The ALFRED STORY BOOK

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Published by the Class in Short Story Writing of Alfred College

FOREWORD

It is with much pride, tho with some trepidation, that the members of the class in Short Story Writing of Alfred College offer this, the second Alfred Story Book, to their friends, the public. We offer no apologies, for these stories. They are merely representative of our work. Still, we realize that they are not perfect examples of the modern short story; our experience is still limited, but we wish to inspire those who come after us to better work; to entertain by our small contributions the public to a small degree; and to realize the ambition of every short story writer to see his work in print.

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BLACK HORSES

FREDERICKA L. VOSSLER

"It was awfully, Grant." Em'ly Hyers shuddered with recollection. She picked up the platter of fried eggs and passed them to her husband, Grant, who slid one of them on to his plate with his knife. Then she continued with the expression of one who takes pleasure in telling of some horror.

"There I was standin' by the side of that steep, rocky road, and, as I said, it seemed as if all of a suddent they came an awfully noise of poundin' and clackin', an' I got all scared, so that I got stiff and couldn't move. And then suddenly it seemed that two big black horses come thunderin' round the corner and down that steep hill plungin' on right toward me. An' I tried to move, but I couldn't, not even move my tongue to call you to help me. I was just goin' to git crushed to the ground and stamped to pieces, when I woke up." As she finished she laid down on her plate a piece of brown bread which she had been making a pretense at eating.

"That was a funny dream, Em'ly," remarked Grant, more by way of showing that he had heard than in displaying any interest in the narration. He was used to hearing Em'ly tell of dreams with equally awful and significant meanings. To him it signified nothing extraordinary. So he continued to drink long swallows of the milk, and to gulp down huge bites of egg-soaked bread.

"Funny!" ejaculated Em'ly emphatically, "Funny, Grant, did you say? It was awfully! It was horrible! You don't know what that means, or you wouldn't say it was funny!"

"No, I can't say that I do," he responded uninterestedly.

"It means trouble! It means worse than trouble! It means death!" Em'ly turned white as she spoke. Her breakfast remained untouched. She twitched nervously in her chair. "Dreamin' of black horses always means death. Why, Grant, I dreamt of black horses before Uncle Joe died. And my dreams always mean something. I wonder who....?"

"Now, Em'ly, don't try to find someone to kill off just because you dreamed of black horses," interrupted Grant, rather provoked at the usual turn of the conversation on such occasions.

"That's just what you always say, Grant. But wait and see; I've noticed that it always happens just as I think it will. My dreams always come true." Triumphant but pale, Em'ly rose from the table, and dragged herself heavily into the pantry.

Grant arose also, and putting on his overall jacket strode out of the house, whistling, "Work for the Night is Coming." He was going out to the twenty-acre field to work this morning. The field had to be dragged.

As Em'ly dragged heavily about her work that morning her mind again and again flew back to the dream of the black horses. Emily Hyers was a big woman of fifty-one years. Her large frame, the huge, firm, round muscles of her forearms, and her large powerful hands all increased one's impression of the woman's physical hardihood. Her head, which was a bit too small for her body, supported an exceedingly meagre number of dull brown hairs, all of which Em'ly gathered into a small knot on the top of her head. An aluminum hairpin sufficed to hold in place the few hairs, which looked as though they were being strained from their lodging place. A few of the hairs which were not long enough to be stretched into the grasp of the aluminum hairpin, hung downward in a fringe at the back of her neck. In her unbeautiful face were clearly manifested the sordid ignorance, the narrow superstition, and the degenerate morbidness of her warped character and existence.

Her husband, Grant, although a man of fifty-seven years, still retained the natural cheerfulness and tendency to look on the bright side of things, inherent in a young man. His breadth of character, deep understanding, broad sympathies, and inexhaustible patience were often put to the test by the narrow and superstitious eccentricities of his wife.

"Could it be cousin Martha's daughter Ella?" Em'ly stopped in the middle of her dishwashing to ask herself the question. "She has scarlet fever, and she probably is worse."

All morning Em'ly dragged aimlessly from one thing to another. She got some bags of dried beans which she thought she would sort for planting, but just when she had all her dishes ready and was seated by the table, she remembered that she hadn't put down on the calendar the number of eggs they gathered yesterday. She got up to do that. Again she sat down and pouring some of the beans out on the red cotton tablecloth started sorting them. But that reminded her that the cream jars had to be emptied into the churn so that Grant could churn when he came in that noon. When she had finished that she again sat down.

