supper, and my belt hung idly on my loins and I was scant of breath when I had done. My new-found ally sate beside me on the floor, eating with

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great gusto and no little astonishment at the source of our meal; he, in common with myself, never before having seen flesh that was preserved in sealed tins, nor had he ever tasted wines and heady liquors of any sort till this same night. We drank wisely, and, in spite of the manifest danger of the action, fell asleep where we had eaten, this being the first night that I had spent under a roof since the day that I and Thomas Snoad set out from Hythe.

### Chapter V

“**H**AIRY MAN!” said I next morning, as we rubbed our eyes and stretched our limbs, for we had slept deep, “henceforth thou shalt be known as Esau, a fitter name and a more ancient. Now, Esau, let us to breakfast, and afterwards we will hold a council and resolve on what measures we can take to quit this thrice accursed island, and all that it holds.”

It was of little use, this converse with Esau; but it was good and cheering to hear the sound of my voice, and, when I spoke, my companion smiled with over-great intelligence, although he understood no single word.

“Esau,” said I, when our meal was done, and we had lain for some time