

The Master of Hollow Grange

by Sax Rohmer, 1883-1959

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I

Jack Dillon came to Hollow Grange on a thunderous black evening when an ebony cloud crested the hill-top above, and, catching the upflung rays of sunset, glowed redly like the pall of Avalon in the torchlight. Through the dense ranks of firs cloaking the slopes a breeze, presaging the coming storm, whispered evilly, and here in the hollow the birds were still.

The man who had driven him from the station glanced at him, with a curiosity thinly veiled.

“What about your things, sir?” he inquired.

Dillon stared rather blankly at the ivy-covered lodge, which, if appearances were to be trusted, was unoccupied.

“Wait a moment; I will ring,” he said curtly; for this furtive curiosity, so ill concealed, had manifested itself in the manner of the taxi-driver from the moment that Dillon had directed him to drive to Hollow Grange.

He pushed open the gate and tugged at the iron ring which was suspended from the wall of the lodge. A discordant clangour rewarded his efforts, the cracked note of a bell that spoke from somewhere high up in the building, that seemed to be buffeted to and fro from fir to fir, until it died away, mournfully, in some place of shadows far up the slope. In the voice of the bell there was something furtive, something akin to the half-veiled curiosity in the eyes of the man who stood watching him; something fearful, too, in both, as though man and bell would whisper: “Return! Beware of disturbing the dwellers in this place.”

But Dillon angrily recalled himself to the realities. He felt that these ghostly imaginings were born of the Boche-maltreated flesh, were products of lowered tone; that he would have perceived no query in the glance of the taxi-driver and heard no monkish whisper in the clang of the bell had he been fit, had he been fully recovered from the effects of his wound. Monkish whisper? Yes, that was it—his mind had supplied, automatically, an aptly descriptive term: the cracked bell spoke with the voice of ancient monasteries, had in it the hush of cloisters and the sigh of renunciation.

“Hang it all!” muttered Dillon. “This won’t do.”

A second time he awoke the ghostly bell-voice, but nothing responded to its call; man, bird, and beast had seemingly deserted Hollow Grange. He was conscious of a sudden nervous irritation, as he turned brusquely and met the inquiring glance of the taxi-man.

“I have arrived before I was expected,” he said. “If you will put my things in the porch here I will go up to the house and get a servant to fetch them. They will be safe enough in the meantime.”

His own words increased his irritability; for were they not in the nature of an apology on behalf of his silent and unseen host? Were they not a concession to that nameless query in the man’s stare? Moreover, deep within his own consciousness, some vague thing was stirring; so that, the man dismissed and promptly departing, Dillon stood glancing from the little stack of baggage in the lodge porch up the gloomy, narrow, and over-arched drive, indignantly aware that he also carried a question in his eyes.

The throb of the motor mounting the steep, winding lane grew dim and more dim until it was borne away entirely upon the fitful breeze. Faintly he detected the lowing of cattle in some distant pasture; the ranks of firs whispered secretly one to another, and the pall above the hills grew blacker and began to extend over the valley.

Amid that ominous stillness of nature he began to ascend the cone-strewn path. Evidently enough, the extensive grounds had been neglected for years, and that few pedestrians, and fewer vehicles, ever sought Hollow Grange was demonstrated by the presence of luxuriant weeds in the carriage way. Having proceeded for some distance, until the sheer hillside seemed to loom over him like the wall of a tower, Dillon paused, peering about in the ever-growing darkness. He was aware of a physical chill; certainly no ray of sunlight ever penetrated to this tunnel through

the firs. Could he have mistaken the path and be proceeding, not toward the house, but away from it and into the midnight of the woods mantling the hills?

There was something uncomfortable in that reflection; momentarily he knew a childish fear of the darkening woods, and walked forward rapidly, self-assertively. Ten paces brought him to one of the many bends in the winding road—and there, far ahead, as though out of some cavern in the very hillside, a yellow light shone.

He pressed on with greater assurance until the house became visible. Now he perceived that he had indeed strayed from the carriage-sweep in some way, for the path that he was following terminated at the foot of a short flight of moss-covered brick steps. He mounted the steps and found himself at the bottom of a terrace. The main entrance was far to his left and separated from the terrace by a neglected lawn. That portion of the place was Hanoverian and ugly, whilst the wing nearest to him was Tudor and picturesque. Excepting the yellow light shining out from a sunken window almost at his feet, no illuminations were visible about the house, although the brewing storm had already plunged the hollow into premature night.