"But I can't do this when somethin' dreadful is goin' to happen," she said to herself nervously. Uneasily she got up and started to the bedroom, but stopped and turning retraced her steps to her rocking chair. Dropping in the chair, she began to cry quietly and agitatedly to herself.

At noon, Grant found her crying in her chair. A repulsive feeling toward the superstition of his wife came over him, but he quickly repressed it. In vain he tried to comfort her. She persisted that disaster was about to befall.

During the afternoon she was as hopelessly morose as during the forenoon. To control herself was impossible. In fact, she made no effort to. A temporary relief from her morbidness came with the arrival of the rural mail carrier. But on noticing his arrival she glanced up at the clock, which was a wedding anniversary present, and immediately her fear grew worse.

Startled she put her hands to her face and began to moan. The clock had stopped again at five o'clock exactly. That surely meant dire trouble. This was the third consecutive day that the clock had stopped, and always at five o'clock. It surely meant something was going to happen. And she knew it would happen in three days, because the clock had stopped three days in succession. As her thoughts continually reverted to the dream and the significance of the clock stopping, she grew more and more uneasy.

That night before retiring Em'ly, accompanied by the faithful Grant, made the rounds of the house, seeing that every window was securely nailed and every door locked. Every coal in the stove was extinguished by means of water, before Em'ly could be induced to go to bed. Even then after she was in bed, upon hearing a slight sound from the vicinity of the barns, she would not lie down until Grant got up, dressed, and went down to see whether everything was all right. While he was gone she kept the door locked, trembling with nervous fear during his absence. Upon his return and assurance that nothing was wrong, she finally went to bed. In ten minutes she got up again, suddenly remembering that perhaps Grant had forgotten to lock the door when he returned from the barn. It was ten o'clock before Em'ly was sufficiently assured of her safety to go to sleep.

At four o'clock in the morning, Grant was startled into wakefulness. Em'ly was sitting up in bed, clutching Grant's arm in a powerful grasp, and uttering deep groans.

"Oh, Em'ly, Em'ly! What is it?" he whispered, scared by the dreadful sounds of his wife's voice, and by the suddenness of his awakening.

"Them black horses again!" she moaned. "This time they was hitched to a hearse, and it was a funeral. And it was here, at our house!" she shrieked.

Grant was attempting to quiet her by stroking her large arm. "There, there," he comforted.

"And, oh Grant, there was lots of people here, but I wasn't here. Where was I? I was in the hearse." She fell back heavily on the pillow.

As Grant started to get up to light the lamp, Em'ly clutched him by the arm, whimpering, "Oh, don't leave me!"

"Don't be frightened, Em'ly," her husband solaced. "I'm just going to light the lamp."

With the light Em'ly's fears were somewhat assuaged. She slept fitfully the rest of the morning, tossing and turning often.

That day, although warm and sunny outside, was a day of terror for Em'ly. She accomplished no work beyond the bare setting on the table of a few articles of food for Grant. Over and over again the series of evil forebodings rushed through her mind.

The clock had stopped three days in succession at the same hour. That meant that somethin' was goin' to happen in three days. It had stopped at five o'clock. That meant that it would happen at five o'clock on the third day. Her dream of black horses meant that somethin' terrible was goin' to happen—someone was goin' to die. And then she dreamt that there were black horses hitched to a hearse, and she was in the hearse. (At this point in her thoughts she always groaned.) She was goin' to die—that was the terrible thing that was goin' to happen. But why should she die? She didn't want to die! She wasn't ready to die! True, she had her shroud all made and packed away in the trunk. But that would keep many years yet. And if she should die who would git the meals for Grant? Who would take care of his house and wash his clothes and do all the other things she had to do to keep Grant goin' straight? He was so absent-minded that he would forgit every time a note come due, or he would forgit and let the cream git too sour before he churned. She couldn't die. Then strong and convincing would surge over her the convictions that she was going to die. Hadn't her dreams said so? Hadn't the clock stopped? Didn't her dreams always come true? It was only by sheer will power that she remained on her feet that day.

That night she would not go to bed. Grant exerted every power of persuasion to convince her that it was only her imagination, that if she would lie down and rest and think of the mercy of the Lord, all her fears would vanish. In vain he showed her that all the doors were locked, the windows nailed. Things which before would have shown her that everything was safe were of no avail now. In such a condition she could not be left alone, so Grant was forced to stay up all night with his wife. During most of the night she sat staring out of her large bright eyes, her mind in the clutches of a haunting fear. At four o'clock Grant opened his eyes and found her head had fallen forward on her chest, and that she was breathing in short irregular breaths. Then he too fell into a light slumber.

