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EMMA FRANCES DAWSON

(1851–1926)

An Itinerant House

*“Eternal longing with eternal pain,
Want without hope, and memory saddening all,
All congregated failure and despair
Shall wander there through some old maze of wrong.”*

“His wife?” cried Felipa.

“Yes,” I answered, unwillingly; for until the steamer brought Mrs. Anson I believed in this Mexican woman’s right to that name. I felt sorry for the bright eyes and kind heart that had cheered Anson’s lodgers through weary months of early days in San Francisco.

She burst into tears. None of us knew how to comfort her. Dering spoke first: “Beauty always wins friends.”

Between her sobs she repeated one of the pithy sayings of her language: “It is as easy to find a lover as to keep a friend, but as hard to find a friend as to keep a lover.”

“Yes,” said Volz, “a new friendship is like a new string to your guitar—you are not sure what its tone may prove, nor how soon it may break.”

“But at least its falsity is learned at once,” she sobbed.

“Is it possible,” I asked, “that you had no suspicion?”

“None. He told me—” She ended in a fresh gust of tears.

“The old story,” muttered Dering. “Marryatt’s skipper was right in thinking everything that once happened would come again somewhere.”

Anson came. He had left the new-comer at the Niantic, on pretense of putting his house in order. Felipa turned on him before we could go.

“Is this true?” she cried.

Without reply he went to the window and stood looking out. She sprang toward him, with rage distorting her face.

“Coward!” she screamed, in fierce scorn.

Then she fell senseless. Two doctors were called. One said

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she was dead. The other, at first doubtful, vainly tried hot sealing-wax and other tests. After thirty-six hours her funeral was planned. Yet Dering, once medical student, had seen an electric current used in such a case in Vienna, and wanted to try it. That night, he, Volz, and I offered to watch. When all was still, Dering, who had smuggled in the simple things needed, began his weird work.

"Is it not too late?" I asked.

"Every corpse," said he, "can be thus excited soon after death, for a brief time only, and but once. If the body is not lifeless, the electric current has power at any time."

Volz, too nervous to stay near, stood in the door open to the dark hall. It was a dreadful sight. The dead woman's breast rose and fell; smiles and frowns flitted across her face.

"The body begins to react finely," cried Dering, making Volz open the windows, while I wrapped hot blankets round Felipa, and he instilled clear coffee and brandy.

"It seems like sacrilege! Let her alone!" I exclaimed. "Better dead than alive!"

"My God! say not that!" cried Volz; "the nerve which hears is last to die. She may know all we say."

"Musical bosh!" I muttered.

"Perhaps not," said Dering; "in magnetic sleep that nerve can be roused."

The night seemed endless. The room gained an uncanny look, the macaws on the gaudy, old-fashioned wall-paper seemed fluttering and changing places. Volz crouched in a heap near the door. Dering stood by Felipa, watching closely. I paced the shadowy room, looked at the gleam of the moon on the bay, listened to the sighing wind in the gum-trees mocking the sea, and tried to recall more cheerful scenes, but always bent under the weight of that fearful test going on beside me. Where was her soul? Beyond the stars, in the room with us, or "like trodden snowdrift melting in the dark?" Volz came behind, startling me by grasping my elbow.

"Shall I not play?" he whispered. "Familiar music is remembrance changed to sound—it brings the past as perfume does. Gypsy music in her ear would be like holding wild flowers to her nostrils."

"Ask Dering," I said; "he will know best."

I heard him urging Dering.

"She has gypsy blood," he said; "their music will rouse her."

Dering unwillingly agreed. "But nothing abrupt—begin low," said he.

Vaguely uneasy, I turned to object; but Volz had gone for his violin. Far off arose a soft, wavering, sleepy strain, like a wind blowing over a field of poppies. He passed, in slow, dramatic style, through the hall, playing on the way. As he came in, oddly sustained notes trembled like sighs and sobs; these were by degrees subdued, though with spasmodic outbursts, amid a grand movement as of phantom shapes through cloud-land. One heart-rending phrase recurring as of one of the shadowy host striving to break loose, but beaten back by impalpable throngs, numberless grace-notes trailing their sparks like fireworks. No music of our intervals and our rhythms, but perplexing in its charm like a draught that maddens. Time, space, our very identities, were consumed in this white heat of sound. I held my breath. I caught his arm.

