

Strange Tales of a Doctor

The Panelled Bedroom

BY L. T. MEADE and DR. CLIFFORD HALIFAX.
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It was toward the latter end of December when I decided to take a much needed rest, and availed myself of an invitation to visit my friends, the Perownes, in their beautiful English country home.

The Perownes of Queen's Marvel belonged to one of the noble families in Staffordshire; their country seat was remarkable for all that renders family residences attractive. Some parts of the house were centuries old, and acres of broad lands surrounded the ancient mansion, which at the time of my visit held a large party of Christmas guests.

Edward Perowne, the present owner, was an imposing looking man of about 60. He came into the hall to welcome me, accompanied by his pretty daughter-in-law, and a girl whom he introduced as his granddaughter. When I dressed for dinner I noticed the great beauty of the room which had been allotted to me. It had three doors, which at this moment stood slightly ajar, one opening on the landing, one into a dressing room and bathroom combined, and one into a small and beautifully furnished sitting room. This room contained writing table, easy lounge, many comfortable chairs, cabinets full of books and a large book case well stocked. I entered, but finding that I had no time to examine the books, returned to my bedroom, closing as I did so all three doors. Then I gazed around in perplexity. I found myself in a spacious bedroom, but there was a certain air of mystery which struck me as strange; there was scarcely any furniture. The bed occupied an alcove, a large fire blazed in the opposite corner, there were a few chairs and one or two tables; nothing else—no wardrobe, no chest of drawers, no bureau, no washstand, no dressing table, no vanity case, no more articles of furniture were on view behind each panel, all by this odd means pushed out of sight except when required for use.

But the most remarkable thing was that the three doors were also in panels, and when shut absolutely disappeared. The effect was strange. Standing in the middle of the room, I was, to all appearance, in an apartment without any door. Just then the going sounded for dinner, but familiar as I seemed to the room, I could not find the right exit. I looked in vain for a handle in any one of the panels, but presently saw a button in a panel at one end of the room. I pressed it and a door opened. I found myself then in my sitting room, which, like the bedroom, was lighted from above with electricity, and going down the stairs joined the rest of the guests at dinner.

I was seated next to the pretty girl who was my host's granddaughter. Her name was Constance Perowne; she was nearly 17. Immediately after dinner I told her the different guests were.

"That is mother sitting opposite you. You know my father is dead, so mother lives here with grandfather. That lady at the further end of the table in black velvet, with her hair done up, she is my cousin, Louisa Enderby. Her mother is grandfather's only daughter. Grandfather married twice, and Louisa Enderby's mother is his daughter by his first wife. My father was dear grandfather's only son. Louisa has spent the greater part of her life abroad. She is a wonderfully clever woman, and the most amazing mesmerist you ever came across."

I glanced in the direction of the lady. She was heavily built, with thick, dark eyebrows, a swarthy complexion and stern set jaw. Altogether an uncommon sort of woman, and with something peculiarly magnetic in her sharp gaze. After dinner we gathered in the drawing room, and at Constance's request Miss Enderby consented to give an exhibition of her mesmerizing powers. Constance offered to be the subject and seated herself in preparation for the ordeal. Miss Enderby commenced to make the usual passes which are supposed to produce hypnotic sleep. It was evident that Constance was an easy subject, for soon her eyes closed, she uttered a deep sigh, and Miss Enderby removing her gaze from the subject, announced that she was asleep. The rest of the visitors crowded around and began to ask questions through the mesmerizer. Constance answered each remark, however silly.

Professionally, I have always been opposed to performances of this nature, considering them distinctly dangerous, and I was glad to accompany him to his study. We had not been there very long when one of the younger girls rushed in and informed us excitedly that Miss Enderby could not awaken Constance, who was crying and moaning hysterically. I went at once to the drawing room, and found the girl in a condition which threatened her with convulsions. Miss Enderby, greatly agitated, was bending over her, grasping her hands.

"Let her alone," I said. "When you become calm again you must reverse the passes, but this can only be done when you are quiet and cool."

I lifted Constance gently to a sofa, and sitting down beside her motioned to every one else to leave the room. They did so, the expression of suffering gradually left the girl's face, and she slept calmly. Miss Enderby went with the rest, and as she was in no condition to make the reverse passes, I did not allow her to accompany me to my study. Between 11 and 12, Miss Perowne awoke quite naturally. She appeared to be her own self again, but I remarked to her mother that I considered the whole business unwise, and advised her not to allow her daughter to participate in any more such experiments.

