

Chapter 23

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**Black Magic or Voodooism**

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE—A DECLINATION—AMONG  
THE FAKIRS—HOW THEY ENTRANCE SUBJECTS—  
LEVITATION—SEANCE IN A SUBTERRANEAN TEMPLE.

**I**t was with considerable hesitation that I presented my plea to the Viscount R\_\_\_\_\_ for his fair niece's return to England. I had nothing to excuse my interference in such a matter but her father's letter and her own wish; for this was the ground on which Blanche herself had desired me to found my proposition. The viscount received my request very coldly, but said he would refer the matter to his wife and niece, with whom he promised to consult before arriving at any conclusion on his own account; meantime, he added, as I had thought proper to open up the subject of his niece's welfare, he deemed it a favorable opportunity to present another view of her interests, and one in which he thought I was more immediately concerned. He then, in stately phraseology, and with considerable show of patronage, made me a formal offer of the lady's hand.

He acknowledged that I had given him no reason to suppose I sought such an alliance, but he could hardly imagine that the honor for which princes contended would be unappreciated by me. He confessed that he was impelled to "this extraordinary breach of etiquette," first, by what he knew to have long been the sincere wish of the Lady Blanche's excellent parents; next, because his "own dear wife" had set her heart upon the match. In addition to this, he said, it was evident that there was some powerful obstacle to the young lady's settlement in life, when she so pertinaciously refused all the splendid opportunities that were open to her; and finally, he trusted to my chivalry and sense of honor not to misunderstand him when he hinted his opinion, that I was the particular obstacle in the way; in a word, that it was for my sake that she had rejected the many desirable offers of brilliant settlement that had been made to her.

My principal sentiment towards Lord R\_\_\_\_\_ for this very flattering address was one of gratitude, as it gave me an opportunity to explain to him my position with perfect candor. I told him, with all the deep and affectionate interest I cherished for Earl D\_\_\_\_\_ and his family, to say nothing of my fraternal regard for sweet Blanche herself, it was yet impossible that I could marry. I was a man devoted to a special idea, consecrated to aims wholly foreign to the marriage relation, the duties of which I could not undertake consistently with the religious engagements to which I referred. I assured him that it was chiefly because I was unable to contribute to Blanche's happiness or peace of mind, that I had pleaded with him to permit her return to her native land and her father's protection.

"To her father's protection most surely," replied the viscount bitterly. "Handsome men that can't marry ought decidedly to devote themselves to a religious life; and beautiful young ladies that won't marry should never be absent from the paternal roof."

Without resenting the tone of sarcastic disappointment in which the poor viscount spoke, I again took advantage of our awkward game of fence to urge my plea for Blanche's departure. I knew that Lord R\_\_\_\_\_ had no valid excuse for finding fault with me in this rejection of an engagement I had never given him the least reason to suppose I desired, yet I pitied his mortification, and felt neither surprised nor angry to observe that he could scarcely master his sense of humiliation, or address me with common civility.

He at length assumed an air of submission, which ill-concealed his anger and disappointment; and as I was about to take my leave, he suggested that as perhaps the ladies might suspect what a blockhead he had been making of himself if I departed thus suddenly, he should feel obliged if I would deign to bestow a few moments more of my valuable time upon them in the drawing-room. I followed him in silence to Lady Emily's boudoir, where we found Blanche extended on a couch, suffering from a severe headache. I uttered a few of the commonplace pieces of advice usual under such circumstances, and was about to make this indisposition a plea for my immediate departure, when Blanche rose suddenly, and shaking back her glorious veil of golden curls from her flushed face, she exclaimed: "Helene will cure me; she calls me even now. I know her soothing influence."

