

Was this his love—his Laura? The features were hers and the soft lines of the face and the golden hair. Who but she had such hair? And the ring on the hand he held? He well knew that ring. He bent forward and pressed the kiss on his bride's lips. Then he drew the silken veil back over her face as one might lay a handkerchief over the face of the dead. And the wedding party left the church; and the young man took his bride to their home; and the people went their way and talked.

What had he felt? What seen? Perhaps he himself could not have said at first. But after long days haunted by a white, listless face with gray, faded lips and eyes whence never came the soul's light, a face framed in a floss of unliving gold; and after long days when he knew the horror of lying beside a still, dead thing, a dead thing that had once been dearer than life to him—*then* he could tell. And as the days and the nights glided ghost-like away, she was ever the same. Not once was a smile on her lips. Not once a gleam of life in her eyes.

III.

On a couch in the midst of a tapestry-hung room lay a beautiful woman. The crimson light from the red-curtained windows hovered softly about her revealing the fairness of her dark-hued face and the charm of her serpent grace.

A curtain was drawn aside and a young man entered. The woman smiled and half rose on the couch. "I knew you would come," she said, and her voice was silver-toned. "Have you wearied of the dead and are come seeking the living? I am alive."

The young man stepped unsteadily toward her. His face was white and wan—a pitiful face.

"Give me back my Laura," he cried huskily. "Give her to me again. My Laura!"

The woman's eyes glittered. She started up passionately. Then she laughed her low, cruel hyena laughter.

"Have you lost your Laura?" she asked mockingly. "Is the dead thing gone? That is too bad. But why come to me for her? Do I steal corpses?" Her voice had become a contemptuous hiss.

A bright savage light was born in the young man's eyes. His face hardened. "No; damn you," he cried, "you do not steal corpses. But you steal souls. You have stolen hers, and unless you give it back your life shall pay for it." There was menace in his tone and a knife gleamed in his hand.

The woman smiled gently. She leaned back on the cushioned couch and drew back the robe from her shapely bosom. "Strike," she said. Now her voice was low and sweet. "You have all there ever was of your Laura—a dead body. I can give you no more. Strike, if you wish."

"You lie," screamed the man. "Take that, you she-devil!" He dealt a quick blow full on the shapely bosom while the dark eyes still turned to him smiling. Then he raised the curtain and was gone.

On the cushioned couch lay the woman's form in all its reptilian grace. On her dark face its own dark smile was fixed by death. The red glare rested on her blood-colored robe and on the scarlet stream flowing from her breast. After a while night came and swallowed all in its gloom.

IV.

People had talked about the peculiar conduct of a certain young man on his wedding day. At first it baffled explanation, but soon came hints and rumors that his married life was not all joy. It was said his wife was insane. But now this was changed and people were wondering again. The wife had unexpectedly recovered. Surely no one knew a more pleasing hostess or companion than she. Always she was bright and witty and talked as sanely as anyone. She seemed to live entirely for her husband. She was a model of wifely devotion. Yet despite all this he was more gloomy and morose than before. Nay, worse; it was known that he