"It is too bold and distracting," I cried. "It is enough to kill us! Do you expect to torment her back? How can it affect us so?"

"Because," he answered, laying down his violin and wiping his brow, "in the gypsy minor scale the fourth and seventh are augmented. The sixth is diminished. The frequent augmentation of the fourth makes that sense of unrest."

"Bah! Technical terms make it no plainer," I said, returning to the window.

He played a whispered, merry discordance, resolving into click of castanets, laugh, and dance of a gypsy camp. Out of the whirl of flying steps and tremolo of tambourines rose a tender voice, asking, denying, sighing, imploring, passing into an over-ruling, long-drawn call that vibrated in widening rings to reach the farthest horizon—nay, beyond land or sea, "east of the sun, west of the moon." With a rush returned the wild jollity of men's bass laughter, women's shrill reply, the stir of the gypsy camp. This dropped behind vague, rolling measures of clouds and chaos, where to and fro floated grotesque goblins of grace-notes like the fancies of a madman; struggling, rising, falling, vain-reaching strains; fierce cries like commands. The music seemed another vital essence thrilling us with its own emotion.

“No more, no more!” I cried, half gasping, and grasping Volz’s arm. “What is it, Dering?”

He had staggered from the bed and was trying to see his watch. “It is just forty-four hours!” he said, pointing to Felipa.

Her eyes were open! We were alarmed as if doing wrong and silently watched her. Fifteen minutes later her lips formed one word:

“Idiots!”

Half an hour after she flung the violin from bed to floor, but would not speak. People began to stir about the house. The prosaic sounds jarred on our strained nerves. We felt brought from another sphere. Volz and I were going, but Felipa’s up-raised hand kept us. She sat up, looking a ghastly vision. Turning first toward me she quoted my words:

“‘Better dead than alive!’ True. You knew I would be glad to die. What right had you to bring me back? God’s curses on you! I was dead. Then came agony. I heard your voices. I thought we were all in hell. Then I found how by your evil cunning I was to be forced to live. It was like an awful nightmare. I shall not forget you, nor you me. These very walls shall remember—here, where I have been so tortured no one shall have peace! Fools! Leave me! Never come in this room again!”

We went, all talking at once, Dering angry at her mood; Volz, sorry he had not reached a soothing *pianissimo* passage; I, owning we had no right to make the test. We saw her but once more, when with a threatening nod toward us she left the house.

From that time a gloom settled over the place. Mrs. Anson proved a hard-faced, cold-hearted, Cape Cod woman, a scold and drudge, who hated us as much as we disliked her. Home-sick and unhappy, she soon went East and died. Within a year, Anson was found dead where he had gone hunting in the Saucelito woods, supposed a suicide; Dering was hung by the Vigilantes, and the rest were scattered on the four winds. Volz and I were last to go. The night before we sailed, he for Australia, I for New York, he said:

“I am sorry for those who come after us in this house.”

“Not knowing of any tragedy here,” I said, “they will not feel its influence.”

“They must feel it,” he insisted; “it is written in the Proverbs, ‘Evil shall not depart from his house.’”

Some years later, I was among passengers embarking at New York for California, when there was a cry of "Man overboard!" In the confusion of his rescue, among heartless and pitiful talk, I overheard one man declare that the drowned might be revived.

"Oh, yes!" cried a well-known voice behind me. "But they might not thank you."

I turned—to find Volz! He was coming out with Wynne, the actor. Enjoying our comradeship on the voyage, on reaching San Francisco we took rooms together, on Bush Street, in an old house with a large garden. Volz became leader of the orchestra, and Wynne, leading man at the same theatre. Lest my folks, a Maine deacon's family, should think I was on the road to ruin, I told in letters home only of the city missionary in the house.

Volz was hard worked. Wynne was not much liked. My business went wrong. It rained for many weeks; to this we laid the discomfort that grew to weigh on us. Volz wreaked his sense of it on his violin, adding to the torment of Wynne and myself, for to lonesome anxious souls "the demon in music" shows horns and cloven foot in the trying sounds of practice. One Sunday Volz played the "Witches Dance," the "Dream," and "The long, long weary day."