"What's that? Em'ly uttered in a voice thick with horror. Grant awoke with a start and leaped from his chair.

"Listen!" commanded Em'ly weakly. It was the faint yet, clear sound of dogs howling. What a terrorizing effect that doleful, ominous sound has on the diseased mind. Half-crazed, yet petrified, Em'ly sat straining every effort to catch the melancholy ululations. First the sound began in low rumbling tones, then increased in volume and rose in pitch until it trembled away in long-drawn-out plaintive sibilations. It had a maddening effect on Em'ly. She rose from her chair. The strain was becoming impossible to bear. With a piercing shriek she ran to her bed and pulling the covers over her head she began to moan in low tones.

All that day she went about the house like one gone mad. She was crazed with fear. Sensible to nothing but the horror of her impending death, she wandered from room to room, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, doing nothing. She was like a wild animal. She would stop suddenly in the middle of the room, her whole frame trembling like that of a person with the ague. Then suddenly she would jump to one side as though dodging something, or start to run, rushing from one room to another, until she was utterly fatigued and panting and breathless as a hart in the chase.

At three o'clock Grant hitched up one of the horses to go after a neighbor woman to stay with Em'ly. When he got there she had gone to town. After a few moment's deliberation as to what should be his next action, he decided to go to town also and bring back the doctor.

As the afternoon waned and it drew near half past four, Em'ly began to mutter in hoarse tones, "It's comin'! I feel it's clutch!" And then she would start on one of her wild tears around the house again.

Just as the clock struck half-past four, she emerged from her bedroom into the combined kitchen and dining-room and started to rush through when a spectacle which blanched her flushed face and heightened her terror to the bursting point, met her gaze. Her breast heaved violently, her heart leapt up in spasmodic paroxysms of horror. Before her stood her own rocking chair rocking back and forth—back—and—forth——back—and—forth. Its arms were moving outward and forward in a beckoning motion toward her. Powerless to resist, she was drawn as by some hypnotic power steadily toward the chair. Her strength was almost gone as she sank into its depths. It was coming! It was here!

But just as this thought rushed forcefully across her consciousness, it was stopped by the violent onrush of another thought, which seemed to run up against the first and smash it.

"I can't die! I must live! I must do somethin' to keep my heart from stoppin'!"

With a blind grasp she reached for the little square bottle of pills—heart pills. They would revive her heart. Six of the pills were poured out into her hand and hastily swallowed. In her frenzy she took no account of numbers. For a few minutes then she sat motionless. Suddenly she sat up straight, but immediately fell back. Tearing, agonizing pains gripped her. She alternately stretched out so that her body was rigid and taut, then suddenly recoiled and doubled up under the stimulus of the pains that shot through her body. After twenty minutes of agonizing suffering and struggles, her heavy body suddenly sunk down in the chair. A few whimpering moans escaped from her drawn mis-shapen mouth, and she lay silent and motionless. The bi-chloride of mercury tablets, which she, in her diseased mental state had taken for headache pills, had done their deadly work effectively.

WHO'S BOSS?

M. LUCRETIA VOSSLER

Silas Penny, "Si" for short, had terrified the youngsters in the little village for years. On those firsts of May when they would knock surreptitiously on his door after hanging there a bouquet of flowers, a paper sack of June beetles, or a lonely bullfrog, he would open his door and hobble after them, calling down the wrath of Satan upon them. They were always away with a delighted whoop, for he chased them farther and acted more fiercely than did any other person in the village.

"Ye blamed little varmints," he would yell at them, "don't ye dare to darken my path agin, or I'll...." the rest of his invective was usually lost in his husky "hoich, hoich" as he spat upon the ground.

Si was a curious figure. He might almost have stepped out of one of Dickens' novels. If he had had a youth no one was aware of the fact. His tall figure was stooped, his face withered and wrinkled with many deep lines, his gray hair thin, and his eyes dimly blue. Si's knees bowed out ridiculously forming a crude letter "O," his hands were gnarled and knotted in bunches. His movements were quick and jerky, his speech choppy and nervous and frequently interspersed with "hoich, hoichs" accompanied by a healthy spat upon the ground or in his old favorite cuspidor.