For a few moments she stood, evidently magnetized by some unseen power, in the attitude of a Pythia waiting for the inspiration of the divine efflatus; then as the force of somnambulism deepened upon her, her beautiful face became almost transfigured. Every one present continued to gaze upon her with breathless admiration, when suddenly she commenced to sing a song so full of sympathetic tenderness and exquisite melody that it was almost impossible to listen to her without tears. This wonderful piece of musical improvisation was addressed to me, and breathed the language of hopeless love combined with a warning of impending evil. It might have applied to the songstress herself, but seemed more designed to express the passion of the sibylline Helene, whose "atmospheric spirit" I could discern, standing beside, and inspiring the beautiful somnambulist. Even the viscount, cold and passionless as he was, had sufficient artistic culture to be amazed and enchanted at the irresistible beauty of the song. Most fortunately, too, he had seen enough of the magnetic trance to understand it. He was none the less displeased, however, and declared that since his niece was given to "such fits of vaticination as that," the only safe and proper place for her was beneath her father's roof, and the sooner she was there the more relieved he should feel.

Meantime poor Lady Emily wept and smiled and clapped her hands with delight, and when at last the fair somnambulist returned to consciousness, and hid her face in her aunt's arms, the latter expressed her unbounded satisfaction that her Blanche had not lost that wonderful gift of "trance improvisation" which had made her the star of those happy home seances which had proceeded under her father's roof, and in which Blanche had been the principal medium and Lady Emily one of the admiring witnesses.

When Blanche was entirely restored to herself, I asked her gently, whether Madame Laval had been in the habit of magnetizing her. "Oh, yes," she answered, "frequently. She can not only relieve my headache when I have one, but she can call me to her at any distance. We have frequently tried this experiment, and I know she could make me come to her, should she will me to do so, from the end of the world."

I looked significantly at the viscount, and then rose to take my leave. He followed me

from the room, saying with much cordiality, as we shook hands at parting, "Chevalier, you are right. This poor girl's place is with her father and mother. I have been wrong to allow her to engage in these dangerous magnetic practices; and since they cannot be broken through if she stays here, go she must, and that with the least possible delay."

"Has not the error been in allowing one so pure, innocent, and impressible as Blanche," I replied, "to become subjugated by the baleful influence of Madame Laval?"

The viscount colored highly, and in the elaborate defence which he attempted of Madame Laval, simply confirmed my suspicions that he, like his niece and many another unsuspecting victim, had succumbed to the spell which this enchantress delighted to cast on all around her, especially when, as in the present instance, she had something to gain by the exercise of her fascinations. It was agreed between the viscount and myself, that Blanche should sail for England in about ten days, that in the meantime she should be taken by Lady Emily to their country seat, some seven miles from Calcutta, under pretense of allowing her full leisure to complete her preparations for departure, whilst the viscount and myself further arranged that I should ride out to see her as often as was necessary, to consult about the most perfect conditions for her comfort and welfare during her passage homeward.

My mind set at rest on that subject, I felt free to devote myself a little more to my friend Graham, who had at last induced me to promise that I would that very night, conduct him to a Voodoo woman, from whom he hoped to obtain some gift or information which would aid him in the prosecution of his almost hopeless suit. I had in vain attempted to dissuade him from this step. Graham either would not or could not open his eyes to the real character of the woman he so frantically loved. Some of the arts she had put upon him in common with others whom she desired to fascinate, had led him to believe that it only required a certain amount of influence on his part to turn the scale of her vacillating mind in his favor. He had heard much, he said, of a certain Voodoo woman of Calcutta, named Anine, who to his certain knowledge had brought together many couples whom he named.

All the philosophy I had formerly urged against these practices were reiterated in vain. He was resolved to try the effect of Voodooism, and, with or without me, he would visit Anine

Now, it so happened that I had in my service a fakir named Nazir Sahib, who was remarkably skilful in all feats of occultism, especially in such as were produced through the ecstasy of motion, an art he had learned in Egypt from the famous "whirling dervishes." This fakir was a Malay, and brother to that very Anine who had obtained a high reputation for her success in those arts of sorcery, which more properly come under the cognomen of "Voodooism." I had never seen Nazir's sister, nor had I any desire to do so; but as my little fakir was much attached to me and delighted to recount for my edification his sister's remarkable experiences with her distinguished patrons and patronesses, I became unwittingly, the repository of many singular and unsought for confidences, amongst which was one that I deemed might be peculiarly serviceable to my friend Graham at this juncture.