"I can bear it no longer!" said Wynne. "I feel like the haunted Matthias in 'The Bells.' If I could feel so when acting such parts, it would make my fortune. But I feel it only here."

"I think," said Volz, "it is the *gloria fonda* bush near the window; the scent is too strong." He dashed off Strauss' fretful, conflicting "Hurry and Delay."

"There, there! It is too much," said I. "You express my feelings."

He looked doubtful. "Put it in words," said he.

"How can I?" I said. "When our firm sent me abroad, I went sight-seeing among old palaces, whose Gobelin tapestries framed in their walls were faded to gray phantoms of pictures, but out of some the thrilling eyes followed me till I could not stay in their range. My feeling here is the uneasy one of being watched."

"Ha!" said Volz. "You remind me of Heine, when he wrote

from Livorno. He knew no Italian, but the old palaces whispered secrets unheard by day. The moon was interpreter, knew the lapidary style, translated to dialect of his heart."

"'Strange effects after the moon,'" mused Wynne. "That gives new meaning to Kent's threat: 'I'll make a sop o' the moonshine of you!'"

Volz went on: "Heine wrote: 'The stones here speak to me, and I know their mute language. Also, they seem deeply to feel what I think. So a broken column of the old Roman times, an old tower of Lombardy, a weather-beaten Gothic piece of a pillar understands me well. But I am a ruin myself, wandering among ruins.'"

"Perhaps, like Poe's hero," said I, "'I have imbibed shadows of fallen columns at Balbec, and Tadmor, and Persepolis, until my very soul has become a ruin.'"

"But I, too," said Wynne, "feel the unrest of Tannhauser:

'Alas! what seek I here, or anywhere,
Whose way of life is like the crumbled stair
That winds and winds about a ruined tower,
And leads no whither.'

"I am oppressed," Volz owned, "as if some one in my presence was suffering deeply."

"I feel," said Wynne, "as if the scene was not set right for the performance now going on. There is a hitch and drag somewhere—scene-shifters on a strike. Happy are you poets and musicians, who can express what is vague."

Volz laughed. "As in Liszt's oratorio of 'Christus,'" said he, "where a sharp, ear-piercing *sostenuto* on the piccolo-flute shows the shining of the star of Bethlehem." He turned to me. "Schubert's 'Wanderer' always recalls to me a house you and I know to be under a ban."

"Haunted?" asked Wynne. "Of all speculative theories, St. Martin's sends the most cold thrills up one's back. He said none of the dead come back, but some stay."

"What we Germans call *gebannt*—tied to one spot," said Volz. "But this is no ghost, only a proof of what a German psychologist holds, that the magnetic man is a spirit."

"Go on, 'and tell quaint lies'—I like them," said Wynne.

I told in brief outline, with no names, the tale Volz and I

knew, while we strolled to Telegraph Hill, passing five streets blocked by the roving houses common to San Francisco.

Wynne said: "They seem to have minds of their own, with their entrances and exits in a *moving* drama."

"Sort of 'Poor Jo's,'" said I.

"Castles in chess," said Volz.

"Io-like," said Wynne, "with a gad in their hearts that forever drives them on."

A few foreign sailors lounged on the hill top, looking at the view. The wind blew such a gale we did not stay. The steps we had known, cut in the side, were gone. Where the old house used to be, goats were browsing.

"Perchance we do inhabit it but now," mockingly cried Wynne; "methinks it must be so."

"Then," said Volz, thoughtfully, "it might be what Germans call 'far-working'—acted in distance—that affects us."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Do you know anything of her now?"

"I know she went to Mexico," said he; "that is all."

"What is 'far-working?'" asked Wynne. "If I could act in the distance, and here too—'what larks!'"

"Yes—'if,'" said I. "Think how all our lives turn on that pivot. Suppose Hawthorne's offer to join Wilkes' exploring expedition had been taken!"

"Only to wills that know no 'if' is 'far-working' possible," said Volz. "Substance or space can no more hinder this force than the one of mineral magnetism. Passavent joins it with pictures falling, or watches stopping at the time of a death. In sleep-walking, some kinds of illness, or nearness of death, the nervous ether is not so closely allied to its material conductors, the nerves, and may be loosened to act from afar, the surest where blood or feeling makes attraction or repulsion."

