

THE STORY OF LAMIA.

A POSTHUMOUS SKETCH NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED BY GEORGE SAND.

Deep in the heart of an African jungle I was the prisoner of a wounded lion.

With a party of natives I was hunting hippopotami. The day was sultry, and, wearying of the sport I wandered away by myself.

I had but one round of ammunition left, and that was in my rifle.

On, on I walked, and was soon a mile from my attendants.

Then I met the lion.

He stood lengthwise across my path. I raised my rifle, without being further perceived, and tried to plant the lead under the creature's shoulder, in his heart.

But I was nervous, and raised the muzzle of my weapon as I fired. The bullet struck the shoulder bone and grazed. The wound was not disabling, but aggravating.

With a savage roar of rage and pain the lion sprang toward me.

I dropped my useless rifle and got into a tree in time to escape the teeth and claws of the maddened brute.

He made frantic efforts to reach me and failing, stood under the tree glaring at me with his fierce yellow eyes, and growling the vengeance he would visit upon me when I came down!

The prospect was dismal. Far away to the North I could hear my attendants firing at intervals to guide me to them. They heard my rifle when I shot at the lion and supposed that it was a signal that I had lost my way.

Alas! I could not answer them. My last bit of powder I had used in making an enemy of the lion.

Becoming alarmed at hearing no second shot from me, my attendants were scattering. I could hear them firing here and there, until at last they had completely surrounded me.

Then they began closing in. I judged by their shooting that they would meet not far from the tree where I was the prisoner of the lion.

Joy though I had been a soldier for ten years, musketry had never made such sweet music for me before.

Nearer, nearer they approached, and I became more and more hopeful. Then they met, less than a fourth of a mile away. They had missed me.

I could hear their voices plainly, though I could not distinguish their words. They were greatly excited, so was I.

Some peculiarity of the climate had weakened my throat, and my once deep, full voice had, within a few days, degenerated into a squeak. Though I could hear them so plainly I knew perfectly well that my voice would not reach their ears unless their was an entire silence in the jungle.

My only hope was that the men might again separate and make another effort to find me. Then, being silent themselves, they might hear me if I called.

Presently their voices stopped and they began beating the jungle. I again became hopeful.

One of the blacks came so near me that I could hear the canes and reeds crunch under his heels.

Now was my time. I concentrated all my power for one terrific yell. I must make myself heard then or not at all. Opening my mouth I filled my lungs and tried to empty them, instantly, in one wild cry.

Horror! I made no audible sound! Still worse, I had strained my sensitive throat too much and had burst a blood vessel.

My throat filled with blood so fast that I was strangling. I could not breathe. It was just the same whether my eyes were open or closed—there was only blackness before me. I could see nothing. There were strange sounds in my ears, and sharp pains in my head. My weakening hands were loosening their hold upon the tree.

Then I fell.

I lived a hundred lives in the brief interval between falling from the limb I was on and lodging lower down in the tree. My whole life passed before me and I expected that it would end in the lion's

jaw's. His fetid breath was in my nostrils and it sickened me while it revived me.

The blood was still streaming from my mouth and, when I could see again, something awaited my eyes which, for the first time in my life, made me tremble.

Directly under me, and scarcely two yards away, sat the lion. His awful mouth was open and he was gapping the blood as it ran from my throat.

He was a man-eater! He had tasted human blood before and I knew my fate in case I fell from the tree.

His eyes blazed like the lurid light of a furnace, and they seemed to have deprived me of the power of motion. I could not stir.

The blacks were still beating the jungle, and were going further away from me every instant.

My breast heaved with a deep and involuntary sigh. The movement lightened the relaxed muscles in my throat, and, strangely enough, closed the ruptured vein. The blood stopped.

The lion licked his chops in the expectancy that it would start again and continue to gratify his sinister thirst.

An inexplicable thrill of hope went through me, though my attendants had passed beyond hearing, and I was within springing distance of a wounded and bloodthirsty lion.