When I retired to my own apartment I sat for a while musing over the events of the evening and thinking of Miss Enderby's remarkable face and sharp piercing gaze. Then, feeling tired, I undressed and got into bed. I must have awakened suddenly some hours later, for the fire was out and the chamber in complete darkness. I found myself broad awake and listening intently. Presently an irresistible im-

pulse to rise came over me. I felt I would yield to it. I stretched out my hand, felt along the wall and turned on the electric light. I lay for a moment longer, struggling against the inclination to arise, and at last I got up and donned my dressing gown. It seemed as though some unknown force compelled me to walk to the opposite end of the room. In the bright light I could see distinctly the small buttons which when pressed silently opened the panel doors. I pressed the center button, the door revolved backward and I perceived that I was on the threshold of the little sitting room. To my surprise it was bright with electric light, and standing by the mantelpiece I encouraged the fire and somewhat arrogant gaze of Miss Enderby.

"What are you doing here?" I demanded curtly.

"I came here to speak to you," was the calm reply. "A glance revealed to me this evening that you and I are on rapport, as we say in our phrasology. You can influence me and I can influence you. We are both hypnotists, although you are not fully aware of the magnitude of your powers. I am anxious to pursue a certain course of action which you can, if you will, balk me in. I want very much to understand that you will do so at your peril."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Tonight, after I had left the room, you used your counter-influence with Mrs. Perowne to withdraw Constance from my society. Now, my intention is to see much of Constance, and to draw her into my power. I mesmerized her for the first time, and I intend to do so again. I am forced to betray to you what I would rather conceal. I am a hypnotist up to a certain point; beyond that point my powers decrease. You are a hypnotist of much higher order; in fact, without knowing it, you are a 'clairvoyant.' You can either help or oppose me. I want you to promise that you will not interfere with me. That is why I hinted you tonight."

"You speak in riddles," I replied. "I won't try to solve them, but I have no hesitation in informing you that I object to any one being subjected to the hypnotic trance. I shall use whatever counter influence I possess against you, Miss Perowne's case."

"You will do so at your peril," she said defiantly. "But you will probably change your mind. I will visit you again tomorrow night."

I made no reply; she glided toward the door, opened it, and went out. I returned to bed. At breakfast on the following morning I observed that all the other guests were present with the exception of Miss Enderby.

"I notice that Miss Enderby is absent," I said to the elder Mrs. Perowne.

"I trust there is nothing the matter with her."

"Miss Enderby never sleeps here," returned the old lady. "She and her mother occupy a house at the south end of the park. Louisa went away immediately after dinner, but she will be back tonight, she went out of the house long before 11 o'clock."

I made no comment, but inwardly I wondered how it was that she had managed to get back again and visit me in my sitting room. Later I entered into conversation with Constance, and she informed me that her mother had forbidden her to allow her cousin to mesmerize her again.

"I am sorry I had to promise," she said frankly. "It has been an old wish of mine that Louisa should mesmerize me. Mother says that Louisa was always a queer child, and when she was quite young she went abroad to be educated. She came home when she was nearly grown up—just before the awful tragedy of grandfather's life occurred."

"What was that?" I asked.

"It was about my father, Dr. Halifax. He was my grandfather's only son. He married when he was only twenty-one, and he died months before I was born. He was drowned while Miss Enderby was a child. Ever since Queen's Marvel, he fell into Lock Overpool. Mother nearly went mad at the time, and grandfather shut himself up and would not see any one for years. It is only lately that he has got over it. You see he had no other child, and he kept her in the house for some reason she was not a favorite of his."

"Then you inherit Queen's Marvel?" I asked.

"At some very far distant date I do," was Constance's response.

The evening which followed was all that was gay and entertaining. Miss Enderby was notwithstanding her plainness and peculiar physiognomy, the life and soul of the party. In the drawing room she gave us some music, and I sauntered over to her side. Suddenly she stopped in the midst of a sonnet, and her full greenish eyes met my face, smiling, and rose from her seat at the piano.

"I have played enough," she said. "I left the room. When I sought my room again that night my mind was still running on the strange personality of Miss Enderby. I flattered myself that I am not very susceptible to the control of other people's glances, but I could not conceal from myself that there was something in her eyes that exercised an odd influence over me, and I went to bed resolved to dismiss Miss Enderby and all her works from my thoughts. I was not long in falling asleep, but once again, as twenty-four hours before, I awoke suddenly with the same odd impulse forcing me to rise. There was no thought of resisting the impulse in my mind; I turned on the light, entered the sitting room as I had done on the previous night, and once more encountered the fixed gaze of my sinister visitor. Louisa Enderby was standing there, and smiled as I appeared.