Wynne in the two voices of the play repeated:

"VICTOR.—Where is the gentleman?

CHISPE.—As the old song says:

'His body is in Segovia,
His soul is in Madrid.'

We could learn about the house we were in only that five families had moved in and out during the last year. Wynne

resolved to shake off the gloom that wrapped us. In struggles to defy it, he on the strength of a thousand-dollar benefit, made one payment on the house and began repairs.

On an off-night he was vainly trying to study a new part. Volz advised the relief to his nerves of reciting the dream scene from "The Bells," reminding him he had compared it with his restlessness there. Wynne denied it.

"Yes," said Volz, "where the mesmerizer forces Matthias to confess."

But Wynne refused, as if vexed, till Volz offered to show in music his own mood, and I agreed to read some rhymes about mine. Volz was long tuning his violin.

"I feel," he said, "as if the passers-by would hear a secret. Music is such a subtle expression of emotion—like flower-odor rolls far and affects the stranger. Harken! In Heine's 'Reisebilder,' as the cross was thrown ringing on the banquet table of the gods, they grew dumb and pale, and even paler till they melted in mist. So shall you at the long-drawn wail of my violin grow breathless, and fade from each other's sight."

The music closed round us, and we waited in its deep solitude. One brief, sad phrase fell from airy heights to lowest depths into a sea of sound, whose harmonious eddies as they widened breathed of passion and pain, now swooning, now reviving, with odd pauses and sighs that rose to cries of despair, but the tormenting first strain recurring fainter and fainter, as if drowning, drowning, drowned—yet floating back for repeated last plaint, as if not to be quelled, and closing, as it began, the whole.

As I read the name of my verses, Volz murmured: "*Les Nuits Blanches*. No. 4. Stephen Heller."

SLEEPLESS NIGHTS.

Against the garden's mossy paling
I lean, and wish the night away,
Whose faint, unequal shadows trailing
Seem but a dream of those of day.

Sleep burdens blossom, bud, and leaf,
My soul alone aspires, dilates,

Yearns to forget its care and grief—
 No bath of sleep its pain abates.

How dread these dreams of wide-eyed nights!
 What is, and is not, both I rue,
 My wild thoughts fly like wand'ring kites,
 No peace falls with this balmy dew.

Through slumb'rous stillness, scarcely stirred
 By sudden trembles, as when shifts
 O'er placid pool some skimming bird,
 Its Lethean bowl a poppy lifts.

If one deep draught my doubts could solve,
 The world might bubble down its brim,
 Like Cleopatra's pearl dissolve,
 With all my dreams within its rim.

What should I know but calm repose?
 How feel, recalling this lost sphere?
 Alas! the fabled poppy shows
 Upon its bleeding heart—a tear!

Wynne unwillingly began to recite: "I fear nothing, but dreams are dreams—"

He stammered, could not go on, and fell to the floor. We got him to bed. He never spoke sanely after. His wild fancies appalled us watching him all night.

"Avaunt Sathanas! That's not my cue," he muttered. "A full house to-night. How could Talma forget how the crowd looked, and fancy it a pack of skeletons? Tell Volz to keep the violins playing through this scene, it works me up as well as thrills the audience. Oh, what tiresome nights I have lately, always dreaming of scenes where rival women move, as in 'Court and Stage,' where, all masked, the king makes love to Frances Stewart before the queen's face! How do I try to cure it? 'And being thus frightened, swear a prayer or two and sleep again.' Madame, you're late; you've too little rouge; you'll look ghastly. We're not called yet; let's rehearse our scene. Now, then, I enter left, pass to the window. You cry 'is this true?' and faint. All crowd about. Quick curtain."

Volz and I looked at each other.

“Can our magnetism make his senses so sharp that he knows what is in our minds?” he asked me.

“Nonsense!” I said. “Memory, laudanum, and whisky.”

“There,” Wynne went on, “the orchestra is stopping. They’ve rung up the curtain. Don’t hold me. The stage waits, yet how can I go outside my door to step on dead bodies? Street and sidewalk are knee-deep with them. They rise and curse me for disturbing them. I lift my cane to strike. It turns to a snake, whose slimy body writhes in my hand. Trying to hold it from biting me, my nails cut my palm till blood streams to drown the snake.”