Si's wife, his second wife to be exact, was a calm little body, hopelessly neat and extremely quiet. She was to Si "the old lady." She went about her own business, never meddling with anything that did not concern her.

The little neighbor-girl next door used to bring Si's mail to him every afternoon. She was almost afraid of him, but her mother made her do it. She would bring it in and then run before he might be tempted to say "thank you."

One afternoon she brought Si a letter along with the "County Gazette." He adjusted a pair of ancient spectacles to his dim eyes and tore open the letter with one quick movement of his gnarled hand. His eyes traveled down the page. "It's from Charlie," he told his wife.

"What's the trouble, Silas?" inquired his wife, for she saw how agitated he was.

"It's about Nettie—she's awful bad—" and, "hoich, hoich" to cover his emotion, "she wants us to come 't once," he said.

His quiet little wife began at once to put things in order although there didn't seem to be a single thing out of order in the whole house.

Nettie was Silas' daughter by his first wife. This illness proved to be her last. And that is how Si became like the veritable old woman in the shoe. Nettie was the mother of six small children. Charlie was unable to care for his motherless babies and Si grudgingly offered to take "a couple if it couldn't be helped otherwise." Charlie snatched at the suggestion and two weeks later dispatched his whole brood to the country.

Si was sitting in his sunny little front room when the big car drove up. It stopped in front of the house and six golden and red-haired, fair and freckled, chubby and skinny little children almost fell over themselves in their excited attempts to be the first to see "Granpa, Granma and their new home."

"Holy cats!" ejaculated Si as he watched them tumbling out, "I see where—hoich, hoich—I'll have to learn 'em something. They'll be killed yet—hoich, but it'd serve 'em right, blast their little hides."

Georgie Henderson, an awkward boy of ten, was dragging the twins, one by each hand. Fannie and Annie were just five and deliciously like little round golden balls of radiant happiness and irrepressible spirits. John, almost four with an important sturdy stride trudged along behind. Lulu, a graceful slip of a girl of seven with surprisingly bright red hair and quantities of freckles, was pulling the squirmy little "Teenie" by one hand.

From the window Si watched the group and vowed that "he'd tame 'em down if it tuk the last living breath in his body." Lulu tapped gently on the door and when her grandfather bawled out "Come in" in a most terrifying voice, the whole six of them came tumbling in. The little grandmother fluttered in and began to untie bonnet strings and smooth rumpled curls. Si, however, maintained a rigid silence.

"Come, come now, and get some molasses cookies and some milk," invited the grandmother and they all followed her without a word, except Lulu. She stood for a moment curiously watching the figure of her stern grandparent. Then, apparently making up her mind, she rushed at him, threw her chubby little arms about him, and snuggled her little freckled face in his wrinkled neck. The very tip-top-most tiny red curl tickled the old man's nose. "Granpa," she crooned in his ear, "you do love us, don't you, Granpa?"

"Huh, hum!" He fumbled around for an excuse to put her down, but seemed unable to find one. "Hoich....hoich."

"Oh Granpa," Lulu gave a squeal of delight, "do that noise again....oh, it's so funny!"

"Down with ye—down with ye, dast ye anyway," and he pushed her down and covered his confusion with an additional "hoich hoich."

"Don't you like me, Granpa?" Lulu asked him from her crumpled position on the floor.

"Bout's much 'slike pizin," he yelled at her and she ran to the kitchen where the aroma of freshly baked molasses cookies filled her little heart with material delight.

"What the devil—" began Si to himself as he banged the door after his affectionate little granddaughter and sat down to think it all over. "What! the nerve of that young 'un!" and he looked dangerously ferocious as he muttered an imprecation, "I'll learn her, the hifalutin' critter, if she kin fall all over me that-a-way ——hoich, hoich,——but them gol-darn kids——hoich, hoich,——'ll be the death of me before I've lived 'nuther day!" and Si began pacing the floor agitatedly.

Meanwhile his little brood were standing in a semi-circle around the kitchen table devouring large molasses cookies and drinking mugsful of foamy milk.

"Gosh, it's good!" drawled Georgie, noisily smacking his lips.

"Georgie Henderson," piped up Lulu primly, "don't you NEVER say that word again, do you hear?"

"Yeh," was the intelligent and irritating reply.

"It's SWEARING!" screamed Lulu, forgetting her primness in her excitement and looking properly shocked.