"I have kept my word," she said. "Will you please sit down?"

I found myself impelled to sit. "You see," she said triumphantly, "that I am certain to have you in my power. You are wondering how I came here, but that does not matter. I warned you that you would do yourself no good by interfering with me. Yet you have used your influence today to put Constance against me. You are doubtless aware of the value of the young life which you seek to protect. I, as the only child of my mother, inherit nothing but a miserable pittance, and even

that is not mine while my mother lives."

I made no reply, and she continued to stare at me. "In order to influence you," she said, "I shall have to tell you my story. My father died when I was six years old; he died in a lunatic asylum, where I may follow him some day, but not yet, if I can help it. After his death I lived for a time in this house with my mother, but at the age of 7 I was sent to France to be educated. The lady who had charge of me was a profound student of mesmerism. She discovered that I was a medium, that I had extraordinary occult powers; she encouraged them and trained me. I became, after a year or two of her manipulations, a very valuable clairvoyant. Shortly after my 15th year I came back to England; my friend had died, my mother was anxious that I should live with her, and I came to the house which she now inhabits. My uncle, my mother's stepbrother, the heir to this vast property, had just been married. I hated him for living at all. But for him I should have been the heiress of Queen's Marvel. Perhaps you have heard that my Uncle Gerald died when out fishing, being found drowned in Lock Overpool, which is part of our river about two miles from here. Well, I will tell you how he really came by his death."

She hesitated; a curious blank look came over her face, a vague terror shone in her eyes. Her hands drew lines around her mouth. She crouched slightly downwards, became rigid for an instant, as if she were going to have a cataleptic fit, but making a great effort straightened herself once more.

"I asked her to drag my soul from me!" she asked hoarsely.

"I ask for no confidence," I responded. "All the same," I continued, looking firmly into her eyes and realizing that her will was weakening, "you will tell what I want to know."

"Yes," she panted. "I cannot help myself, the truth for the first time crosses my lips. The uncle whom I hated, who stood between me and this great property, did not meet his death by accident. I often went with him on his fishing expeditions. Although no one knew it, I was with him on that special day. He waded into deep water, and I sat on the bank and watched him. Suddenly the demon which seemed to have got into me at my birth took mastery of me.

"Uncle Gerald," I cried, "I wish you would get me that green fern which grows right in the depths of the rock above Lock Overpool."

"With pleasure," he replied. He returned to the shore, and without removing his waders went along the edge of rock which jutted out over the pool. His feet lay on the bank, his back turned to me; I followed him cautiously—madness doubtless in my soul—and I struck him a heavy blow with the iron instrument on the back of his head! He fell as if he were shot, bounded against a rock, and sank like a stone to the bottom of the pool. I threw his fishing rod on the water and rushed home. No one had seen me leave the house, and no one had seen me return. Not the faintest suspicion was ever attached to my name. I committed the crime for the sake of the property, but in the end fate went against me, for my uncle's widow, unknown to me, was about to give birth to a child. Three months after my uncle's death, Constance was born; she is in the direct succession and will inherit the bulk of the property. By and by she will marry, and her husband will take her name. Dr. Halifax, I mean to get Constance under my influence. I do not wish to commit murder a second time, but I must have Constance Perowne as my tool. If you dare to defy me you will suffer."

She stopped speaking and stared past me toward the wall. Her expression changed again, she looked at me in a coned manner.

"What have I been saying?" she queried. "Oh, yes, I came to tell you

to go away from here—to leave me alone."

Here I interrupted her and pointed to the door. "Leave me," I said sharply. "You have delivered your message; now go."

She went, backing slowly to the door, and pausing on the threshold.

In her hall dress, and looked at me vaguely; there was a peculiar expression in her eyes. It needed but a glance to show me that the girl was in a state of trance or mesmeric sleep. I went up and spoke to her. "Constance, what is the matter?" I asked. "What do you want?"