He awed us not alone from having no control of his thoughts, but because there came now and then a strange influx of emotion as if other souls passed in and out of his body.

“Is this hell?” he groaned. “What blank darkness! Where am I? What is that infernal music haunting me through all space? If I could only escape it I need not go back to earth—to that room where I feel choked, where the very wall paper frets me with its flaunting birds flying to and fro, mocking my fettered state. ‘Here, here in the very den of the wolf!’ Hallo, Benvolio, call-boy’s hunting you. Romeo’s gone on.

‘See where he steals—

Locked in some gloomy covert under key

Of cautionary silence, with his arms

Threaded, like these cross-boughs, in sorrow’s knot.’

What is this dread that weighs like a nightmare? ‘I do not fear; like Macbeth, I only inhabit trembling.’ ‘For one of them—she is in hell already, and burns, poor soul! For the other’—Ah! must I die here, alone in the woods, felled by a coward, Indian-like, from behind a tree? None of the boys will know. ‘I just now come from a whole world of mad women that had almost—what, is she dead?’ Poor Felipa!”

“Did you tell him her name?” I asked Volz.

“No,” said he. “Can one man’s madness be another’s real life?”

“Blood was spilt—the avenger’s wing hovered above my house,” raved Wynne. “What are these lights, hundreds of them—serpent’s eyes? Is it the audience—coiled, many-headed monster, following me round the world? Why do they

hiss? I've played this part a hundred times. 'Taught by Rage, and Hunger, and Despair?' Do they, full-fed, well-clothed, light-hearted, know how to judge me? 'A plague on both your houses!' What is that flame? Fire that consumes my vitals—spon-ta-neous combustion! It is then possible. Water! water!"

The doctor said there had been some great strain on Wynne's mind. He sank fast, though we did all we could. Toward morning I turned to Volz with the words:

"He is dead."

The city missionary was passing the open door. He grimly muttered:

"Better dead than alive!"

"My God! say not that!" cried Volz. "The nerve which hears is last to die. He may know——"

He faltered. We stood aghast. The room grew suddenly familiar. I tore off a strip of the gray tint on the walls. Under it we found the old paper with its bright macaws.

"Ah, ha!" Volz said; "will you now deny my theory of 'far-working?'"

Dazed, I could barely murmur: "Then people *can* be affected by it!"

"Certainly," said he, "as rubbed glasses gain electric power."

Within a week we sailed—he for Brazil, I for New York.

Several years after, at Sacramento, Arne, an artist I had known abroad, found me on the overland train, and on reaching San Francisco urged me to go where he lodged.

"I am low-spirited here," he said; "I don't know why."

I stopped short on the crowded wharf. "Where do you live?" I asked.

"Far up Market Street," said he.

"What sort of a house?" I insisted.

"Oh—nothing modern—over a store," he answered.

Reassured, I went with him. He lived in a jumble of easels, portfolios, paint, canvas, bits of statuary, casts, carvings, foils, red curtains, Chinese goatskins, woodcuts, photographs, sketches, and unfinished pictures. On the wall hung a scene from "The Wandering Jew," as we saw it at the Adelphi, in London, where in the Arctic regions he sees visions foreshadowing the future of his race. Under it was quoted:

—“All in my mind is confused, nor can I dis sever
 The mould of the visible world from the shape of my
 thought in me—
 The Inward and Outward are fused, and through them
 murmur forever
 The sorrow whose sound is the wind and the roar of the
 limitless sea.”

“Do you remember,” Arne asked, “when we saw that play?
 Both younger and more hopeful. How has the world used
 you? As for me, I have done nothing since I came here but that
 sketch, finished months ago. I have not lost ambition, but I
 feel fettered.”

“Absinthe?—opium?—tobacco?” I hinted.

“Neither,” he answered. “I try to work, but visions, widely
 different from what I will, crowd on me, as on the Jew in the
 play. Not the unconscious brain action all thinkers know, but
 a dictation from without. No rush of creative impulses, but a
 dragging sense of something else I ought to paint.”

“Briefly,” I said, “you are a ‘Haunted Man.’”

“Haunted by a willful design,” said he. “I feel as if some-
 thing had happened somewhere which I *must* show.”