Indeed, there was no sign of occupancy about the strange-looking mansion, which might have hidden forgotten for centuries in the horseshoe of the hills. He had sought for rest and quiet; here he should find them. The stillness of the place was of that sort which almost seems to be palpable; that can be seen and felt. A humid chill arose apparently from the terrace, with its stone pavings outlined in moss, crept up from the wilderness below and down from the fir-woods above.

A thought struggled to assume form in his mind. There was something reminiscent about this house of the woods, this silent house which struck no chord of human companionship, in which was no warmth of life or love. Suddenly, the thought leapt into complete being.

This was the palace of the sleeping beauty to which he had penetrated. It was the fairy-tale dear to childhood which had been struggling for expression in his mind ever since he had emerged from the trees on to the desolate terrace. With the departure of the station cab had gone the last link with to-day, and now he was translated to the goblin realm of fable.

He had crossed the terrace and the lawn, and stood looking through an open French window into a room that evidently adjoined the hall. A great still darkness had come, and on a little table in the room a reading-lamp was burning. It had a quaint, mosaic shade which shut in much of the light, but threw a luminous patch directly on a heap of cushions strewn upon the floor. Face downward in this silken nest, her chin resting upon her hands and her elfin curly brown hair tousled bewitchingly, lay a girl so audaciously pretty that Dillon hesitated to accept the evidence of his eyes.

The crunching of a piece of gravel beneath his foot led to the awakening of the sleeping beauty. She raised her head quickly and then started upright, a lithe, divinely petite figure in a green velvet dress, having short fur-trimmed sleeves that displayed her pretty arms. For an instant it was a startled nymph that confronted him; then a distracting dimple appeared in one fair cheek, and:

“Oh! how you frightened me!” said the girl, speaking with a slight French accent which the visitor found wholly entrancing. “You must be Jack Dillon? I am Phryné.”

Dillon bowed.

"How I envy Hyperides!" he said.

A blush quickly stained the lovely face of Phryn , and the roguish eyes were lowered, whereby the penitent Dillon, who had jested in the not uncommon belief that a pretty girl is necessarily brainless, knew that the story of the wonder-woman of Thespi  was familiar to her modern namesake.

"I am afraid," declared Phryn , with a return of her mischievous composure, "that you are very wicked."

Dillon, who counted himself a man of the world, was temporarily at a loss for a suitable rejoinder. The cause of his hesitancy was twofold. In the first place he had reached the age of disillusionment, whereat a man ceases to believe that a perfectly lovely woman exists in the flesh, and in the second place he had found such a fabulous being in a house of gloom and silence to which, a few moments ago, he had deeply regretted having come.

His father, who had accepted the invitation from an old college friend on his son's behalf, had made no mention of a Phryn , whereas Phryn  clearly took herself for granted and evidently knew all about Jack Dillon. The latter experienced a volcanic change of sentiment; Hollow Grange was metamorphosed, and assumed magically the guise of a Golden House, an Emperor's pleasure palace, a fair, old-world casket holding this lovely jewel. But who was she?—and in what spirit should he receive her bewildering coquetries?

"I trust," he said, looking into the laughing eyes, "that you will learn to know me better."

Phryn  curtsied mockingly.

"You have either too much confidence in your own character or not enough in my wisdom," she said.

Dillon stepped into the room, and, stooping, took up a book which lay open upon the floor. It was a French edition of *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius.

The hollow was illuminated by a blinding flash of lightning, and Phryn 's musical laughter was drowned in the thunder that boomed and crashed in deepening peals over the hills. In a sudden tropical torrent the rain descended, as Dr. Kassimere entered the room.

II

Jack Dillon leant from his open window and looked out over the valley to where a dull red glow crowned the hill-top. There was a fire somewhere in the neighbourhood of the distant town; probably a building had been struck by lightning. The storm had passed, although thunder was still audible dimly, like the roll of muffled drums or a remote bombardment. Stillness had reclaimed Hollow Grange.