He was moving about uneasily. The pain in his shoulder was forgotten while he was drinking my blood—it had returned now and so had his rage.

There was a convulsive movement of his claws and his mane was rising. He was about springing.

Summoning all my strength I half leaped and half climbed into the limbs above me just as the lion hurried himself forward.

Baffled again, and furious with the fresh pain which his unsuccessful jump cost him, he made the jungle ring with his roaring.

If my men would only hear him, guess the truth and come to my rescue! In two more hours night would come, and then my black attendants would give up the search.

I looked down at the lion and wondered whether he or I would stand hunger the longest.

What was it I saw moving deliberately through the jungle? Was it a human being or some monster even more ferocious than the lion?

It was coming toward me, and it was heavily draped in gauzy black. As it came nearer the outlines of the form showed me that it was a woman.

"Stop!" I shouted. "There is a lion, a man-eater, at the foot of this tree!"

My voice had recovered all of its former roundness and strength! It rang out so loud and clear that it startled me.

The woman made no answer but still moved forward.

At the sound of my voice the lion lifted his head and snuffed the air as if he had understood my words—Though he looked straight at my advancing woman he gave no sign that he saw her, but lay down under the tree, and dog-like, rested his nose upon his paws.

I was astounded. Straight on the woman came, and her loose, floating garments seemed to brush the lion in the face as she passed him.

Still he did not move, but blinked his great yellow eyes sleepily. The woman was completely covered with the somber gauzy veil.

Only her eyes were visible. They were of a phosphorescent, sapphire blue, and they varied constantly, from a soft starry radiance to a malicious, snake-like glitter.

She was watching me the moment she came in sight, and her eyes were still fixed upon me when she paused under the tree and as near me as she could get without climbing up.

"Who, and what are you?" I asked "and why are you in such a place as this?"

"I am Lamia," she said.

Her voice was clear as a flute and it seemed to ring after she ceased speaking, like a piece of steel.

"Lamia?"

"Yes. I am the first woman," she said. "God was wise and made me all woman, all love. Adam hated me because I loved the sunshine, which was warm and yellow like my hair.

He wanted always to worship our Creator—and I to bask in the joys of the life which our Creator gave us. I got only cold words in answer to my love, and frowns for all my kisses. So we were sundered. God let us part. Eve came to Adam, made, to solace him and please his conceit, of his own bone and flesh. How wise he was! Then came my vengeance. Full of haste, I fled to Eblis, and we have warred against the race of Adam ever since. A woman best can cast a woman down. I plucked the fruit which Eblis gave to Eve. I planned the arts by which he won her. She was but a woman—so she fell. I caused the curs to fall upon the twain made one: Adam, the perfect, and Eve the flesh. High was my glee when forth from Paradise the angel's flame-sword drove them.

"Their seed had Adam's form, and souls from heaven. To make the work complete I gave them demon hearts. So sin came in the world. But answer woman's love with scorn and hate—sin and vengeance always follow.

My vengeance has been manifold and vast. Cain spilled his brother's blood because my urgings made him and all who come from him have worn the scarlet shame.

"Since Adam denied my love I have compelled it, countless times, from those who have his shape.

"My smiles and spells beguile young men; and when he loves me they soon find him dead with one of my yellow hairs twined tightly around his head. So Lamia loves the world!

"Golden hair is ever my gift, and those who wear it do my work. My soul, forbidden heaven, continually inhabits the frame of such a woman—and in it wrecks woe and sorrow."

I thought her mad—some stricken lunatic.

"You have not told me," I said, "why you are in this jungle."

"I sorrow for Him who suffered death for the race I hate. It is his natural right."

Sure enough—it was Christmas Eve.

I was more moved all along by the music of her voice than by her strange narration.

She was moving slowly away once more.

"Tell me," I said, determined to make her speak again, "is there nothing which can assuage your awful hate and end your course of vengeance?"

"Yes!"

The word sounded like the hiss of molten iron when it meets water.