“What is it like?” I asked.

“I wish I could tell you,” he replied. “But only odd bits
 change places, like looking in a kaleidoscope; yet all cluster
 around one centre.”

One day, looking over his portfolios, I found an old *Temple
 Bar*, which he said he kept for this passage—which he read to
 me—from T. A. Trollope’s “Artist’s Tragedy:”

“The old walls and ceilings and floors must be saturated with the ex-
 halations of human emotions! These lintels, doorways, and stairs have
 become, by long use and homeliness, dear to human hearts, and have
 become so intimately blended a portion of the mental furniture of
 human lives, that they have contributed their part to the formation
 of human characters. Such facts and considerations have gone to the
 fashioning of the mental habitudes of all of us. If all could have been
 recorded! If emotion had the property of photographing itself on the
 surfaces of the walls which had witnessed it! Even if only passion,
 when translated into acts, could have done so! Ah, what palimpsests!
 What deciphering of tangled records! What skillful separation of suc-
 cessive layers of ‘passionography!’”

"I know a room," said Arne, "thronged with acts that elbow me from my work and fill me with unrest."

I looked at him in mute surprise.

"I suppose," he went on, "such things do not interest you."

"No—yes," I stammered. "I have marked in traveling how lonely houses change their expression as you come near, pass, and leave them. Some frown, others smile. The Bible buildings had life of their own and human diseases; the priests cursed or blessed them as men."

"Houses seem to remember," said he. "Some rooms oppress us with a sense of lives that have been lived in them."

"That," I said, "is like Draper's theory of shadows on walls always staying. He shows how after a breath passes over a coin or key, its spectral outline remains for months after the substance is removed. But can the mist of circumstance sweeping over us make our vacant places hold any trace of us?"

"Why not? Who can deny it? Why do you look at me so?" he asked.

I could not tell him the sad tale. I hesitated; then said: "I was thinking of Volz, a friend I had, who not only believed in what Bulwer calls 'a power akin to mesmerism and superior to it, once called Magic, and that it might reach over the dead, so far as their experience on earth,' but also in animal magnetism from any distance."

Arne grew queerly excited. "If Time and Space exist but in our thoughts, why should it not be true?" said he. "Macdonald's lover cries, 'That which has been is, and the Past can never cease. She is mine, and I shall find her—what matters it when, or where, or how?'" He sighed. "In Acapulco, a year ago, I saw a woman who has been before me ever since—the centre of the circling, changing, crude fancies that trouble me."

"Did you know her?" I asked.

"No, nor anything about her, not even her name. It is like a spell. I must paint her before anything else, but I cannot yet decide how. I feel sure she has played a tragic part in some life-drama."

"Swinburne's queen of panthers," I hinted.

"Yes. But I was not in love. Love I must forego. I am not a man with an income."

"I know you are not a nincompoop!" I said, always trying to

change such themes by a jest. I could not tell him I knew a place which had the influence he talked of. I could not re-visit that house.

Soon after he told me he had begun his picture, but would not show it. He complained that one figure kept its back toward him. He worked on it till he fell ill. Even then he hid it. "Only a layer of passionography," he said.

I grew restless. I thought his mood affected mine. It was a torment as well as a puzzle to me that his whole talk should be of the influence of houses, rooms, even personal property that had known other owners. Once I asked him if he had anything like the brown coat Sheridan swore drew ill-luck to him.

"Sometimes I think," he answered, "it is this special brown paint artists prize which affects me. It is made from the best asphaltum, and that can be got only from Egyptian mummy-cloths. Very likely dust of the mummies is ground in it. I ought to feel their ill-will."

One day I went to Saucelito. In the still woods I forgot my unrest till coming to the stream where, as I suddenly remembered, Anson was found dead, a dread took me which I tried to lose by putting into rhyme. Turning my pockets at night, I crumpled the page I had written on, and threw it on the floor.

In uneasy sleep I dreamed I was again in Paris, not where I liked to recall being, but at "Bullier's," and in war-time. The bald, spectacled leader of the orchestra, leaning back, shamming sleep, while a dancing, stamping, screaming crowd wave tri-colored flags, and call for the "Chant du Depart." Three thousand voices in a rushing roar that makes the twenty thousand lights waver, in spasmodic but steady chorus:

"Les departs—parts—parts!
Les departs—parts—parts!
Les departs—parts—parts!"

