

I'll work that expression into my story) that the red stain is strawberry juice. An expert is sent for, who is coming next day with his compound microscope to hunt for corpuscles. She dares not burn the cloth, that would convict her, and—what next? Suppose—oh, this is good! She gets some salt in some miraculous way and the necessary apparatus (how in heck?—I'll have to read *Nick Carter* awhile before writing that part) and removes the stain with chlorine gas. Then she gets a strawberry and squeezes the juice on and she's acquitted and, well,—I can easily fix the rest.

That's no love story, and I never saw one like it. Suddenly a fearful thought strikes me. Will chlorine gas attack blood stain? What fun the chemists would poke at me if I made a big blunder! Well they shan't have a chance. I grabbed my cap and ran over to the chemistry lab, where I set up the proper apparatus, and soon had the vile, poisonous gas generating. Now for the blood! Human blood! I grabbed my finger just as Doc. Newton did when he came with his new-fangled examinations, and jabbed away with a pin. No blood. A deeper thrust, no blood. Then I gritted my teeth and chucked the pin way in. Jiminy, how it hurt! And I felt much like a martyr to the literary profession when a moment later I put a rag bearing a big drop of my own gore to soak in the chlorine gas.

Five minutes elapsed without a perceptible change in the color of the blood stain,—then, horrors! An idea came that withered me like a dried elderberry. What on earth is the use of all this confounded nonsense when plain warm water would do the work as well? I almost wept as the full force of my stupidity struck me, and without waiting longer, I shoved the apparatus under the hood and went to supper, cursing the literary business in general.

That evening I tried my best to collect my ideas for a new effort. I started a strange, unnatural, hypnotic yarn, which I had conceived while reading the *Black Cat*, then outlined a weird romance among the Cliff Dwellers, but it was no use. Each attempt was worse than the previous one, and gradually I began to have a nauseating realization that if I ever produced anything original, it must come from a supernatural source.

One hope remained—a drowning man's straw; perhaps I can dream something, some incongruous mess of nonsense out of