He was restless, uneasy; he sought to collate his impressions of the place and its master. Twelve years had elapsed since his one previous meeting with Dr. Kassimere, and little or no memory of the man had remained. So much had intervened; the war—and Phryn . Now that he was alone and could collect his

ideas he knew of what Dr. Kassimere's gaunt, wide-eyed face had reminded him: it was of Thoth, the Ibis-headed god whose figure he had seen on the walls of the temples during his service in Egypt.

"Kassimere was always a queer fish, Jack," his father had said; "but most of his eccentricities were due to his passion for study. The Grange is the very place Sir Francis" (the specialist) "would have chosen for your convalescence, and you'll find nothing dangerously exciting in Kassimere's atmosphere!"

Yet there was that about Dr. Kassimere which he did not and could not like; his quietly cordial welcome, his courteous regret that his guest's arrival by an earlier train (a circumstance due to reduced service) had led to his not being met at the station; the charming simplicity with which he confessed to the smallness of his household, and to the pleasure which it afforded him to have the son of an old chum beneath his roof—all these kindly overtures had left the bird-like eyes cold, hard, watchful, calculating. The voice was the voice of a friend and a gentleman, but the face was the face of Thoth.

The mystery of Phryn  was solved in a measure. She was Dr. Kassimere's adopted daughter and the orphaned child of Louis Devant, the famous Paris cartoonist, who had died penniless in 1911, at the height of his success. In his selection of a name for her, the brilliant and dissolute artist had exhibited a breadth of mind which Phryn  inherited in an almost embarrassing degree.

Her mental equipment was bewildering: the erudition of an Oxford don spiced with more than a dash of Boul' Mich', which made for complexity. Her curious learning was doubtless due to the setting of a receptive mind amid such environment, but how she had retained her piquant vivacity in Hollow Grange was less comprehensible. The servants formed a small and saturnine company, only two—the housekeeper, Mrs. Harman, a black and forbidding figure, and Madame Charny, a French companion—sleeping in the house. Gawly, a surly creature who neglected the gardens and muttered savagely over other duties, together with his wife, who cooked, resided at the lodge. There were two maids, who lived in the village...

The glow from the distant fire seemed to be reflected upon the firs bordering the terrace below; then Dillon, watching the dull, red light, remembered that Dr. Kassimere's laboratory adjoined the tiny chapel, and that, though midnight drew near, the doctor was still at work there.

Owls and other night birds hooted and shrieked among the trees and many bats were in flight. He found himself thinking of the pyramid bats of Egypt, and of the ibis-headed Thoth who was the scribe of the under-world.

Dr. Kassimere had made himself medically responsible for his case, and had read attentively the letters which Dillon had brought from his own physician. He was to prescribe on the following day, and to-night the visitor found Morpheus a treacherous god. Furtive activities disturbed the house, or so it seemed to the sleepless man tossing on his bed; alert intelligences within Hollow Grange responded to the night-life of the owls without, and he seemed to lie in the shadow of a watchfulness that never slumbered.

III

"There's many a fine walk hereabouts," said the old man seated in the arm-chair in the corner of the Threshers' Inn bar-parlour.

Dillon nodded encouragingly.

"There's Ganton-on-the-Hill," continued the ancient. "You can see the sea from there in clear weather; and many's the time I've heard the guns in France from Upper Crobury of a still night. Then, four mile away, there's the haunted Grange, though nobody's allowed past the gate. Not as nobody wants to be," he added, reflectively.

"The haunted Grange?" questioned Dillon. "Where is that?"

"Hollow Grange?" said the old man. "Why, it lies——"

"Oh, Hollow Grange—yes! I know where Hollow Grange is, but I was unaware that it was reputed to be haunted."

"Ah," replied the other, pityingly, "you're new to these parts; I see that the minute I set eyes on you. Maybe you was wounded in France, and you're down here to get well, like?"

"Quite so. Your deductive reasoning is admirable."

"Ah," said the sage, chuckling with self-appreciation, "I ain't lived in these here parts for nigh on seventy-five years without learning to use my eyes, I ain't. For seventy-four years and seven months," he added proudly, "I ain't been outside this here county where I was born, and I can use my eyes, I can; I know a thing I do, when I see it. Maybe it was providence, as you might say, what brought you to the Threshers to-day."