Roused, I supposed by passing rioters, I did not try to sleep again, but rose to write a letter for the early mail. As I struck a light I saw, smoothed out on the table, the wrinkled page I had cast aside. The ink was yet wet on two lines added to each verse. A chill crept over me as I read:

FOREST MURMURS.

Across the woodland bridge I pass,
 And sway its three long, narrow planks,
 To mark how gliding waters glass
 Bright blossoms doubled ranks on ranks;
 And how through tangle of the ferns
 Floats incense from veiled flower-urns,
 What would the babbling brook reveal?
 What may these trembling depths conceal?
*Dread secret of the dense woods, held
 With restless shudders horror-spelled!*

How shift the shadows of the wood,
 As if it tossed in troubled sleep!
 Strange whispers, vaguely understood,
 Above, below, around me creep;
 While in the sombre-shadowed stream
 Great scarlet splashes far down gleam,
 The odd-reflected, stately shapes
 Of cardinals in crimson capes;
*Not those—but spectral pools of blood
 That stain these sands through strongest flood!*

Like blare of trumpets through black nights—
 Or sunset clouds before a storm—
 Are these red phantom water-sprites
 That mock me with fantastic form;
 With flitting of the last year's bird
 Fled ripples that its low flight stirred—
 How should these rushing waters learn
 Aught but the bend of this year's fern?
*The lonesome wood, with bated breath,
 Hints of a hidden blow—and death!*

I could not stay alone. I ran to Arne's room. As I knocked, the falling of some light thing within made me think he was stirring. I went in. He sat in the moonlight, back to me before his easel. The picture on it might be the one he kept secret. I would not look. I went to his side and touched him. He had been dead for hours! I turned the unseen canvas to the wall.

Next day I packed and planned to go East. I paid the landlady not to send Arne's body to the morgue, and watched it that night, when a sudden memory swept over me like a tidal wave. There was a likeness in the room to one where I had before watched the dead. Yes—there were the windows, there the doors—just here stood the bed, in the same spot I sat. What wildness was in the air of San Francisco!

To put such crazy thoughts to flight I would look at Arne's last work. Yet I wavered, and more than once turned away after laying my hand on it. At last I snatched it, placed it on the easel and lighted the nearest gas-burner before looking at it. Then—great heavens! How had this vision come to Arne? It was the scene where Felipa cursed us. Every detail of the room reproduced, even the gay birds on the wall-paper, and her flower-pots. The figures and faces of Dering and Volz were true as hers, and in the figure with averted face which Arne had said kept its back to him, I knew—myself! What strange insight had he gained by looking at Felipa? It was like the man who trembled before the unknown portrait of the Marquise de Brinvilliers.

How long I gazed at the picture I do not know. I heard, without heeding, the doorbell ring and steps along the hall. Voices. Some one looking at rooms. The landlady, saying this room was to let, but unwilling to show it, forced to own its last tenant lay there dead. This seemed no shock to the stranger.

"Well," said her shrill tones, "poor as he was he's better dead than alive!"

The door opened as a well-known voice cried: "My God! say not that! The nerve which hears is last to die—"

Volz stood before me! Awe-struck, we looked at each other in silence. Then he waved his hand to and fro before his eyes.

"Is this a dream?" he said. "There," pointing to the bed; "you"—to me; "the same words—the very room! Is it our fate?"

I pointed to the picture and to Arne. "The last work of this man, who thought it a fancy sketch?"

While Volz stood dumb and motionless before it, the landlady spoke:

"Then you know the place. Can you tell what ails it? There

have been suicides in this room. No one prospers in the house. My cousin, who is a house-mover, warned me against taking it. He says before the store was put under it here it stood on Bush Street, and before that on Telegraph Hill."

Volz clutched my arm. "It is 'The Flying Dutchman' of a house!" he cried, and drew me fast down stairs and out into a dense fog which made the world seem a tale that was told, blotting out all but our two slanting forms, bent as by what poor Wynne would have called "a blast from hell," hurrying blindly away. I heard the voice of Volz as if from afar: "The magnetic man *is* a spirit!"

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