

# That Haunting Thing

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE BY ACHMED ABDULLAH

Diana Manning was the very last woman to which such a thing should have happened. For there was nothing about her in the least psychic or spiritual.

She was matter with a capital M, and sex with a capital S; \$, rather, since hers was sex without the excuse of passion—sex dealing entirely and shamelessly with bank accounts, high power racing cars, diamonds, and vintage champagnes. She was lovely, and she drove the hearts and the purses of men as a breath drives a thin sheet of flame.

Only her finger nails gave the mark of the east side tenement (she was a nee Maggie Smith) where she had been born and bred; for they were too well kept, too highly polished, too perfectly manicured. But men did not notice it. They seldom looked farther than her hair which was like a sculptured reddish-bronze helmet, her low, smooth, ivory forehead, her short, delicately curved nose, her lips which were crimson like a fresh sword wound, her eyes which spoke of wondrous promises—and died dully.

Her life had been melodramatic—from the man's angle, he understood, and not from her own since, sabbily evil, she was beyond the moralizing sense of bad and, of course, good. There had been death in the trail of her shimmering gowns, suicide, ruin, the slime of divorce courts, disgrace to more than one. But she had never cared a whit. She was always petting her own hard thoughts, puncturing the lives of strangers who never remained strangers for long—with the dagger point of her personality, her greed, her evil; and men kept on fluttering around the red, burning candle which was her life, like silly willow flies. Then more deaths, requiems bought and paid for, and all that sort of thing.

Quite melodramatic. Incredibly, garishly so.

But—what will you?

It isn't always the woman who pays, stage and pulpit to the contrary. And—she does pay—it's usually the man who endorses the note.

When she reached her home on the upper west side that Saturday night, she felt the Thing the moment she stepped across the threshold. She felt it shrouded, ambiguous, vague. But it was there. Very small at first. Hidden somewhere in the huge, square entrance hall and peering in upon her mind.

She wondered what it was, and what it might be doing there.

So she called to her maid:

"Did not call to reassure herself. For the woman was not afraid. That was it exactly; she was not afraid from first to last. If she had been, she would have switched on the light. But she did not. She left the flat in darkness. Deliberately. And that, again, was stronger since hitherto she had always hated darkness and half-light and seeping, gray shadow; had always wanted and gloried in full, orange bursts of color—big, clustering, massive, cruel lights. She had just that sort of complexion—pallid, you know, smooth, with the color rising evenly, dawn-hued and tender, and never in patches and blurry streaks.

"Annette! Annette!" she called again, a mere matter of habit; for she relied on her respectable, middle-aged Burgundian maid for everything and everything that troubled her, from wrestling with a cynical, inquisitive reporter to putting the correct quantity of ammonia in her bromo selters.

"Yes, Madame," came the maid's sleepy voice.

"Has anybody called?"

"No, Madame."

"But"—She looked into the corner of the entrance hall. The Thing seemed to be crouching among the peacock-green cushions of the ottoman there.

"But, Annette"—she commenced again.

She did not complete the sentence. The Thing was there. And what did it matter how it had got in?

"I am coming, Madame," said the maid.

"Never mind. Go to sleep. I'll uncross myself. Good night, Annette!"

"Good night, Madame!"

Diana Manning shrugged her shoulders, walked across the entrance hall, and put her hand on the door-knob of her boudoir. She said to herself that she would open the door quickly. For she sensed, rather, she knew, that the Thing intended to follow her. It radiated energy and vigor and determination. A certain kindly determination that, just for a fleeting moment, touched in her sense of awe.

But the moment she opened the door, the moment her lithe body slid from the darkness of the entrance hall into the creamy, silky, perfumed darkness of her boudoir, she knew that the Thing fitted in by her side. She felt it blow over her neck, her face, her breast, like a gust of wind. It even touched her. It touched her non-physically. That is the only way to put it.

Nor was she afraid then. On the contrary, she felt rather sorry for the Thing. And that touched in her once more the sense of awe—natural, since to feel sorry was to her a new sensation, since never before in all her life had she felt sorry for anything or anybody. The result was she

began to hate the Thing—with cold, calculating hatred, hatred without fear.