"Guess I'm my own boss, hain't I?" demanded Georgie.

"Guess you're not, so there!" screeched Lulu.

"I am so my own boss!" Georgie yelled back to her, while the younger sisters and brothers stared with open mouths and bulging eyes at the audacity of their elders.

"You're not!"

"I am!"

"You're not!" accompanied by an emphatic stamp of her small foot.

"I am! I am! I am!"

"You are not. So THERE, Smarty—Granpa's our boss. NOW! And she pushed open the door into the front room thereby knocking Si's spectacles off and giving his forehead a vigorous bump, for he had been listening to the controversy through the keyhole.

"Aren't you our boss, Granpa?" Lulu crooned, suddenly sweet again.

"Dast it!" he yelled, "Can't a man have no peace in his own house?" and he started pacing nervously the length of the kitchen.

"Granpa, you are our boss, aren't you, Granpa?" Lulu tagged him around. "Tell him," and she pointed an antagonistic finger at Georgie, "you are, Granpa, he thinks he's awful smart and can boss us all around."

Si looked ready to burst. There was a violent struggle going on within his undemonstrative old heart. One moment he was ready to explode with fury and the next he was on the point of melting.

"I say, Granpa," persisted Lulu, keeping close at his heels, "you ARE the BOSS, aren't you, Granpa? Who else would be, Granpa? Not him!" and she cast her eyes disdainfully in the direction of Georgie who remained stupidly indifferent while he consumed quantities of molasses cookies.

"Sit down, will ye?" he roared at last. She sat down. She was a born actor. With her elbows resting on her knees, her bright red curls falling gracefully over her hands in which her head was rested, and her whole position one of dejection and humiliation, she made a picture that would have melted the heart of a crooked politician or a New York broker.

All the while Si was watching Lulu out of the corner of his eye, as he pushed first one Henderson and then another out of his way. The little Hendersons, seeing their sister in this tragic position, began to sympathize. Fannie and Annie cried gurgly healthy wails; John lowered his dignity enough to inquire, "ith you mad, Lulu?;" and the baby, imitating the twins, howled lustily. Si's calm little wife looked on, helpless, while Si continued to pace the floor. He was plainly uneasy. His "hoich hoichs" and the stealthy glances at the crestfallen Lulu were more frequent and indicative of the interest he was taking, the emotion he was experiencing.

"Huh!" sniffed Georgie to show his contempt.

"We're men, ithn't us?" demanded sturdy little John of Georgie, "and theyze all cry babiths!"

"Yaow! Yaow! Boo! Hoo!" the twins and the baby increased the volume of their outburst.

Si's fists were clenched tightly by this time. He would not look at anyone. He just struggled and struggled. The cords in his neck were strained and bulging out. An exceptionally dark blue vein stood out plainly on his forehead.

Even actors get tired. Lulu lifted a tragic, tear-stained appealing little face at just the psychological moment, "You are boss, aren't you, Grandpa? If you aren't the boss, who is?"

Old Si's knees cracked as he bent over and roughly smoothed the bright ringlets of Lulu's little head. "Ye're the boss, ye consarned little varmint," he announced.

THE STONE

CLARA LEWIS

Out in the bean patch Beanie Morris bent his back to the July sun while he pulled the weeds from among his beloved bean-vines. In the house his mother was frying doughnuts. Now and then a whiff of their delicious odor came to the patch where Beanie worked. He wrinkled his stubby Irish nose in an ecstasy of anticipation.

"Begorra, the cakes me mither makes are the best iver, I do be thinkin'," he mused to himself, and straightened his crooked back the while.

There were two things held uppermost in Beanie's heart—his mother, a true daughter of the "old sod," and his beans. For his mother Beanie had burnt the candle at both ends, that he might the sooner become a priest. And when his poor brain had been turned by such an influx of learning he turned to the cultivation of beans with the same zeal he had lavished on his books.

Strange, wasn't it, that an Irishman should prefer beans to "praties"? But Beanie was odd. Instead of flying into a passion when angered, like other Irishmen, he dropped to his knees and muttered "Ave Marias" and "Pater Nosters" till he was calm again. Poor misunderstood Beanie! How the town boys jeered him, and the adults avoided his place. They called him "crazy Beanie" and looked upon him as a nuisance and a menace, just as they had, before his affliction, respected him.