It was by a private arrangement, then, with Nazir, that I selected a certain night for our visit to Anine, and this was the result. Directing our steps towards the lowest and most obscure part of the "black city," we arrived about midnight at the door of a low dwelling, when I paused to advise Graham that he was to walk unswervingly and as nearly as he could in my footsteps, keep close to me, and neither turn aside or speak. He need not marvel, I added, that no one who might chance to meet us would observe or address us, for we would be invisible and unheard.

If my readers should question whether I was serious in this last assertion, I answer yes, in every iota. If they still further desire to know how I could command such a power, I reply, by such means as enables the Hindoo fakir to saturate his body with living force, and subdue all its physical elements to the power of his spirit. This power is gained by long-protracted fasts and other ascetic practices, continued for years when the actual changes wrought in the system render the rapport between the votary and the spirit-world very close and intimate. The subject, almost a spirit himself, can easily be enveloped in the agasa (life essence) of the spirit's astral body, and in this envelope he walks in spiritual invisibility, commanding the physical elements of earth at will. The processes by which a determined Eastern ecstatic can attain to these spiritual states would be as useless to describe to self-indulgent European sybarites as to expect an English life-guardsmen to fly through the air like an East Indian Irdha-pada, who has spent his life in probationary exercises, besides inheriting an organism fitted for the part he plays.

It is enough to say that I had earned the power I possessed, and was aided by spirits to exercise it and dispense it to my companion.

After passing through the outer dwelling and a succession of mean, deserted courts, we came to a ruinous old temple, in one angle of which I advanced to the door of a crypt, which opened from within at my signal, and admitted us, by a descent of a few steps, into a large stone chamber, partly hewn out of the rock. Here we found a tank and other preparations for the performance of ancient priestly rites. Three veiled females were sitting huddled together on a stone bench at the side of the hall, and their attire proved that they were attendants on some lady of consequence.

"Do not mind them," I said to Graham aloud. "Step as I have desired you, and they will not see us." In proof of what I said, I led my companion close to the group, speaking aloud as we advanced, but they neither looked up or noticed us. We then moved on to a second door at the farther end of the hall, which, like the first, swung open for our passage through. Beyond this door we found the scene of operations, which was a stone chamber similar to the first, though somewhat larger. I placed myself and my companion at the foot of a broken peristyle, around the base of which we found a heap of stones, on which we leaned whilst the following scene was enacted.

A party of half nude fakirs, amongst whom I recognized my lively little follower, Nazir, danced, spun, and whirled in a circle around a female, who, attired simply in a loose white robe, with bare arms and feet, and a profusion of raven-black tresses falling almost to the ground, stood, with arms folded across her breast, in the center of the dancers. These ecstasies whirled around, each on his own pivot as it were, with such inconceivable rapidity that they looked like spinning columns rather than human beings, and the immense charge of agasa or magnetism they liberated, so completely filled the apartment that it could be almost seen as a vapor, as well as felt as a force; certain it is, that it nearly overpowered Graham, who would have fallen to the ground under its tremendous influence, had I not held his hand firmly and willed him to be calm. At the upper end of the hall was an altar covered with cabalistic characters, on which were placed three braziers dispensing fumigations. Before the altar, was a red charcoal fire, whilst moving around the fire and feeding the brazier with strong, pungent odors, was the sister of Nazir, a Malay woman with handsome features, bright, sparkling eyes, and wearing a short, white tunic edged with cabalistic signs, and a sort of glittering coronet, similarly adorned.

At a certain portion of the dance the whirling fakirs all paused instantaneously, stood for a moment motionless, as if they had been turned to stone by the touch of an enchanter's

wand. They then each raised their lean arms and pointed their forefingers at the female in the center. By this change of posture Graham was enabled to see plainly what I already knew, namely, that the female was Madame Helene Laval. His horror and dismay at this discovery had nearly destroyed the rapport in which I held him. He soon recovered himself, however, and with a muttered exclamation resumed his place by my side.

