

THE WATCHER  
BY THE DEAD.

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San Francisco Examiner.

In an upper room of an unoccupied dwelling in that part of San Francisco known as North Beach by the body of a man in a coffin. The hour was near nine in the evening; the room was dimly lighted by a single candle. Although the weather was warm the two windows, contrary to the custom which gives the dead plenty of air, were closed and the blinds drawn down.

The furniture of the room consisted of but three pieces: an arm-chair, a small reading-stand, supporting the candle, and a long kitchen table, supporting the body of a man covered from head to foot with a sheet. All these, including the body, would seem to have been recently brought in, for an observer, had there been one, would have seen that all were free from dust; whereas everything else in the room was pretty thickly coated with it, and there were eolwels in the angles of the walls.

Under the sheet the outlines of the body could be traced, even the features, these having that unnaturally sharp definition which seems to belong to faces of the dead, but is really characteristic of those only that have been wasted by disease. From the silence of the room one would rightly have inferred that it was not in the front of the house, facing a street. It really faced nothing but a high breast of rock, the rear of the building being set into a hill.

As a neighboring church clock was striking nine with a deliberation which seemed to imply such an indifference to the flight of time that one could hardly help wondering why it took the trouble to strike at all, the single door of the room was opened and a man entered, advancing toward the coffin. As he did so the door closed, apparently of its own volition; there was a grating, as of a key turned with difficulty, and the snap of the lock-bolt as it shot into its socket. A sound of retiring footsteps in the passage outside ensued, and the man was to all appearances a prisoner. Advancing to the table, he stood a moment looking down at the body; then, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, he walked over to one of the closed windows and hoisted the blind. The darkness outside was absolute, the flames were covered with dust, but, by wiping this away, he could see that the window was fortified with strong iron bars crossing it within a few inches of the glass and embedded in the masonry on each side. He examined the other window. It was the same. He manifested no great curiosity in the matter, did not even so much as raise the sash. If he was a prisoner he was apparently a tractable one. Having completed his examination of the room, he seated himself in the arm-chair, took a book from his pocket, drew the stand with its candle alongside and began to read.

The man was young—not more than thirty—dark in complexion, smooth-shaven, with brown hair. His face was thin and high-nosed, with a broad forehead and a "firmness" of the chin and jaw which is said to denote resolution. The eyes were gray and steadfast, not moving except with definitive purpose. They were now for the greater part of the time fixed upon his book, but he occasionally withdrew them and turned them to the body on the table, not, apparently, from any dismal fascination which under such circumstances it might be supposed to exercise upon even a courageous person, nor with a conscious rebellion against the oppressive influence which might dominate a timid one. He looked at it as if in his recalling he had come upon something recalling him to a sense of his surroundings. Clearly this watcher of the dead was discharging his trust with intelligence and composure, as became him.

After reading for perhaps a half-hour he seemed to come to the end of a chapter and quietly laid away the book. He then rose, and taking the reading-stand from the floor carried it into a corner of the room near one of the windows, lifted the candle from it and returned to the empty fireplace before which he had been sitting. A moment later he walked over to the body on the table, lifted the sheet and turned it back from the head, exposing a mass of dark hair and a thin face-cloth, beneath which the features showed with even sharper definition than before. Shading his eyes by interposing his free hand between them and the candle, he stood looking at his motionless companion with a serious and tranquil regard. It was a picture to delight a Rembrandt. Satisfied with his inspection he pulled the sheet over the face again, and returning to his chair took some matches off the candlestick, put them in the pocket of his sack coat and sat down. He then lifted the candle from its socket and looked at it critically, as if calculating how long it would last.

It was barely two inches long. In another hour he would be darkness. He replaced it in the candlestick and blew it out.

In a physician's office in Kearney street three men sat about a table, drinking punch and smoking. It was late in the evening, almost midnight indeed, and there had been no lack of punch. The eldest of the three, whom we may call Helbertson, was the host—it was in his rooms they sat. He was about thirty years of age; the others were younger; all were physicians.

"The superstitious awe with which the living regard the dead," said Dr. Helbertson, "is hereditary and incurable. One need no more be ashamed of it than of the fact that he inherits, for example, an incapacity for mathematics or a tendency to lie."

The others laughed. "Oughtn't a man to be ashamed to be a liar?" asked the youngest of the three, who was a medical student not yet graduated.

"My dear Harper, I said nothing

about that. The tendency to lie is one thing; lying is another." "But do you think," said the third man, "that this superstitious feeling, this fear of the dead, reasonless as we know it to be, is universal? I am myself not conscious of it."