"Quite possibly," Dillon admitted.

"He was just such another as you," continued the old man with apparent irrelevance. "You don't happen to be stopping at Hainingham Vicarage?"

"No," replied Dillon.

"Ah! he was stopping at Hainingham Vicarage and he'd been wounded in France. How he got to know Dr. Kassimere I can't tell you; not at parson's, anyway. Parson won't never speak to him. Only last Sunday week he preached agin him; not in so many words, but I could see his drift. He spoke about them heathen women livin' on an island—sort of female Robinson Crusoes, I make 'em out, I do—as saves poor shipwrecked sailors from the sea and strangles of 'em ashore."

Dillon glanced hard at the voluble old man.

"The sirens?" he suggested, conscious of a sudden hot surging about his heart.

"Ah, that's the women I mean."

"But where is the connection?"

"Ah, you're new to these parts, you are. That Dr. Kassimere he keeps a siren down in Hollow Grange. They see her—these here strangers (same as the shipwrecked sailors parson told about)—and it's all up with 'em."

Dillon stifled a laugh, in which anger would have mingled with contempt. To think that in the twentieth century a man of science was like to meet with the fate of Dr. Dee in the days of Elizabeth! Truly there were dark spots in England. But could he credit the statement of this benighted elder that a modern clergyman had

actually drawn an analogy between Phryné Devant and the sirens? It was unbelievable.

“What was the unhappy fate,” he asked, masking his intolerance, “of the young man staying at the Vicarage?”

“The same as them afore him,” came the startling reply; “for he warn’t the first, and maybe”—with a shrewd glance of the rheumy old eyes—“he won’t be the last. Them sirens has the powers of darkness. I know, ’cause I’ve seen one—her at the Grange; and though I’m an old man, nigh on seventy-five, I’ll never forget her face, I won’t, and the way she smiled at me!”

“But,” persisted Dillon, patiently, “what became of this particular young man, the one who was staying at the Vicarage?”

The ancient sage leant forward in his chair and tapped the speaker upon the knee with the stem of his clay pipe.

“Ask them as knows,” he said, with impressive solemnity. “Nobody else can tell you!”

And, having permitted an indiscreet laugh to escape him, not another word on the subject could Dillon induce the old man to utter, he strictly confining himself, in his ruffled dignity, to the climatic conditions and the crops.

When Dillon, finally, set out upon the four-mile walk back to the Grange, he realised, with annoyance, that the senile imaginings of his bar-parlour acquaintance lingered in his mind. That Dr. Kassimere dwelt outside the social life of the county he had speedily learnt; but for this he had been prepared. That he might possibly be, not a recluse, but a pariah, was a new point of view. Trivial things, to which hitherto he had paid scant attention, began to marshal themselves as evidence. The two village “helpers,” he knew, received extravagant wages, because, as Phryné had confessed, they had “found it almost impossible to get girls to stay.” Why?

Of the earlier guest, or guests, who had succumbed to the siren lure of Phryné, he had heard no mention. Why? Save at meal-times he rarely saw his host, who frankly left him to the society of Phryné. Again—why? Dr. Kassimere, in his jealously locked laboratory, was at work day and night upon his experiments. What were these experiments? What was the nature of the doctor’s studies?

He had now been for nearly three weeks at Hollow Grange, and never had Dr. Kassimere spoken of his work. And Phryné? The sudden, new thought of Phryné was so strange, so wonderful and overwhelming, that it reacted physically; and he pulled up short in the middle of a field-path, as though some palpable obstacle blocked the way.

Why had he set out alone that day, when all other days had been spent in the girl’s company? He had deliberately sought solitude—because of Phryné; because he wanted to think calmly, judicially, to arraign himself before his own judgment, remote from the witchery of her presence. He had tried to render his mind a void, wherein should linger not one fragrant memory of her delicate beauty and charm, so that he might return unbiased to his judgment. He had returned; he was judged.

He loved Phryné madly, insanely. His future, his life, lay in the hollow of her hands.

IV

"Yes," admitted Phryn , "it is true. There were two of them."

"And"—Dillon hesitated—"were they in love with you?"

"Of course," said Phryn , naively.

"But you——"

Phryn  shook her curly head.

