

Wall

"This," said the estate agent, "is a very charming house."

He guided the young couple around droning on and on as he walked swiftly from room to room. Downstairs, upstairs, and downstairs again. Mary saw the stained glass window on the landing ceiling which let in the sunlight through a plain glass skylight set in the roof. Philip was looking for such things as good flooring and dry walls.

Once downstairs again, Mary looked out of the french window that led into the garden. There were lilac trees in full bloom scenting the air. On the right, under two cypress trees was an old wall, as varied in colour as Autumn leaves. There were uneven bulges in it here and there, giving it the appearance of continual movement...a shimmering, rippling movement. It may have been a trick of the bright sunlight that caused it, but Mary felt uneasy as she did so, as if unseen eyes were all around. The agent ushered them into the garden. Mary drew a sharp breath and took hold of Philip's hand as they walked the length of the garden and back again. She kept her eyes on the wall, an uneasy feeling assailing her. Turning to the agent, she asked,

"This is a very curious wall! Is it very old?"

He hesitated for a moment.

"It is about four hundred years old, I believe. It is in very good condition and well preserved, yet I have never heard of any one repairing it. It is part of an old monastery built in the sixteen hundreds."

"Tell us a little more," said Philip.

"About four hundred years ago a monastery stood here. History has it that the monks were not all they should have been in their time. They were strange in their behaviour towards the younger generation of that time, as many a young person could have told had they been capable of doing so after a visit to the monastery. They would go to confession, and were returned by one of the monks in the evening who told relatives that their sins had turned their heads and brains. However, it is only hearsay, or old wives tales."

As they walked round the garden, Mary felt a strange sensation, as if her head was being caressed by a pair of soft, smooth hands that were faintly scented with sandalwood. She felt sick and afraid. Turning to Philip, she said,

"I don't like this garden very much."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Whatever is the matter with you? There is nothing wrong with the garden!"

"I don't know what it is," she said, "but there is something wrong with it."

Philip laughed.

"You have got the jitters. When I have the garden ship-shape, by moving that rockery further down the gardens, so that we can see the whole of the wall in one stretch, you will not know the place."

"Please, Phil, let us go into the house,"

Once inside, she recovered her good spirits and laughed at herself for being so silly.

"I'm sorry. I do like the house. It is the garden I don't like very much. It must be all those trailing weeds that put me off."

She asked the agent about the story attached to the wall.

"They do say that the monks used to bury their dead in the wall."

Philip whistled.

"I'd like to hear some more of this. It sounds very interesting."

As they turned to leave the house, Philip said he had left his gloves in the garden. As he went back to get them, Mary heard him whistling cheerfully, but then it stopped suddenly, and she heard him call out sharply to her,

"Mary! Mary!"

It was a frantic call for help. She flew into the garden but he was no where to be seen. She stood as if turned to stone.

She thought she heard the sound of low murmuring voices, of singing and chanting, that seemed to come louder and louder. The scent of sandalwood was very strong. Now a voice was in her ear, deep, soft and caressing.

"Marie, Marie, I am coming for you very soon. We shall have many happy hours together, you and I."

She felt soft hands smoothing her hair. She brushed them away and ran to the wall. Here she found one of Philip's gloves on the ground, by the rockery. The other was held prisoner in the brickwork of the wall, its fingers struggling to be free. She saw a strange new bulge in the wall that had not been there before. She beat on the wall with her hands and clung to the still fluttering glove, feeling the warmth of Philip's hand in hers. She heard evil, harsh laughter that made her blood run cold. She heard the sound of singing, and feet shuffling along.

The chanting grew louder and louder, then something pulled at the glove she was holding.

"Let him go, you devils!" She screamed. "Philip! Philip, where are you? Come back! Oh, where are you?"

The chanting grew to as deafening crescendo. The wall heaved and swayed, then fell into a crumbling mass of brick dust. Mary all but fainted.

When she recovered, Philip was bending over her.

"Mary! Are you alright? What is the matter?"

"What happened to you, Philip?"

"I went into the garden for my gloves and I felt quite giddy for a while, and like a fool, I called out to you."

Mary clung to him for a moment.

"Oh, Philip!", was all she said, but she could still feel the fingers of the glove fluttering in her hand. They both looked at the heap of coloured brick dust.

"How did it fall,?" she asked.

"Oh, I just gave it a push," Philip laughed in a strange way.

But he did not tell her the whole truth, that as he went into the garden he seemed to be seized by a mighty pair of arms, and was dragged for some yards across the ground. He had heard voices speaking around him. He was taken into a building which he saw a chapel, part of a monastery. All around were old hand carvings and beautifully worked hangings in rich golds, reds, and blues. A monk was seated at the organ, his body swaying to the rhythm of the music he was playing. The sound reached the most tremendous heights, then dropped to an almost soundless movement of the player's hands. The monks sang with voices of most wondrous beauty. As the last "Amen" rang out, Philip was led out to the front and swung round to face the congregation. Their faces appalled him.