"Oh, but it is in your system," for all that," replied Helbertson; "it needs only the right conditions—what Shakespeare calls the 'confederate season'—to manifest itself in some very disagreeable way that will open your eyes. Physicians and soldiers are, of course, more nearly free from it than others."

"Physicians and soldiers! Why don't you add hangmen and heads-men? Let us have in all the assassin classes."

"No, my dear Mancher; the juries will not let the public executioners acquire sufficient familiarity with death to be altogether unmoved by it under ordinary circumstances."

Young Harper, who had been helping himself to a fresh cigar at the side-board, resumed his seat. "What would you consider conditions under which any man or woman born mortal become insupportably conscious of his share of our common weakness in this regard?" he asked, rather vaguely.

"Well, I should say that if a man were locked up all night with a corpse—alone—in a dark room—of a vacant house—with no bed-covers to pull over his head—and lived through it without going altogether mad—he might justly boast himself not of woman born, nor yet, like Macduff, a product of the Cæsarean operation."

"I thought you never would brush piling up conditions," said Harper; "but I know a man who is neither a physician nor a soldier who will accept them all for any stake you like to name."

"Who is he?" "His name is Jarrette—a stranger in California; comes from my town in New York. I haven't any money to back him, but he will back himself with dead loads of it."

"How do you know that?" "I would rather bet than eat. As for fear—I dare say he thinks it some autaneous disorder, or possibly a particular kind of religious heresy."

"What does he look like?" Helbertson was evidently becoming greatly interested. "Like Mancher, here—might be his twin brother."

"I accept the challenge," said Helbertson, promptly. "I am fully obliged to you for the compliment, I'm sure," drawled Mancher, who was growing sleepy. "Can't I get into this?"

"Not against me," Helbertson said. "I don't want your money."

not stopped. The candle was now visibly shorter. He again extinguished it, placing it on the floor at his side, as before.

Mr. Jarrette was not at his ease; he was distinctly dissatisfied with his surroundings, and with himself for being so. "What have I to fear?" he thought. "This is ridiculous and disgraceful; I will not be so great a fool. But courage does not come of saying, 'I will be courageous,' nor of recognizing its appropriateness to the occasion. The more Jarrette condemned himself, the more reason he gave himself for condemnation; the greater the number of varieties which he played upon the simple theme of the harmfulness of the deal the more horrible grew the discord of his emotions."

"What!" he cried aloud in the anguish of his spirit—"what! Shall I, who have not a shade of superstition in my nature—I, who know, and never more clearly than now, that the after-life is the dream of a desire—shall I lose at once my 'let, my honor, and my self-respect, perhaps my reason, because certain savage ancestors, dwelling in caves, conceived the monstrous notion that the dead walk by night that—'"

Distinctly, unmistakably, Mr. Jarrette heard behind him a light, soft sound of footsteps, deliberate, regular, and successively nearer.

Just before daybreak the next morning Dr. Helbertson and his young friend Harper were driving slowly through the streets of North Beach in the doctor's coupe.

"Have you still the confidence of youth in the courage—or stoidity—of your friend?" said the elder man. "Do you believe that I have lost this wager?"

"I know you have," replied the other. "Well, upon my soul, I hope so."

It was spoken earnestly, almost solemnly. There was silence for a few moments.

"Harper," the doctor resumed, looking very serious in the shifting half-lights that entered the carriage as they passed the street lamps. "I don't feel altogether comfortable about this business. If your friend had not irritated me by the contemptuous manner in which he treated my doubt of his endurance—a partly physical quality—and by the cool indifference of his suggestion that the corpse lie that of a physician, I should not have gone on with it. If anything should happen we are ruined, as I fear we deserve to be."

"What can happen? Even if the matter should be taking a serious turn, of which I am not at all afraid, Mancher has only to resurrect himself and explain matters. With a genuine 'cut-throat' from the dissecting-room, or one of your late patients, it might be altogether different."

Dr. Mancher, then, had been as good as his promise; he was the "corpse."

man looked into their faces without seeming to see them, and sprang through the door, down the steps, into the street and away. A stout policeman, who had had inferior success in conquering his way down the stairway, followed a moment later and starts in pursuit, all the heads in the windows—those of women and children—were—creaming in guidance.