She locked the windows and doors. Quite instinctively her hand brushed the tiny nacre button which controlled the Venetian chandelier. But she did not press it. She left the boudoir in darkness. For she was familiar with every stick of furniture about the place. She knew the exact location of the great, carved, crimson-and-gold Spanish renaissance day bed between the window and the fire-place, the big tufted table in the center of the room, the smaller one, covered with a mass of bycramme, between the two windows, the low divan running along the south wall and overlapping toward the fireplace, the four little tabourets, and, in the northeast corner the Chinese screen, inlaid with ivory and lac and jade, behind which she kept a small liquor chest. She knew the room, every inch of it, and could move about it, in spite of the darkness, like a cat.

The Thing, on the other hand, whatever it was, would find many pitfalls in the cluttered-up boudoir if it tried to get rambunctious.

These latter were the exact words with which Diana Manning expressed the thought to herself; in this very moment of awe and hatred. Remember—she was born and bred on the East Side. Of course, since those days of sooty, sticky, grimy tenement chrysalis, she had learned to broaden her ears and slur her r's and to change the slang of the gutters for that of the race tracks. But, somehow, she knew that the Thing would be more familiar with her earlier diction.

She lay down on the couch, staring into the darkness. She had decided to watch carefully, to pounce upon the Thing suddenly and to throttle it. For, somehow, the Thing had taken on the suggestion of deliberate, personal intention of an aggressive hostility—something which felt and hated, even suffered, yet which had no bodily reality. The realization of it froze Diana into rigidity—not the rigidity of fear, but something far worse than fear, partaking of Fate—she didn't know what. She only knew that she must watch—then pounce and kill.

"I must have matters out with it," she thought. "One of us two is master in this room; it is I. And I can't afford to wait all night. At half past eleven young Bunny Whipple is calling for me—"

Again at the thought of "Bunny" Whipple, she felt that strange, hateful new sensation of awe, blended with pity. The Thing was responsible for it—the Thing.

How she hated it! She clenched her fists until the knuckles stretched white. What had the Thing to do with Bunny Whipple's little blue-eyed, golden-haired wife—the bride who—

Diana cut off the thought in mid-air and tossed it aside as if it were a soiled glove. She watched more carefully than ever, her breath coming in short staccato bursts, her body tense and stationed, her mind rigid. She tried to close her mind; she did not want the Thing to peep in upon it. For right then she knew—she did not feel nor guess—she knew that the Thing had the trick of expanding and decreasing at will.

It made her angry. She did not consider it fair.

For it gave to the Thing the advantage of suddenly shrinking to the size of a pin point and hiding in a knot of the Tabriz rug which covered the floor and, immediately afterwards, of bloating into monstrous size, like a balloon, and floating toward the stupefied ceiling like an immense soap bubble—floating there—looking down with that strange, hateful, rather friendly determination, "Bunny Whipple's wife"— she thought again. "I saw her yesterday and the silly little fool recognized me. She would have spoken to me had I given her the chance. Spoken to me as she wrote me—asking me to give her back her husband's love—love—"

Her mind formed the word, caressed it as it were something futile and soft and naive and laughable, like a ball of cotton or a tiny kitten—

The next moment, she whipped it aside with her hard will. She sat up straight. For at the forming of the word, the Thing which a second earlier had been a pin-point sitting on the gilded edge of a Sevres vase, bloated and stretched gigantesquely, leaped up with an immense rushing of wings, appeared to float, leaped again toward the ceiling as if trying to jerk it away from the cross beams.

Then just as suddenly, it dropped on the floor. It lay there, roaring with laughter. She felt it. She knew it.

Too, she knew exactly where it was; between the large tufted table and the divan. She'd get it and choke it while it lay there helpless with merriment.

She jumped from her couch, her fingers spread like a cat's claws.

"I'll get you—you Thing!" she said the words out loud. "I'll get you! I'll get you!" Her voice rose in a shrill, tearing shriek—step by step, she approached the divan.

"I'll get you—get you—get you—"

"Madame! Madame! Did you call me?"