He put his hands over his eyes, then a voice rang out, loud and clear.

"Brother Philip, you rebel against all our teachings. You have been here five years and still you do not conform. The only answer is death!"

Philip started forward, but a pair of brawny arms held him back. He fought to free himself and running, to the altar, he turned, and with eyes blazing he faced the two hundred monks clad in their purple robes held in place by scarlet girdles.

"Yes, I rebel. I rebel against your hypocrisy," he cried.

"Your souls are black and tortured. You walk, eat, sleep and pray. Your prayer books under your arms, while everyday and night you are thinking up fresh devilry, and how to corrupt the innocent and the ignorant yet again. You gorge yourselves, your bloated bodies groan under their weight while children starve. You soak yourselves in red wine, red as the blood that trickles down the backs of those you have flogged for daring to murmur against you and your....,"

Half a dozen monks seized him and forced him to his knees before he had time to say any more.

"Death is the only way out!"

The soft voice of Brother Mark came to him, Brother Mark, the most feared monk of all.

"Death is the only way out for dissenters. We will take him to the wall and make him comfortable. This evening I shall bring his sister to see him. I will show him how we care for his grieving, loved ones when he is no longer here to help them. I shall look after the gentle Marie when he, Brother Philip, is no longer with us"

He waved a strong, white hand towards one of the other monks.

"Brother Peter, go with all haste to Eastwich and bring back the young lady known as Marie Wofen. Tell her that her brother, Philip, is ill and wishes to see her. Go as soon as possible. Tell her to come prepared to stay for several days and tell her that we shall take all possible care of her."

The monk bowed his head and hurried away.

The monks led Philip away and locked him in his cell. He gave a great cry of helplessness. He knew there was nothing he could do to stop his sister coming, as they had always been very close friends. He also knew the monks would use force on her if they felt like using it.

After what seemed to him to be about four hours, they came for him again and led him through the cool corridors out into the garden. They led him down the stone, flagged pathway towards the old wall under the two cypress trees on the eastern side of the chapel. Here six monks were waiting with Brother Mark at the head, hands in the sleeves of his cassock, his eyes lowered to the ground. As Philip drew nearer he saw another figure, a small and slender girl, with grey eyes, large and luminous under a blue hood. It was his sister, Marie. She started forward to meet him but was held back by Brother Mark.

"Philip, Philip!"

She freed herself from her captor and flew to him.

They said you were ill and soon to die. They said that I had to come at once because you needed me. What ever does it mean? What are they going to do to you?"

"I have told you never to come here on any reason whatsoever."

Philip caught her hand in his own, and tried to pull her a little nearer to him.

"You know well enough what they do to us here when we finally see them for what they really are. And you also know what will happen to you when I can no longer protect you. Why did you come?"

He bent down to kiss her, but she was pulled away from him and was dragged crying to the side of Brother Mark. He saw that she was held firmly in his arms. The eyes of Brother Mark were like two hard, blue pebbles in his head as he looked at Philip from under their hooded lid

"Marie! Marie!"

They dragged him to the wall and forced him into an empty cavity and while two monks held him firmly, they bricked him in the opening, brick by multi-coloured brick. He saw her weeping helplessly in the arms of Brother Mark, he saw the blue of her cloak, then his vision blurred. The full horror of it descended on him as the bricks reached his chest. He could just see where Brother Mark stood with eyes gloating above his many chins. Philip struggled to be free; he felt as if he were choking...choking....."

"Marie! Marie!"

He gave a despairing cry, and giving a final struggle to free himself he pushed at the wall, then became still.

"Yes," said Philip to Mary, "I stumbled in the garden and fell against the wall. I put my hand out to save myself, I gave it a push and the whole thing collapsed around me."

He tightened his hold on her.

"I was so frightened," she said. "For a while I could not see you. It must have been the sun in my eyes".

Philip turned to Mary, and stared at her in amazement.

"You know! How did you know?" he exclaimed

"I heard them," she answered, "I thought I felt them too. They were in the garden - and the scent of sandalwood."

"Do you know," he said, "I think we will take this house and beat them yet." - finally acknowledging the truth of their experience.

"You don't think they will be too strong for us.?" asked Mary.

"Not now! The wall is destroyed and with that their memory. I feel sure they are gone for ever. Of course, we shall have to get rid of the cypress trees as well, and that will finish everything."

The voice of the estate agent broke in on them.

"Have you seen enough of the house? I would be a pity to let it slip away from you. I take it that you intend to buy?"

"Yes, we'll buy it." said Mary and Philip together.

"It is an odd thing," said the agent, "but for a moment or two you both seemed to disappear from view as you walked down the garden about a quarter of an hour ago."

"It must have been the sun in your eyes", said Mary.

The agent ushered them into his waiting car. As they left the house they heard blackbird singing its heart out with joy.