Beanie continued to pull weeds. It was nearing the hour of sunset, and he thought of the tasty supper his mother was preparing. A long shrill cry smote his ears. He turned, rushed toward the house. Terror clutched at his simple heart. At his noisy approach a dark grisly man burst from the house and fled across the fields. Beanie scarcely noticed him. His business was to find the source of that cry. He entered the kitchen. The usually spotless room was in wild disorder. Flour, potatoes, baked beans, doughnuts, covered the floor. And in the midst of it lay—his mother! For a moment Beanie stared in dumb amazement. Then with a look of almost intelligence, he knelt beside the pros-

trate woman. He raised her in his arms and carried her to her bed. With woman-like tenderness he brushed back the straggling hair, and smoothed the rumpled dress.

Then, not knowing what else to do, he went for the nearest neighbor woman. He knocked at the door. The woman opened it. She gave one look at Beanie's terror-stricken face, then closed the door with a bang. The poor fellow, nearly in tears, knocked again. This time the farmer opened the door and breathing forth a volley of abuse, told Beanie to make off.

The Irish fellow hurried on to the next house. He met with the same kind of reception. Then, in despair, a bright thought emerged from his bewildered brain. He would get the doctor! Wearily he trudged up the road to the doctor's house. The doctor was not there. Beanie sat on the doorstep nervously breaking up twigs, till the doctor came. In halting words the half-wit told his story. At a curt "hop-in" from the doctor, they were off.

In a few minutes the doctor's car was at Beanie's door. The two men sprang from it and into the house. While the doctor examined Mrs. Morris, Beanie knelt by the bed, telling his rosary. At last the doctor spoke. "Heart failure, from fright," he said. That was all. He went out and closed the door. Beanie was alone with his dead.

The doctor sent someone to care for the body. Beanie drove him from the house. He seemed endowed with superhuman energy. He put together a coffin and laid his mother out in it. He dug her grave beneath the elms of the yard. Some of his old learning must have come back to him, for since there was no priest, he himself recited the "office for the dead."

After his simple service, Beanie went back to the house. He cleaned the house, room by room. He made a pack of his few personal possessions. While he locked the doors he placed the pack on the porch. He looked around with an air of farewell, then with his pack on his back and his face away from the community which had so ill-used him and his, he disappeared down the highway. Like a stone tossed into the sea, he was gone, traceless.

LA MICHITA

LOUISE LAIR

She was a dancer in the cafe of San Quidoyla and was known as La Michita, "the tiger kitten." She was not the daughter of San Quidoyla but he had brought her up by means of a dog whip and vehement cursing.

Slim and slight was La Michita with all the litheness and agility of a beast of the jungle. Her hair was black and sheenless. Its coils were pierced by a jeweled dagger. Her eyes were tawny, amber, and ever watchful. They were treacherous, deceitful eyes and always partly closed.

When she danced it was not like the light quickness of leaves blown by the wind hurrying and scurrying here and there, but the stealthy, sinuous writhing of the girl was like that of the panther in its native element.

She had little affection for anyone and she hated men.

"Beasts," she would snarl. "How I hate them. They watch my dancing as though I was the prey, they the devouring animals. There are no good men."

And how could she be otherwise? Beaten always by San Quidoyla, ruined by her first lover, pursued and desired by many, she had never known a good man.

So every evening she danced, undulating, twisting and turning on the small platform. Her small feet padded on the boards like the paws of a tiger. Her red shawl floated behind her. In her hair the dagger shone. Little sparks of light radiated from its jewels. More and more rapidly she would move. Men showed their lust in their faces. Even San Quidoyla would applaud. Then the lips of La Michita would snarl and the light of hate would smolder in the amber depths of her eyes.

Suddenly into the life of the dancer came a stranger. He was tall and straight. His hair was iron grey, his face stern. Blue were his eyes and cold as the waters of the ocean. He sat in the cafe several nights quiet and silent. Even the dancing of La Michita did not rouse him.

His actions mystified the girl. Slowly she drifted to his table after a mad dance. The stranger looked up. A faint smile lighted his face, but his eyes, unlike the eyes of the men known to La Michita, did not light with desire. They remaied blue and cold. A faint wonderment came over La Michita. She could not understand it.

She slid into a chair.

"You are a stranger here?" she asked purringly.

The stranger nodded. La Michita again felt surprise. Usually such an advance as she had made would have called forth a suggestion of wine or of a flirtation.

"You like it here—?" she continued.

"No," replied the man and lapsed into silence. The faint smile remained on his face. It bewildered La Michita. He did not seem to be interested in her.