As the fakirs continued to point their fingers at the lady, her features assumed an expression so rapt and superb, that my admiration for the beautiful overcame my disgust for her character, and I regarded her for the time being with breathless interest. It is no exaggeration to say that at this juncture, the luminous fluid which streamed from the outstretched fingers of the fakirs, shone like tongues of flame, and so transported their deeply-entranced subject that she tossed her arms aloft, with wild cries and convulsive shudderings. At length she seemed to make one bound high up in air, when she was held suspended three feet above the ground for several minutes. At this sight the circle of ecstasies around her uttered fresh cries, and imitating her action by tossing their arms in the air, prostrated themselves, with their faces on the ground, where they remained motionless during the rest of what ensued.

The Malay woman now approached the floating figure, and extending her arms towards her with an imperative gesture, whilst she chanted a monotonous invocation to the spirits of the air, gradually drew her subject down to the earth, when, taking her by the hand, she led her to a seat placed opposite the fire and within a circle traced on the ground. From this point she commenced a series of invocations to the spirits of the elements, during which she kept incessantly pacing round and round, including the altar, the fire, and the lady in her gyrating path, feeding the fire and braziers meanwhile with essences, which continued to dispense their aromatic and pungent odors through the chamber.

To those Spiritualists who may have been accustomed to behold mediums floating in air in the midst of the commonplaces that ordinarily prevail at modern spirit circles, such phenomena may occasion no surprise, nor will the above recital convey the slightest idea, of the weird and ghastly effect which this scene produced. The gloom and antique solemnity of the rock-hewn cavern; the strange aspect of the fetish objects which surrounded us; the wild, almost demoniac appearance of the crouching fakirs, and the half-frenzied mistress of the rites; but above all, the preternatural appearance of the white-robed ecstatic, whose suspension in air, baffling all the known laws of nature, must have been the effect of powers unknown or incomprehensible, or else the action of invisible beings no less terrible than the sorceress whom they aided.

All this was so new and startling to Graham that I could not feel surprised when he—as brave a soldier as ever drew sword—stood grasping my hand, whilst his own, was as cold as death, and trembling like an aspen leaf, as he leaned for support on my shoulder.

The following words form a rough translation of the first verse, which the sibyl chanted, as she paced round and round in her magic circle:

"O beauteous creature of Fire,

Endow this mortal with thy ardor!

Let the flame of her life draw all creatures to her feet in worship! Let her power consume them

And burn into dust and ashes all who bend not the knee before her!

O Spirit of Fire! Spirit of Heat! Spirit of Flame! Spirit of the blazing elements! Hear and be obedient!"

Three verses addressed to the spirits of the other elements followed, but the ardor of the language and the reckless wickedness which was implied in them, although masked in the synthetical flow of the sweet Shen Tamil language, will not endure translation.

When these abominable invocations were ended, a sensation of rocking and quivering followed, which not only pervaded our systems, but seemed to thrill through the whole mass of rock from which the ancient fane was hewn. An indescribable disturbance, too, agitated the air around us. The perception of a sound rather than a sound itself, wailed in our ears, something between a long-drawn sigh and the moaning of the wind. Faint indications of grotesque forms and glittering eyes flitted through the gloomy cavern, lighted as it was only by the dull glare of the fire and braziers, and tongues of flame glinted through the atmosphere everywhere. Those who, like myself, have ever taken part in or witnessed an act of combined Voodooism and ecstasy like the one I am attempting to describe, will have experienced what both Graham and I felt at the time, namely, an oppression of spirits almost amounting to despair, terrible to realize, but almost impossible to express in words. I have known many travelers in Oriental lands, who, from motives of curiosity or special interest, have attended such scenes, and no matter how unimpressible they may have been by nature, I have never conversed with or heard of one who did not realize something of the same kind of desolation and abandonment of God and the good which possessed us on this occasion.

When the invocations of the Malay woman were ended, she made a profound Oriental salutation to Madame Laval; then crossing her arms upon her breast, she stood like an ebony statue or an impersonation of the spirit of darkness and thus addressed her employer:

"What more would the daughter of Indra require of her slave? Lo, she is now fairer than Parvati in the eyes of mortals, more powerful than he of the sacred Bull! What more does she demand?"