"I rather liked the French boy, but I do not believe anything that a Frenchman says to a girl; and Harry, the other, was handsome, but so silly..."

"So you did not love either of them?"

"Of course not."

"But," said Dillon, and impulsively he swept her into his arms, "you are going to love me."

One quick upward glance she gave, but instantly lowered her eyes and withheld her bewitching face from him.

"Am I?" she whispered. "You are so conceited."

But as she spoke the words he kissed her, and she surrendered sweetly, nestling her head against his shoulder for a moment. Then, leaping back, bright-eyed and blushing, she turned and ran like a startled fawn across the terrace and into the house.

He saw no more of her until dinner-time, and spent the interval in a kind of suspended consciousness that was new and perturbing. Within him life pulsed at delirious speed, but the universe seemed to have slowed upon its course so that each hour became as two. Throughout dinner, Phryn  was deliciously shy to the point of embarrassment; and Dillon, who several times surprised the bird-eyes of Dr. Kassimere studying the girl's face, detained his host, and being a young man of orderly mind, formally asked his consent to an engagement.

The doctor's joy was seemingly so unfeigned that Dillon almost liked him for a moment. He placed no obstacle in the path of the suitor for his adopted daughter's hand, graciously expressing every confidence in the future. His joy was genuine enough, Dillon determined; but from what source did it actually spring? The Thoth-like eyes were exultant, and all the old mistrust poured back in a wave upon the younger man. Was this distrust becoming an obsession? Why should he eternally be seeking an ulterior motive for every act in this man's life?

He went to look for Phryn , and found her in the spot where he had first seen her, prone in a nest of cushions. She sprang up as he entered the room, and glanced at him in that new way which set his heart leaping...

And because of the magic of her presence, it was not until later, when he stood alone in his own room, that he could order the facts gleaned from her.

There was some grain of truth in the story of the ancient gossip at the Threshers after all. A young French lieutenant of artillery had received an invitation to spend a leave at Hollow Grange. His Gallic soul had been fired by Phryn 's beauty, and although his advances had been met with rebuff, he had asked Dr. Kassimere's permission to pay his court to the girl. On the same evening he had departed hurriedly, and Phryn  had supposed, since the doctor never referred to him again,

that he had been sent about his business. Then came a strange letter, which Phryn  had shown to Dillon. Its tone throughout was of passionate anger, and one passage recurred again and again to Dillon's mind. "I would give my life for you gladly," it read, "but my soul belongs to God..."

Phryn  had counted him demented and Dr. Kassimere had agreed with her. But there was Harry Waynwright, the nephew of the vicar of St. Peter's at Hainingham. An accidental meeting with Phryn  had led to a courtesy call—and the inevitable. It had all the seeming of a case of love-sickness, and the unhappy youth grew seriously ill. From pestering her daily he changed his tactics to studiously avoiding her, until, meeting her in the village one morning, he greeted her with, "I can't do it, Phryn ! tell him I can't do it. He can rely upon my word; but I'm going away to try to forget!"

Dr. Kassimere had professed entire ignorance of the meaning of the words. A faint shadow had crossed Phryn 's face as she spoke of these matters, but, as a result of her extraordinary beauty, she was somewhat callous where languishing admirers were concerned, and she had dismissed the gloomy twain with a shrug of her charming shoulders.

"Mad!" she had said. "It seems my fate always to meet mad-men!"

The night silence had descended again upon Hollow Grange, disturbed only by the mournful cry of the owl and the almost imperceptible note of the bat. But to the nervous alertness of Dillon, a deep unrest seemed to stir within the house; yet—an unrest not physical but spiritual; it was as the shadow of a sleepless watcher—a shadow creeping over his soul.

What was the explanation lying at the back of it all? Vainly he sought for a theory, however wild, however improbable, that should embrace all the facts known to him and serve either to banish his black doubts or to focus them. Upon one thing he had determined: There was some thing or some one in Hollow Grange that he *feared*, some centre from whence fear radiated.

Phryn , for one fleeting moment, had revealed to him that she, too, had known this formless dread, but only latterly; probably from lack of a more definite date, she had spoken of this fear as first visiting her at about the time of the Frenchman's advent.