It was the maid's voice coming from the hall.

"No—no! Go to bed, Annette! Go to bed—do you hear me?" as the maid rattled the door-knob. "I don't want to be disturbed—"

"I beg your pardon, Madame," Annette coughed discretely. "I didn't know that anybody—thought you had come home alone—"

"Go to bed! At once!" Diana shrieked; then, the maid's footsteps patter away, fell on the couch, panting.

She was in a towering rage. She felt sure that if it had not been for the maid she could have pounced upon the Thing while it lay there on the floor, roaring with laughter. Now the laughter had died out and the Thing had got away. It had shrunk into a tiny butterfly—that's how Diana felt it—which was beating its wings against the brass rod of the portieres. But it was fluttering rather helplessly, blindly, as it had lost some of its energy and vigor; and again Diana felt sorry and correspondingly her hatred grew. And her determination.

"I'll get you—you—"

She waited until her breath came more evenly, rose, walked noiselessly to the portieres and rustled them.

The Thing was startled. Diana could feel the tiny wings flutter and beat. She could hear its terrible straining effort to blow into a huge soap-bubble and, not succeeding, to shrink into a pin-point.

But something was making it impossible, and Diana knew what it was. It was the fact that, in one of the hidden back cells of her brain, the thought of Bunny Whipple's silly little fool of a golden-haired wife had taken firm root, refused to budge.

So Diana kept the thought. She nursed it. It seemed like a bait, and she thrust it forward.

She spoke out loud, her face raised up to the portieres:

"Silly little fool of a golden-haired bride" and she added, out of subconscious volition: "Silly Bunny!"

She had spoken the last words carelessly, as a naughty boy speaks to a cat before he catches her and twisks her tail, and the Thing was about to fall into the trap. For a second it hovered on the brass rod, seemed to wait, expectant, undecided. Then it came down a few inches. It fluttered within reach of Diana's outstretched hand.

But when she closed her hand suddenly, viciously, it winged away again, breathless, frightened, but unbattered. It flew into the center of the room. It made a renewed terrible effort to blow into a balloon.

And this time it succeeded partly.

She did not feel exactly what shape it had assumed, flabby, covered all over with soft lumps which were very beastly.

She followed more determined than ever, and the Thing tried to leap into the air.

It had nearly succeeded when Diana, with quick presence of mind, thought again of Bunny Whipple and Bunny Whipple's silly, golden-haired wife.

"She asks me to give her back Bunny's love—his love! God! Does the silly little fool think that Bunny loves me? Does she call that—Love?"

This time it was Diana who burst into a roar of laughter, and the Thing stood still and listened, its head cocked to one side, stupid, ridiculous, foolish; and when Diana neared it, when it tried to fly, to hover, to swing in mid air, all it succeeded in doing was to move swiftly about the room, just an inch or two away from the woman's groping fingers.

Diana laughed again, for she knew that the thing had lost its faculty of flying, that it would not be able to escape her for long with the chances all in her favor. For the boudoir was cluttered-up with furniture and she knew the location of every piece, while the Thing would lose itself, stumble, fall, and then—

"Wait! You just wait!" she whispered; and the Thing backing away from the center of the room toward the carved Chinese screen, she followed step by step, her fingers groping, clawing, the lust of the hunter in her eyes, in her heart.

"I'll throttle you—"

Then she reconsidered. To throttle so as to kill, she would have to measure her own strength exactly against the Thing's strength of resistance. And that would be hard. For the Thing was non-physical. It had no body.

But it was sure to have a heart. She would stab that heart. So she picked from the tufted table the jeweled Cressian dagger which she had admired the day before in a little shop on Lexington avenue, and which Bunny had given to her—with some very foolish remark, quite typical of him—she remembered. "I wish to God you'd kill yourself with it! Get out of my life—leave me in peace—me and Lottie—"

Lottie was the silly, golden-haired wife.

But when, dagger in hand, Diana took up the chase again, she was disappointed with the room as she herself. It avoided sliding rugs, sharp-cornered tufted tables, tabourets and chairs placed at odd angles. It never as much as grazed a single one of the many brittle bits of bric-a-brac.

