

all I could say, was that she was a beautiful widow with a small income, and that she and Claud were devoted to each other.

"Yes," said Mrs. Morton, scornfully, "like all other men, the moment you see a pretty face you inquire no further. I quite tremble for Claud."

When I reflected how little I really knew about Mrs. Despard, I felt abashed and guilty. However, Claud was a full grown man, and no fraternal counsel was likely to turn him aside from his desire.

In the course of a few days he wrote me that he was to be married on the 5th of the next month. I made arrangements which would enable me to go to the wedding; but three days before the date named I heard again from him. The wedding was postponed for a fortnight. He gave no reason for the delay; but he said he was anxious to see me; and to-morrow he should run down to my home.

He came as promised. I was aghast when I saw him. He looked worn, haggard, wretched. My first thought was that business had gone wrong with him. His looks might well be those of a man on the brink of ruin. After the first greeting I at once took him to my study in order to be put out of suspense. Just as I was about to begin my anxious questions, he turned to me.

"Frank, old fellow," he said, imploringly, and with a faint attempt at a smile, "don't laugh at me."

Laugh! That was the last thing that I was likely to do. I pressed his hand in silence.

"You won't believe me, I know," he continued. "I can't believe it myself. Frank, I am haunted."

"Haunted!" I was bound to smile, not from any disposition toward merriment, but in order to show the poor boy the absurdity of his idea.

"Yes, haunted. The word sounds ridiculous, but I can use no other. Haunted."

"What haunts you?"

He came closer to me and grasped my arm. His voice sank to a hoarse whisper.

"A horrible, ghastly, grewsome thing. It is killing me. It comes between me and my happiness. I have fought and struggled against this phantom terror. I have reasoned calmly with myself. I have laughed my own folly to scorn. In vain—in vain. It goes, but it comes again."

"Overwork," I said, "insomnia, too many cigars, late hours; and had you been a drinking man I should add, too much stimulant, too little food, anxiety, perhaps. Have you anything on your mind—any special worry?"

"Of course I have," he said, pettishly. "Did I not tell you it is killing me?"

"What is killing you?"

He rose and paced the room excitedly; then suddenly he stopped short, and once more clutched my arm.

"A face," he said, wildly—"a man's face; a fearful, white face that comes to me; a horrible mask, with features drawn as in agony—ghastly, pale, hideous! Death, or approaching death, violent death, written in every line. Every feature distorted. Eyes starting

from the head. Every cord in the throat standing out, strained as by mortal struggle. Long, dark hair lying flat and wet. Thin lips moving and working—lips that are cursing, although I hear no sound. Why should this come to me—why to me? Who is this dead man whose face wrecks my life? Frank, my brother, if this is disease or madness, cure me; if not, let me die."

His words, his gestures, sent a cold thrill through me. He was worse, far worse, than I had feared.

"Claud," I said, "you are talking nonsense; cure you! of course I mean to cure you. Now sit down, collect yourself, and tell me how this hallucination comes."

"Comes! How does it come? It gathers in corners of the room; it forms and takes shape; it glares at me out of the wall; it looks up at me from the floor. Ever the same fearful, white, dying face, threatening, cursing, sometimes mocking. Why does it come?"

I had already told the poor fellow why it came, but it was no use repeating my words. "Tell me when you see it," I asked; "at night—in darkness?"

He hesitated, and seemed troubled. "No, never at night. In broad day light only. That to me is the crowning terror, the ghastliness of it. At night I could call it a dream. Frank, believe me, I am no weak fool. For weeks I have borne with it. At last it has conquered me. Send it away; or I shall go mad!"

"I'll send it away, old boy, never fear. Tell me: can you see it now?"

"No; thank God, not now."

"Have you seen it to-day?"

"No; to-day I have been free from it."

"Well, you'll be free from it to-morrow, and the next day, and the next. It will be gone forever before you leave me. Now come and see Mary and the babies. I haven't even asked you how Mrs. Despard is."

A curious look crossed his face. "I think she grows more beautiful every day," he said. Then he seized my hand. "Oh, Frank," he exclaimed, "rid me of this horror, and I shall be the happiest man in the world."

"All right," I answered, perhaps with more confidence than I felt.

Although I made light of it to my patient, his state greatly alarmed me. I hastened to put him under the strictest and most approved treatment. I enforced the most rigid sumptuary laws, made him live on plain food, and doctored his consumption of tobacco unmercifully. In a few days I was delighted to find that my diagnosis of the case was correct. Claud was rapidly recovering tone. In a week's time he seemed restored to health.

The days went by. As yet Claud had said nothing about leaving; yet, unless the date was once more adjourned, he was to be married on the 19th. I did not counsel him to postpone the happy day. He was by now so well that I thought he could not do better than adhere to his arrangement. A month's holiday, spent in the society of the woman he loved, would, I felt certain, complete his cure, and banish forever that grisly intruder begotten of disorganized nerves.