"Slowly, he has changed towards me," she had whispered, referring to Dr. Kassimere. "He watches me, sometimes, in a strange way. Oh, he has been so good, so very kind and good, but—I shall be glad when—"

Could some part of the mystery be explained away by the doctor's increasing absorption in his studies, which led him to regard the charge of a ward, and a wayward one at that, as unduly onerous and disturbing? Might it not fairly be supposed that ignorant superstition and the ravings of unrequited passion accounted for the rest?

At the nature of Dr. Kassimere's studies he could not even guess. The greater number of the works in the library related to mysticism in one form or another, although there was a sprinkling of exact science to leaven the whole.

"He can rely upon my word," Waynwright had said. Regarding what, or regarding whom, had he given his word?

The cry of a night-hawk came, as if in answer; the hoot of an owl, as if in mockery. Out beyond the terrace a dull red light showed from Dr. Kassimere's laboratory.

V

Enlightenment came about in this fashion—seeking to quench a feverish thirst, Dillon discovered that no glass had been left in his room. He determined to fetch one from the buffet cupboard downstairs. Softly, in slippers, he descended the stairs and was crossing the hallway when he kicked something—a small book, he thought—that lay there upon the floor. Groping, he found it, slipped it into the pocket of his dressing-gown, and entered the dining-room. He found a tumbler without difficulty, in the dark, noted the presence of a heavy, oppressive odour, and returned upstairs. Now he made another discovery. He had forgotten the nightly draught of medicine prescribed by Dr. Kassimere; a new unopened phial stood upon the dressing-table.

He mixed himself a mild whisky and soda from the decanter and siphon which his host's hospitality caused nightly to be placed in his room, and then, seized by a sudden thought, took out the little book which he had found in the hall.

It was a faded manuscript, in monkish Latin; a copy of an unpublished work of Paracelsus. Many passages had been rendered into English, and the translations, in Dr. Kassimere's minute, cramped writing, were interposed between the bound pages. In these again were interpolated marginal notes, some in the shape of unintelligible symbols, others in that of chemical formulæ. Several passages were marked in red ink. And, having perused the first of these which he chanced upon, a clammy moisture broke out upon his skin, accompanied by so marked a nervous trembling that he was forced to seat himself upon the bed.

The secret of this man's ghastly life-work was in his hands; he knew, now, what bargain Dr. Kassimere had proposed to the Frenchman and to the other; he knew why he had adopted the lovely daughter of Louis Devant—and he knew why he, Jack Dillon, had been invited to Hollow Grange. That such a ghoul in human shape could live and have his being amid ordinary mankind was a stupendous improbability which, ten minutes earlier, he would have laughed to scorn.

"My God!" he whispered. "My God!"

His glance fell upon the unopened phial on his dressing-table, and from his soul a silent thanksgiving rose to heaven that he had left that potion untasted. He realised that his own case differed from those of his predecessors in two particulars: He was actually in residence under Dr. Kassimere's roof and receiving treatment from the man's hands. No option was to be offered to *him*; the great experiment, the *Magnum Opus*, was to be performed without his consent!

And Phryné!—Phryné, the other innocent victim of this fiend's lust for knowledge! The thought restored his courage. More than life itself depended upon his coolness and address; he must act, at once. The monstrous possibility hinted at by von Hohenheim—in his earliest published work, *Practica D. Theophrasti*

Paracelsi, printed at Augsburg in 1529, was, in this hideous pamphlet, elaborated and brought within the bounds of practical experiment.

He crept to the door, opened it, and stood listening intently. That silence which seemed like a palpable cloud—a cloud masking the presence of one who watched—lay over the house. Slowly he descended to the hall and dropped the horror which the evil genius of von Hohenheim had conceived, upon the spot where it had lain when his foot had discovered it.

A creaking sound warned him of some one's approach, and he had barely time to slip behind some draperies ere a cowed figure bearing a lantern came out into the hall. It was Dr. Kassimere, wearing a loose gown having a monkish hood—and he was searching for something.

Nothing in his experience—not the blood-lust seen in the eyes of men in battle—had prepared him for that which transfigured the face of Dr. Kassimere. The strange semblance of Thoth was there no more; it had given place to another, more active malevolence, to a sort of Satanic eagerness indescribably terrifying; it was the face of one possessed.