"Anine!" said the lady in a tone of deeper dejection than I had ever heard her clear tones sinking to before, "Anine, I have already proved your power upon all men but one. He whom alone I love, alone has resisted me; nay more, I know now—oh, too well, too well!—that he actually abhors me."

"He loves another," replied the Malay, coldly. "Is not that enough?"

"Hush, hush!" cried the lady, fiercely, "you shall not tell me that, nor do I yet believe it. Listen to me, woman! You have a woman's heart in your breast; that I know, despite your reckless indifference to the woes of others. Is there nothing you can do to help me—nothing yet left to be tried, Anine?"

Here she poured out a tale of passion so wild and fierce that again my pen halts before the attempt to transcribe her words. Reckless and pitiful, wicked, yet touching, as they were, they afforded terrible evidence of the woe and wreck which human passion can make when once its stormy power is suffered to usurp the throne of reason.

Anine replied: "Have I not confessed to thee, lady, that this master of spirits is stronger than I? I can bring all other men to my feet, but not him. Even now, it seems to me that his influence is upon us; this place is full of him, and he beats down my power as if I thrashed the wind.

"Lady, I have told you there is but one way left by which you can subdue him; you must hurt him—nearly kill his body before you can touch his spirit!"

As she spoke, she advanced to the space behind the altar and withdrew a dark curtain, when we at once discovered the background of the scene. I must confess I was less surprised than my friend, to perceive that this veil had concealed a large, coarse, but well-executed portrait of myself, beneath which was a waxen image, which I had no difficulty in recognizing as also intended to represent me.

Graham started wildly as this exhibition met his eyes. For the first time, as it would seem, the real truth flashed upon his mind; and when the lady, with a mixture of passionate sobs, adjurations, and execrations, began apostrophizing these effigies in language that admitted of but one interpretation, my poor friend's agitation exceeded all bounds, and would certainly have destroyed my power to shield him from discovery, had I not retained a strong grasp upon him.

"Let us go, Chevalier!" he murmured. "For God's sake, let us leave this scene of shame and horror! Is this Voodooism? Is this what I was about to enter upon with unhallowed purpose and reckless intent? O heaven, forgive me for my involuntary crime!"

It was useless to try and soothe him, or attempt to detain him longer in a scene of which I well knew he had beheld enough already to effect his perfect restoration to a sense of honor, manliness, and piety. For myself, I knew well enough the nature of the performance that was to ensue. I knew also that whatever it was would fall-harmless upon my well-guarded spirit. I have already intimated to my readers, that the success or strength and potency of all magical rites lies in their psychological effect, or the power of mind projected from one individual upon another. Permit me also to recur to the theory so often alluded to in these pages, namely, that all the effect of will or psychological impress depends upon its uninterrupted action. So long as it can reach its subject without the intervention of cross-magnetism or opposing currents it will surely succeed; but when, as in my case, the subject is aware of the work in hand, guarded against it by a stronger will and more potential spiritual power than that of the operator, the spell fails, the potency is overpowered, and the whole attempt is baffled.

According to the conventional ideas upon which tales of fiction are founded, the writers—being in general well-meaning persons, who conceive themselves bound to uphold what they term "the interests of morality"—depict their scenic effects with a view to the "triumph of virtue over vice," hence the Voodoo workers' power to harm the pure and good should utterly fail. Unhappily the physical and psychological laws of being do not suspend their action in favor of the moral. The pure and pious share the fate of the wicked and blasphemous in the sinking ship or burning house, and the good and sinless parent is just as apt, if not more so, to love the bad and sinful child as the good and pure one.

Blind force is inexorable, whether it be directed in the interests of vice or virtue. Let us not mistake laws for principles. The law of psychological effect is the law of strength, of magnetic potency, of positive and negative reciprocity.