The place was not only dark and narrow, but also, I was quite certain, almost sound proof. It was a safe built of solid iron, and doubtless hermetically sealed. I guessed quickly what had happened. Miss Enderby had planned this terrible catastrophe, and had sent her to entrain me in the iron chest. I knew that unless I could find a prompt mode of exit my hours were numbered; nay, more, that I had but a few minutes to live. I would swiftly absorb the air in this narrow chamber, and in a very short time die of asphyxia. I felt in my pocket, took out a silver case which contained matches, and struck one. Already the confined space of my cell was buzzing in my ears, my heart throbbed wildly, and I panted as one does in the throes of suffocation. Glancing dizzily around I saw just over my head and behind the iron box what looked like a thin minute was myself again. Lightning another match, I found myself on the edge of some deep steps which went down into apparently bottomless depths, and descended carefully. Very charily I got to the last step, and then pursued my way along a very narrow and winding passage, which presently brought me to an old door thick with cobwebs. Seizing a bar of iron which happened to be on the floor, I pushed back the hump of the lock. A breath of cooler air greeted me, and I found myself out of doors and in the direction of the servants' part of the house. As quickly as possible I once more entered the house and regained my chamber by means of the servants' staircase.

When I went in, shut the door, and sat for some time thinking over the position of affairs.

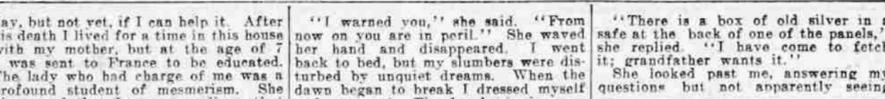
Whether Miss Enderby was mad or sane, my plain duty was to acquaint her relatives with the occurrence which had just taken place. It was not safe to have such a woman at large. Doubtless even now she thought I was dead, as I assuredly would have been but for the discovery of the secret door at the back of the safe. After resting for an hour, I changed my dress and went down to the hall room. I heard the merry strains of music, and entered the ballroom by one of the side doors. The first person I saw was Constance. She looked radiant in her white dress; the light of youth and happiness shone

in her hazel eyes. When she saw me she smiled; she was, I knew afterward, perfectly unconscious of the terrible deed she had just committed. I did not trouble her with any remark, but went further into the room, stepped up to an open window, and partly concealing myself behind a curtain, began to look around. I was now able to watch Miss Enderby without being seen myself. She was dancing with a handsome man, and talking to him brightly. But I observed that, notwithstanding her assumed mirth, she was the victim of an uneasy terror. Seen closer, her face looked haggard. She could not resist the temptation to stretch out one of my hands and lay it on her shoulder. She was talking to her partner at the time, and they were in the act of resuming the waltz. She turned, her eyes met mine, an expression of horror came over her face, and she retreated backward, gaining at me with distended pupils. I have not the least doubt that she thought I was a ghost—it was impossible for her to believe that I could have found my way out of my living tomb. With a shriek she sank the next moment in a sort of a fit at my feet. Some people rushed forward and bore the fainting woman out of the room. I followed and did what I could to restore her to consciousness. But when she finally opened her eyes I knew by their wild stare that the woman was mad.

Within a week from that date Miss Enderby died, without ever having a gleam of returning sanity. The shock of seeing me when she thought I had absorbed her was too much for her over-balanced brain, already too-excitable. With her death the necessity for disclosing her frightful secrets no longer remained, and I kept my own counsel.

As to Constance, she is my special friend, and to her dying day she will never know what a narrow escape she had from taking my life.

(Next week: "A Race With the Sun.")



The panel revolved slowly back.

me. Now, in my examinations of this curious chamber I had carefully investigated the contents of every panel except one; one that, to all appearance, had no spring, and I had not been able to open it. To this panel, Constance made her way. Without hesitation she pressed her finger against the ornamental trail of ivy which had been painted on the woodwork, and the panel revolved back, revealing inside a long and narrow safe made of solid iron. The safe was about three to four feet deep. Constance went in, and began to pull forward a heavy iron box which stood on a shelf.

"It is too heavy," she panted, turning to me.

"Let me help you," I said.

Just as if she were in an ordinary state, she stepped out of the safe, and I went in. She stood on the threshold, I stretched up my arm to take down the box, and as I was in the act of so doing, suddenly I found myself in complete darkness. The spring door of the panel had come to; I was shut up in a living tomb.

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Xmas Eating and Drinking

The insides of the whole family from Dad to Baby got lots of hard work to do this week. CASCARETS will help them. See that every member of the family gets a CASCARET every night. This will do the work easily and naturally and save a lot of sickness and suffering later on.

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Men's Ailments

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