Many nights he came to the cafe. Always their conversation was fragmentary. His eyes remained blue and cold.

One night he detached himself from the black shadows as the dancer came out of the cafe.

"I would talk with you" he said. "I am lonely."

Never before had anyone spoken so to La Michita. Somewhere within her a faint feeling of motherliness stirred.

"This is a strange place," continued the man. "I know noone and as I am seeking a murderer dare not make friends lest my intentions be discovered. Somehow I feel that I can confide in you.

All this affected La Michita strangely. Never before had anyone trusted her. Other men had said:

"Beware. She is a wild cat, a devil. Do not put any faith in her."

Here was a man who voluntarily believed in her. Again something new stirred in the breast of the girl.

Many were the walks which followed. The stranger told of his home and childhood. A locket on his watch chain held pictures of the white-haired mother and the sweet-faced sister. The countenance of the sister was virginal and flower-like. A feeling of remorse came over La Michita, her who had never felt ought but hate and defiance.

Sometimes the stranger spoke of God. A companionship seemed to exist between him and this deity. La Michita had only heard the word God as a curse.

So through the comradeship and kindness of the man, his serene faith in a power greater than himself and in the goodness of others, and his talks of home and mother, a change was wrought in La Michita. A strange sense of peace filled her soul. Often coming in from a star-lit walk a prayer of thankfulness rose from her heart, the heart of her who had never known what it was to pray.

Gone was the bestial look from her face. Her lips smiled and gladness shone out from her eyes. Others noticed it.

"I would almost dare stroke the kitten" said one.

"She gave me a bracelet" said a painted woman.

Even her dancing was different. Gone was the sinuous writhing, the suggestiveness of posture, and the padding as of tiger's paws. She danced like a swaying flower, the red shawl floating gently and gracefully in the air.

A feeling of submission filled the dancer. Gladly would she have died for the stern-faced stranger. And through it all, the walks in the star-light, the earnest talks, and the mazes of La Michita's dancing, the eyes of the stranger remained blue and cold.

One evening the pair walked by the side of a quietly flowing stream.

Something irresistible seemed to influence La Michita. She turned to her companion. No longer were his eyes blue and cold. Now they burned with the light of love, pure, sacred love.

"Dearest," he said, "I love you."

The eyes of La Michita filled with tears. She who had never cried under the beatings of San Quidoyla. Why was God so good to her?

"Be my wife" continued the stranger, "and all that you want you shall have. And someday perhaps, who knows but that little hands will twine themselves in ours."

La Michita fell to her knees. He knew her past and yet he extended to her the joys of wifehood and motherhood. The girl sobbed. It could not be true. Surely it was a dream. Could this man love the sensual dancer?

"Can it be that you do not love me?"

Love him! His very touch was exquisite almost to the point of pain. She was not even worthy of his caress much less of his love.

San Quidoyla opened his mouth to curse when La Michita told him she danced that night for the last time. But something in the girl's face stopped him. Perhaps a vision of the stern-faced stranger came to him.

"God grant you happiness," he said and patted her hand.

La Michita danced that night like a bit of milkweed tossed by a summer wind and her face was like a Madonna's.

Many shrugged their shoulders when they heard she was leaving.

"She will return," they said.

Three days of exquisite tranquility La Michita spent with her lover. They planned their home and future. On the fifth day he was dead, stabbed treacherously by the murderer whom he was seeking.

A pall of blackness settled on the soul of La Michita. Gone was her sense of peace. She no longer had a companionship with God. He had turned his face away. Alone she wandered, stunned, blinded and bruised.

They buried the blue-eyed stranger on the day that was to have been the wedding day, the culmination of their happiness.

Up from beside the new grave rose La Michita, once more the tiger kitten.

That night she appeared in the cafe of San Quidoyla. High coiled was her hair and caught with the dagger. Red were her lips and tawny and treacherous her eyes, sinuous and panther-like her movement.

"It is the kitten, the devil returned," said San Quidoyla.

Up on the platform sprang La Michita. Wild was her dance. Sensually and abandonedly she whirled. She twisted and writhed. The red shawl coiled like a snake. Her eyes were bestial. Her lips curled in a snarl.

Suddenly high in the air flamed the dagger. Poised for a moment she held it....then unerringly into her breast it descended and the soul of La Michita went off to meet that of the stern-faced stranger waiting just Beyond.