"Yes! When I meet a man of Adam's race who wins my love. Then peace will come to my soul and even Lamia will find rest in Heaven. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Compared with her laugh the roaring of the wounded lion had been music. It removed my last doubt. The woman was a demon!

Then I offered up my first prayer in ten years. I begged God never to let me hear that awful laugh again.

As I said "Amen" there was a crash in the canes and brakes. Some one else was coming through the jungle. Eagerly I looked in the direction of the sound. Anyone, anything, would be welcome so long as the dreadful Lamia did not return.

I would rather, even, climb down and embrace the lion than meet her again.

I looked down. The lion was gone.

Was it all a dream, a vision—the wounded lion and the vengeful, ghoulish spirit? No! I could still hear that fiendish, hellish laugh.

The noise in the jungle was made by my men. They had found me at last. How glad I was to see those dusky, grinning Africans! Soon they were chattering like apes, telling me how persistently they had searched for me.

There was a pool of blood under the tree where the lion had lain, there was a trail of blood leading to the sluggish river. We followed it, found the weakened brute, and killed him.

That much was reality! I was glad. It convinced me that Lamia had been with me. My faith in the supernatural and in God, shaken for ten years, was restored again. I entered the jungle a skeptic; I left it a believer.

Six weeks later I was out of Africa,

but I did not get back in France until the middle of the next December.

Three days later I was once more at Rouen, my birth place and the home of my family.

My father had died during my absence and my two sisters were living with our widowed mother.

As even the merest recollection of what had occurred to me in the African jungle gave me the shivers, I forebore mentioning it to any one.

One day just before Christmas, I met in the street the most beautiful woman I ever saw. Her complexion was of lily fairness, except a dainty rose flush on each cheek. Her eyes were a deep blue, and her hair—in every sense her crowning glory—was as yellow as the sunshine.

"Lamia's gift!" I said, and shuddered. It was the first time her dreadful name had crossed my lips since I left the Dark Continent.

The woman glanced at me carelessly, while I stood still in the street and watched her out of sight.

In a day or two we met again, and something in my face or manner drew a smile from her.

St. Denis! how lovely she was! Only the thought of Lamia kept me from finding her out. I feared that demons might be lurking in that wonderful golden hair, and I found it impossible to rid myself of the notion.

The day before Christmas I went with my sisters to hang evergreens in the little church where for two centuries, our ancestors had worshipped.

Our work was about half done when the woman with the yellow hair came in.

I was splitting a board with a small axe for those who were putting up decorations, and the sharp blade was descending when I saw the woman.

Instantly I forgot what I was doing.

"Thud!" went the axe half way through my left hand.

My sisters screamed, and everybody else stood still and looked—everybody but the woman whose coming caused the accident.

She instantly stripped a silken scarf off her neck, tore it in shreds and bound up my mangled hand with the deftness of a surgeon.

"Monsieur must go home now," she said, "and let some one more skillful than I do the rest."

"No one could be more skillful," I declared.

She bowed low and smiled.

"Monsieur is very gallant and kind. I fear it was I who caused the unfortunate accident."

"Oh, no; it was my own carelessness. My eyes were wandering about too much."

Again that bewitching smile. How strangely it moved me.

She stepped forward again to examine my bandaged hand.

"Blood on the Christmas greens?" she whispered. "Is it ominous of anything?"

"It can only bring good," I answered, "since it came from you."

The next chance brought us together in the church door. I asked her to accept a seat in the family pew and she consented. We sat together.

After that we met often. My mother and sisters found her charming, and she often dined or supped with us.

One night in January I declared my love and asked her to marry me.

She instantly became as white and was rosy with blushes, and, laying her head on my shoulder, she wept.

"I am yours," she said softly.

When she again raised her eyes there was a strange, starry radiance in them. Where had I seen it before, I could not tell.

In a month we were married.

When we stood before the altar the marriage service was being read her agitation was startling and unaccountable.

hour. There was never a moment of pain.