Once it chuckled as if faintly

amused at something.

But Diana did not give up heart. She had made up her mind, and she was a hard woman—her soul a blend of diamond and fire-kissed steel.

"I'll get you!" and she thought of a new and better way. She would corner the Thing.

Again she advanced, slowly, cautiously, step by step, driving the Thing before her across the width of the room always keeping uppermost in her mind the thought of Bunny Whipple and his silly fool of a golden-haired wife—the thought which was paralyzing the Thing's faculty of bloating and shrinking and flying.

The end came very suddenly.

Watching her chance, she had the Thing cornered, straight up against the inlaid Chinese screen. It tried to shrink—to blot—to fly—to get away. But Diana had timed her action to the click of a second. She brought the dagger down—with all her strength—and the Thing crumpled, it gave, it was not.

There was just a sharp pain, a crimson smear, and a very soft voice from a far, stary, velvet distance.

"You have killed me, Diana!"

"Killed—whom? Who are you?"

"The evil in your soul, Diana! The evil—"

—then something which had been concealed seemed to turn fluid and alive and golden; something rose into a state that was too calm to be ecstasy.

The next morning, Bunny Whipple's silly, blue-eyed, golden-haired wife was sitting across from her husband at breakfast.

He was white and haggard and shaky. She looked at him, pity in her eyes.

"Have you seen the morning paper, Bunny?" she asked.

"No! Don't want to. More scandal about me, I guess—" he bit the words off savagely.

"Only—that—that woman—"

"Diana Manning! All right! What about her?"

"She was found dead last night—by her maid. She had stabbed herself through the heart with a Cressian dagger. The papers say that a smile was on her face—a happy, sweet smile—as if—" She picked up the Star and read the reporter's lyric outburst out loud:

"As if death had brought her happiness and salvation and a deep, calm, glorious fulfillment."

Bunny Whipple did not reply. He stared into his coffee cup.

Very suddenly he looked up. His wife had risen and walked around the table toward him.

She put her slim, white hands on his shoulders.

There were tears in her eyes—tears and a trembling question.

He drew her to him, and kissed her.

## Maybe a Water Heater Would Pay You

That combination water fountain and heater is the most convenient and profitable hog equipment I ever bought." The speaker was J. L. Kranning, one of the good hog raisers in Miami County, Indiana. "You remember that cold day we had in January two years ago? Those two oil lamps kept the water so warm that only a thin coat of ice formed around the edges. Most of the time one lamp is all that is needed to keep the water warm enough for the pigs to drink comfortably."

Mr. Kranning used to water his pigs in a trough during the cold winter days. "An hour after I'd chopped the ice out of the trough and put fresh water from the well in, it would be frozen up, most likely," he went on. "If any of the pigs did not drink soon after I'd put in the fresh water, they usually had to wait another twelve hours before they could get a drink. That's bad business for a growing pig. He needs plenty of warm water to help digest his feed and keep his digestive system flushed out properly. With this water heater my pigs can get a drink any time they want it—a drink that does not chill them and make them hump up their backs like my pigs did when they had to drink ice-cold water from a trough."

The heater and fountain that Mr. Kranning uses is a combination affair. There are two oil lamps to warm the water. Kerosene is used for fuel. The heater is mounted on iron skids and can be hauled around easily with a horse.

It is likely that your local hardware dealer sells such heaters—James R. Wiley, in Farm and Fireside.

## How Udder Type Affects Production

Why the importance of the udder? If you know dairy cattle, you know that upon the size, shape, and general characteristics of this organ and its accessories depend pretty largely the producing capacity of a cow.

Size is essential, yet often misleading. The dairyman must keep in mind that a large udder may be due to either an extensive growth of secretive tissue or of connective material. In the latter case the abundance of connective tissue often misleads the inexperienced buyer into purchasing what he supposes, on account of the large display of udder, to be a high producer, but which may be a really inferior animal.

