

A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY.

The Nebraska Sanitarium.

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Across the western part of New Jersey, from the Delaware River to the Rockies, a long, wooded mountain ridge extends. Among Jerseymen it is known as Saurland, and the early Dutch settlers whose lot it was to open this part of the world to civilization could not have chosen a more appropriate title. The mountain is a great picturesque pile of trap and shale. Trees grow on it, and that is all. Along its edges a few broken-down farm buildings still defy the ravages of storm and wind, but most of them are uninhabited, and they stand as mountains to men's disappointments. It is a popular saying in the Rockies valley that no living creature thrives on Saurland, and it is an unlucky bird that builds its nest there.

Far up on the mountain side about three miles from the nearest hamlet is a gorge filled with massive boulders. There is a mountain stream that boils and fumes in the black depths between the boulders, and because of the sound it produces the locality has come to be known as "Roaring Rocks." It would be almost impossible to find a wilder, weirder spot than Roaring Rocks. The gorge is always in gloom, for between the interlacing branches of the trees no sunshine ever creeps. The song of birds and the chatter of squirrels is ever absent, and the only sound is that of the wind in the tree-tops and the mysterious monotonous roaring of the hidden stream. The most curious inhabitants of the surrounding region never venture there except in broad day, and the more superstitious regard the place as haunted by the ghost of a woman who, in a past generation, was found dead on the top of a cubical boulder that, like an altar, rises above its fellows.

About 9 o'clock of last Monday night a farmer named Norman Wyckoff, who lives at Skillman, was plodding homeward along the road that skirts the base of the mountain. He had reached the neighborhood of Roaring Rocks and had hurried his pace to get away from the ill-favored locality when he stopped in his tracks at the sound of a sickening shriek from the depths of the dark woods above him. Again the cry rang and echoed from the rocks and was lost in the night. At first Wyckoff was moved to take to his legs, but being a man of extraordinary courage, and the village champion in all matters of athletic prowess as well, he paused and listened.

Suddenly a red glare flashed from the mountain and flickered against the low-hanging clouds. Wyckoff's dog growled and crawled behind his master. By listening intently the man could hear the sound of human voices, and occasionally, a low, meaning cry of an-

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guish. Some one was in trouble, and the valiant farmer, disregarding all thought of the dead woman's ghost, and his own personal welfare, began the ascent of the mountain. As he drew nearer to the gorge, the sound of voices grew more distinct, and lights glimmered through the trees. He approached through the dry leaves more carefully, until, from the shelter of a rock he could look into the gorge without being seen.

By the light of a wood fire he saw a sight that chilled the blood in his veins. Twelve figures, robed in black, sat in a semi-circle about the fire and moaned a weird chant, swaying their bodies as the sound swelled or fell. Before the figures, high in air on the altar rock where the dead woman had been found, stood the white shape of a naked man, blindfolded and bound. The chant rose to a wild note that ended abruptly and all was deathly still, except the rumbling of the water among the rocks.

Then in a deep, chilling voice one of the twelve spoke, "Cur!" he said. "For the third and last time before you are doomed to eternal damnation, speak!" And the circle before the fire growled: "Speak!" Again the wild cry for help awoke the echoes of the night, and it came from the white figure on the rock.

A falling leaf brushed the prisoner's shoulder and he started from fright. Wyckoff, hidden outside the circle of light, trembled lest the man should throw himself over the edge of the altar-rock to almost certain death. He would have called out to him, but a sudden move on the part of the twelve caused him to hesitate. They rose, each taking a fire-brand from the blazing. Striking up their monotonous chant, again, they disappeared behind the pulpit rock, and in a short time stood upon its top, where they surrounded the bound man. The leader brought forth a long

ropes, which he passed about the prisoner's neck. The chant rose to the same wild refrain, and as it died away a ghastly green glare flashed from behind the boulder and threw the whole group into hideous silhouette. Wyckoff could stand the strain no longer. He sprang from his cover and dashed down the gorge toward the road. After he had put fifty yards between himself and the murderous scene he stopped and looked back. Every light had disappeared,

and the roaring of the water was the only sound that reached his ears.

Tuesday morning a party of farmers with dogs and guns visited Roaring Rocks. A pile of wood-ashes marked the place where the fire had burned the night before. One of the farmers climbing to the top of the altar, and there he found, painted across the face of the granite, in large, red letters, the following curious inscription: "D. K. E. RUTBACK. Every light had disappeared, GERS."—L. F. ROBBINS.

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