Christmas Eve came again. We sat up until after midnight, and I never before heard woman sing as she sang then. It seemed to me like the passionate, joyous outburst of a ransomed soul after years of weary darkness.

The next day she said: "Stay at home to-day. Do not go to church. I cannot go with you, and I beg not to be left alone."

"Certainly—as you wish."

We had not been an hour apart since our marriage. Why should there be a first time?"

Toward evening she seemed pale and trembled.

"Are you ill?" I asked.

"Mortally so."

Horrified, I sprang to my feet.

"Stop," she said you can do nothing. Sit down and hold me in your arms."

I obeyed her.

"Husband," she said, "I have something to tell you, and I hope—may, I am sure—that your love is equal to it."

"Rely on that," I said.

She kissed me and then continued: "Your love has saved a lost soul. I am Lamia—the first woman."

I thinking it merely morbid fancy, caused by her illness, I smiled.

"Nay do not smile. I speak the truth, and I will give you proof. I am, indeed, Lamia; she who came to you in the African jungle when a wounded lion was thirsting for more of your blood."

I was amazed. I had never told any one of that. She must be Lamia!

"God closed the doors of Heaven on me until I should love and wed one of Adam's race. Each generation since the world began, my youth has been renewed and I have resumed my work of vengeance. Adam taught my heart to hate; you taught it to love. You opened the doors of love and Heaven at the same time. Lamia's vengeance ended when she became your wife. This night I die, but my soul is safe and I enter Paradise. Look at the clock. In an hour it will be midnight, and then you will only hold Lamia's lifeless form; her soul will be in Heaven, near the gates awaiting yours."

I clasped her more closely, but in vain. Momentarily I could see her weaken.

The clock struck 12. She was gone.

A year passed since then—a year of sadness and solitude. It is Christmas night once more, and the hour of midnight approaches. Something tells me I am going to her.

Everything grows dim.

The clock strikes 12. I hear her voice!

Lamia! I come!

A CALL TO PRAYER.

Not seeing any evidence of piety among the Arabs in the streets of Cairo and very little about the mosque, I took the trouble one evening to station myself where I could distinctly see the minaret of the principal mosque for the purpose of witnessing the effect of the call to prayer on the faithful in the streets below.

It stood in one of the noisiest parts of the Mooski, at the corner of a narrow street, diverging into one of the dirtiest of Arab neighborhoods. In the front was a police office, before which there were half a dozen lounging Arab gendarmes, and all about it hummed and buzzed the unfinished business of the day. As the sun sank slowly over the Western deserts and the sunshine and shadow crept together up the tall minaret, I observed some signs of haste among a few of the dirtier Arabs. It was the beginning of Ramadan, and they were probably hurrying home to remove some of the superfluous filth, as enjoined, before the evening prayer. On the Mooski there was no change. If anything, the rattle of the vehicles and the cries of street vendors seemed to become louder and more discordant.

The sun was just on the horizon when the muezzin made his appearance on his lofty balcony, walked all around it and leaned over on every side as if to assure himself that the preparations for prayer were being properly made. After having completed his observations it became apparent from his attitude and the pose of his head that he was trying to ray om-

thing. But no sound reached the street, and no one seemed conscious of his movements. The carriage whirled on more rapidly. The water vendor shifted his swollen pig skin to an easier position and tinkled his brass cups till they sounded like village chimes. The watermelon seller raised his voice to the highest note of the upper register and the shopkeepers redoubled their invitations to purchase to the passers by. The muezzin, appreciating the fact that he was not heard, or if heard not listened to, tried to strengthen his voice by that old fashioned expedient of speaking the hollow of his two hands. But it was of no use. Either he had not what the singers call a "carrying voice," or the combined commercial eloquence of the street was too much for him. As far as distinct utterance was concerned, he might as well have enunciated that extremely artificial vocal effort, the syllable "boo," and he must have felt as the night came on and he retired discomfited that his world of the minaret was an entirely different thing from the world of modern Cairo and that his unheeded belief was indeed a creed out-worn.

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