A desirable udder, one composed largely of secretive tissue, should be mellow to the feel, covered with a soft, pliable skin and fine hair. On the other hand, an udder that feels firm and coarse, and which does not decrease noticeably in size when the milk is drawn, is undesirable, and is characteristic of the "boarder" cow.

The importance of udder texture cannot be over-emphasized, yet, strange as it may seem, the meaty-uddered cow often wins in the show ring. This is due to the fact that the udder of a high-producing animal is liable not to contain sufficient connective tissue to maintain it in a desirable shape under the heavy weight of milk secreted.

Length and width is to be preferred rather than great depth. Aside from the possibility of a deep udder breaking down under heavy strain, is the objection that it offers too little surface for the operation of the blood vessels from which materials for the manufacture of milk are secured.

While not always an indication of high production, the case in which prominent veins cannot be associated with abundant milk secretion are few. After covering the udder the milk veins pass forward along the stomach and disappear in the milk wells. The deeper the milk wells, and the longer and more tortuous the milk veins, the better indication that the cow is a good producer.

The teats should be reasonably large, three or four inches being preferred by most dairymen. Abnormally large teats, however, are apt to be associated with "cut-up" udder—that is, one the floor of which is irregular and cut up between the teats. Any such irregularity or lack of fullness means less room for secretive tissue, and hence objectionable.

While most authorities prefer that the floor of the udder be flat, it is nevertheless a fact that an udder sloping upward in the fore part, such as the one shown in the illustration, or more usually so, may usually be expected to contain more secretive tissue that a flat-bottomed one.

The desirable characteristics mentioned thus far may be determined easily only after a cow freshens.

In case the animal is dry, a reliable indication of a good sized udder, in so far as length is concerned, is good length between the point of the hip bone and the pin bone. A line dropped from the pin bone will meet the rear attachment. The conformation of the thighs, too, is a reliable guide to the breadth an udder may be expected to develop. The thigh should be concave, thus allowing plenty of

## Attention, MEN!

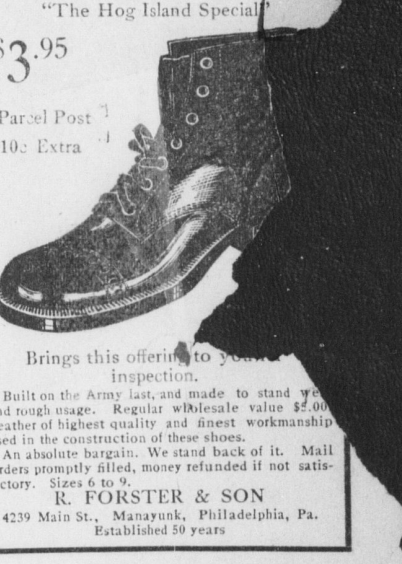
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## U Need This Household Necessity

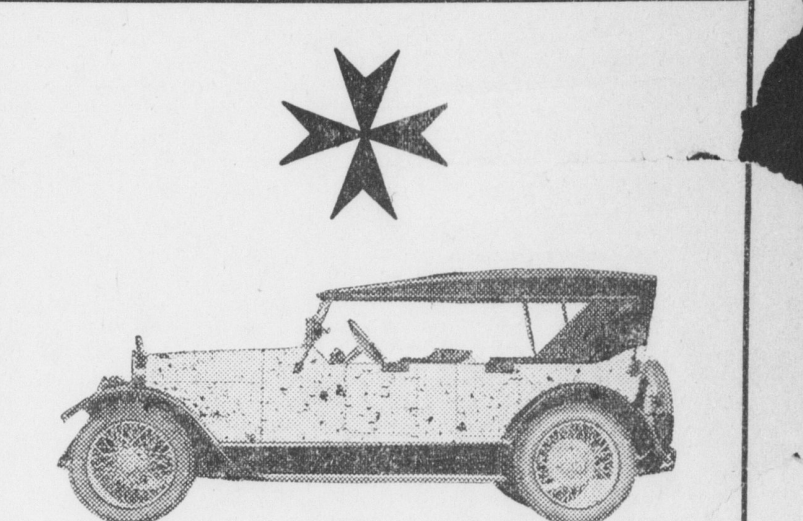
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