The stairway being now nearly cleared, most of the crowd, having rushed down to the street to observe the fight and pursuit, Dr. Helbertson mounted to the landing, followed by Harper. At a door in the upper passage an officer denied them admittance. "We are physicians," said the doctor, and they passed in. The room was full of men, dimly seen crowded about a table. The new-comers edged their way forward and looked over the shoulders of those in the front rank. Upon the table, the lower limit covered with a sheet, lay the body of a man, brilliantly illuminated by the beam of a built-up lantern held by a policeman standing at the foot. The others, excepting those near the head—the officer himself—all were in darkness. The face of the body showed yellow, repulsive, horrible! The eyes were partly open and upturned, and the jaw fallen; traces of froth defied the lips, the chin, the cheeks. A tall man, evidently a physician, bent over the body with his hand thrust under the sheet-front. He withdrew it and placed it to fingers in the open mouth. "This man has been about two hours dead," said he. "It is a case for the coroner."

He drew a card from his pocket, handed it to the officer and made his way toward the door.

"Clear the room—out, all!" said the officer sharply, and the body disappeared as if it had been snatched away, as he flashed his beam of light here and there against the faces of the crowd. The effect was amazing; the men, blinded, confused, almost terrified, made a tumultuous rush for the door, pushing, crowding, and tumbling over one another as they fled like the hosts of night before the shafts of Apollo. Upon the struggling, trampling mass the officer poured his power without pity and without cessation. Laughed in the current, Helbertson and Harper were swept out of the room and cascaded down the stairs into the street. "Good God, doctor! did I not tell you that Jarrette would kill him?" said Harper as soon as they were clear of the crowd.

"I believe you did," replied the other without apparent emotion. They walked on in silence, block and block. Against the gray East the dwellings of our hill-tops showed in silhouette. The milk wagon was already astir in the streets; the baker's man would soon come on the scene; the newspaper carrier was abroad in the land.

"It strikes me, youngster," said Helbertson, "that you and I are having too much of the morning air lately. It is unwholesome; we need a change. What do you say to a tour in Europe?"

"I'm not particular; I should suppose that four or five of these afternoon would be early enough."

"I'll meet you at the boat," said Harper.

Seven years afterward these two men sat upon a bench in Madison Square, New York, in familiar conversation. Another man, who had been observing them for some time, himself unobtrusively, approached, and courteously lifting his hat from locks as white as snow, said: "I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but when you have killed a man by coming to life it is best to change clothes with him, and at the first opportunity make a break for liberty."

Helbertson and Harper exchanged significant glances. They were apparently amused. The former then looked the stranger in the eye and replied: "That has always been my plan. I entirely agree with you as to its advisability."

Sharper here paid over Jarrette's money like an honest stakeholder. A very good and honorable profession," he repeated, thoughtfully, "moving carelessly away; 'tut Istick to the old one. I am Chief Medical Officer of the Bloomington Asylum; it is my duty to cure the Superintendent."

MASKS AND FACES.  
JULES INTROVILLE—PETIT JOURNAL.

A masked ball was to be given in the Hotel-deville for the benefit of the enfants trouves, and Alphonse Hypolite de Dadeumont planned to be there.

Three individuals at once attracted his attention. The first was a richly dressed lady, apparently in her first youth, representing Diane de Poitiers, favorite of Henry II; the second was a slim figure carrying a crutched stick and wearing the powdered hair and rich apparel of Ninon l'Enclos; the third was a fat crusader with a shell in his cap to show he had been to Palestine.

Hypolite first made the acquaintance of Diane, but was much annoyed to find the crusader making ardent attempts to attract the lady. Next our hero took up with Ninon, but was disgusted with the rotund figure continuing to dog his heels and trying to cut him out.

The Devil take the crusader! He dropped Ninon and retired with Diane to a recess, where he made the running very fast indeed. To the great wrath of M. de Dadeumont he found that the fat man of the crusades had followed him and was again making play to attract the fair Diane.

"Monsieur," said Hypolite, "your attentions are obtrusive. I demand satisfaction; unmask!" The crusader contemptuously tore off his mask and dashed it at the feet of Alphonse Hypolite de Dadeumont. It was his father.

On seeking the stern visage of the unmasked crusader, the lady so fondly leaning on the arm of M. Alphonse gave a scream and would have fallen. With a tender hand he removed her mask. It was his mother.

At this moment the fair creature with the crutched stick joined in the group, and, not perceiving anything amiss, gayly tapped him on the arm. "Reverent knight! Is it thus that you keep faith with your fond nymph?" As she spoke an usher approached and with many apologies, informed her that the prefect peremptorily required all to unmask. Reluctantly the fair being stood disclosed to the eyes of Alphonse Hypolite.

Deaf it was his grandmother.

"What a methodical fellow you are, Dobbs!" said Filkins, who had stepped into Dobbs' office during the latter's absence.

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He (emphatically)—"I do not."  
She (drawing away from him "What?"  
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