The principles of good and evil operate in circles of an entirely different character; hence the arts of Voodooism would and could affect the pure and innocent Blanche Dudley, wholly unguarded as she was by any influence strong enough to repel the magnetism to which having once yielded she had become subject. On me this power failed because I was positive to the projector, and was enclosed, moreover, in a circle of influence which she could not penetrate.

As to the intrinsic power of Vaudooism, let me endeavor to define it in the following comments. That wicked spirits both of mortals and elementaries attend such scenes and aid in the effects produced, no well-experienced spiritist can deny; that the strong passion infused into the rites must aid their phenomenal power is equally certain. The rites themselves, the chants, invocations, fumigations, and mock tortures, inflicted on pictures, images, and other inanimate objects, are absolutely worthless either for good or harm, save and except as they are instrumental in stimulating the mind of the operators to psychological fury and ecstatic frenzy. The true potency of all such scenes lies in the motive, the amount of mental power infused into the work, the strength of the will with which it is enacted, and the attraction which it has for evil and mischievous spirits, who delight to aid mortals in such acts as they themselves are in sympathy with.

It may be asked, where, then, are our good angels, and why do they not interpose to save us from these dark and malignant powers? I answer, they are ever near; potential to aid and prompt to inspire us either to fly from, or resist the evil; but that they are always successful the facts of human history emphatically deny. Perhaps coarse, gross, and material spirits are nearer to earth than the pure and refined. Whatever be the cause, it is as idle as injurious to disregard facts for the sake of upholding a theory of morals which is only valuable when it is proved to be practical. Our best safeguard against evil powers and evil machinations in general, is to cultivate a pure and innocent nature, which in itself is a repelling force against evil. But when that pure and innocent nature has become the subject of magnetic influence, it is imperative for us to deal no longer with moral but with magnetic laws, and these, as I have frequently alleged before, act upon principles of their own which do not regard morals at all. We must adopt the principles of nature as we find them, not as we deem they ought to be nor as we in our egotism suppose they will become in deference to our peculiar excellence, neither must we delude ourselves with the idea that our ignorance will shield us from dangers we know nothing about. I have heard many well-meaning people affirm they were quite safe from all evil influences, etc., because they knew nothing about such subjects, deeming their security lay in their ignorance.

In former chapters on the subject of obsession, I have referred to the vast multitude of obsessed persons whose example proves that innocence and ignorance form no protection against the assaults of evil powers. All were attacked indiscriminately without any reference to their knowledge or ignorance of their state. Sweet young children, innocent and ignorant enough to illustrate this position, frequently become the subjects of obsession, and I could cite innumerable cases wherein good and pure women have fallen victims to the arts of base-minded psychologists, whilst far less worthy persons, aware of their danger, have escaped.

The true safeguard against all occult influence of an adverse or malignant character, is an understanding of its nature and existence, the laws that govern it and the means of thwarting and overruling its effects. It may be very satisfactory to remain in ignorance of the fact that the midnight marauder is prowling around our doors, provided he takes no advantage of our fancied security to break in upon us, but when we are aware of his presence and our liability to danger from his incursions, we shall be able to guard against him without any proviso.

Knowledge is power, ignorance is imbecility.

It is for this reason that I would induce all truly philosophical thinkers to investigate the occult, and study out in the grand lyceum of nature's laws, the various sources of good and evil influences by which we are constantly surrounded and constantly affected. Were mankind once aware of its danger in this, as in every other direction, it would be proof against it.



The limitations of time and space forbid my enlarging upon this subject further. It is enough to know what all mankind will sooner or later realize, namely, that will is the sovereign potency ruling creation for good or evil; and until we educate the race in the knowledge, use, and abuse of psychology, we shall continue to sin and suffer, become the victims of blind forces which are continually operating upon us whether we know it or not, filling the lunatic asylums with subjects obsessed by evil spirits, the prisons with imbeciles impressed with the contagion of criminal propensities, and the home, with immoral men and women, laboring under the epidemic of evil passions, infused into their natures by the very atmosphere they breathe.

Knowledge and science to the rescue! The knowledge of occultism and the science of soul!