Like some bird of prey he pounced upon the book, thrust it into the pocket of his gown, and began furtively to retrace his steps. As he entered the big dining-room, Dillon was close upon his heels.

Dr. Kassimere passed into the small room beyond and turned from thence into the library. Dillon, observing every precaution, followed. From the library the doctor entered the short, narrow passage leading to that quaint relic of bygone days and ways—the tiny chapel. At the entrance Dillon paused, watchful. Once, the man in the monkish robe turned, on the time-worn step of the altar, and looked back over his shoulder, revealing a face that might well have been that of Asmodeus himself.

On the left of the altar was the cupboard wherein, no doubt, in past ages, the priest had kept his vestments. The oppressive odour which Dillon had first observed in the dining-room was very perceptible in the chapel; and as Dr. Kassimere opened the door of the cupboard and stepped within, an explanation of the presence of this deathly smell in the house occurred to Dillon's mind. The laboratory adjoined the Grange on this side; here was a private entrance known to, and used by, Dr. Kassimere alone.

His surmise proved to be correct. Occasioning scarcely a sound, the secret door opened, and a fiery glow leapt out across the altar steps, accompanied by a wave of heated air laden with the nauseous, unnameable smell. Within the redly lighted doorway, Dr. Kassimere paused, and glanced at a watch which he wore upon his wrist. Then for a moment he disappeared, to reappear carrying a small squat bottle and a contrivance of wire and gauze the sight of which created in Dillon a sense of physical nausea. It was a chloroform-mask! Both he placed upon a vaguely seen table and again approached the door.

Weakly, Dillon fell back, pressing himself, closely against the chapel wall, as the doctor, this time leaving the secret entrance open—with a purpose in view which the watcher shudderingly recognized—recrossed the chapel and went off, softly treading, in the direction of the library.

All his courage, moral and physical, was called upon now, and knowing, by some intuition of love, what and whom he should find there, he stepped unsteadily into Dr. Kassimere's laboratory...

That there were horrors—monstrosities that may not be described, whose names may not be written—in the place, he realised, in some subconscious fashion; but—prone upon a low, metal couch of most curious workmanship lay Phryné, in her night-robe, still—white; perfect in her pale beauty as her namesake who posed for Praxiteles.

Dillon reeled, steadied himself, and sank upon his knees by the couch.

“Phryné!” he whispered, locking his arms about her—“my Phryné!...”

Then he remembered the gauze mask and even detected the sickly, sweet smell of the anaesthetic. Anger gave him new strength; he raised the girl in his arms and turned towards the door communicating with the chapel.

Framed in the opening was the hooded figure of Dr. Kassimere, confronting him. His face was immobile again, with the immobility of ibis-headed Thoth; his eyes were hard, his voice was cold.

“What is the meaning of this outrage?” he demanded sternly. “Phryné has been taken suddenly ill; an immediate operation may be necessary—”

“Out of my way!” said Dillon, advancing past a huge glass jar filled with reddish liquid that stood upon a pedestal between the couch and the door.

“Be careful, you fool!” shrieked Dr. Kassimere, frenziedly, his calm dropping from him like a cloak and a new and dreadful light coming into the staring eyes.

But he was too late. Dillon's foot had caught the pedestal. With a resounding crash the thing overturned; as Dr. Kassimere sprang forward, he slipped in the slimy stream that was pouring over the laboratory floor—and fell...

Laying Phryné upon the altar, her head resting against the age-worn communion rails, Dillon turned and closed the secret door dividing the house of God from the house of Satan. One glimpse, in the red furnace glow, he had of Dr. Kassimere, writhing upon the slimy floor, shrieking, blaspheming—and fighting, fighting madly, as a man fights for life and more than life...

He had not yet carried the unconscious girl beyond the dining-room, when, above that other smell, he detected the odour of burning wood. A fire had broken out in the laboratory.

Mrs. Jack Dillon mourns her guardian (no trace of whom was ever found in the charred remains of Hollow Grange) to this day; for she retains no memory of the night of the great fire, but believes that, overcome by the fumes, she was rescued and carried insensible from the house, by her lover. In the latter's bosom the grim secret is locked, with the memory of a demoniac figure, fighting, fighting...

