

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

WAIF WANDER

Table of Contents

<u>THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE</u>	1
<u>WAIF WANDER</u>	1

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

WAIF WANDER

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

In the year 1858 I had established a flourishing practice in London; a practice which I owed a considerable portion of, not to my ability, I am afraid, but to the fact that I occupied the singular position of a man professional, who was entirely independent of his profession. Doubtless, had I been a poor man, struggling to earn a bare existence for wife and family, I might have been the cleverest physician that ever administered a bolus, yet have remained in my poverty to the end of time. But it was not so, you see. I was the second son of a nobleman, and had Honourable attached to my name; and I practiced the profession solely and entirely because I had become enamoured of it, and because I was disgusted at the useless existence of a fashionable and idle young man, and determined that I, at least, would not add another to their ranks.

And so I had a handsome establishment in a fashionable portion of the city, and my door was besieged with carriages, from one end of the week to the other. Many of the occupants were disappointed, however, for I would not demean myself by taking fees from some vapourish Miss or dissipated Dowager. Gout in vain came rolling to my door, even though it excruciated the leg of a Duke; I undertook none but cases that enlisted my sympathy, and after a time the fact became known and my levees were not so well attended.

One day I was returning on horseback toward the city. I had been paying a visit to a patient in whom I was deeply interested, and for whom I had ordered the quiet and purer air of a suburban residence. I had reached a spot in the neighbourhood of Kensington, where the villas were enclosed in large gardens, and the road was marked for a considerable distance by the brick and stone walls that enclosed several of the gardens belonging to those mansions. On the opposite side of the road stood a small country-looking inn, which I had patronised before, and I pulled up my horse and alighted, for the purpose of having some rest and refreshment after my ride.

As I sat in a front room sipping my wine and water, my thoughts were fully occupied with a variety of personal concerns. I had received a letter from my mother that morning, and the condition of the patient I had recently left was precarious in the extreme.

It was fortunate that I was thought-occupied and not dependent upon outward objects to amuse them, for although the window at which I sat was open, it presented no view whatever, save the bare, blank, high brick wall belonging to a house at the opposite side of the road. That is to say, I presume, it enclosed some residence, for from where I say not even the top of a chimney was visible.

Presently, however, the sound of wheels attracted my eyes from the pattern of the wall-paper at which I had been unconsciously gazing, and I looked out to see a handsome, but very plain carriage drawn up at a small door that pierced the brick wall I have alluded to; and almost at the same moment the door opened and closed agently, however, the sound of wheels attracted my eyes from the pattern of the wall-paper at which I had been unconsciously gazing, and I looked out to see a handsome, but very plain carriage drawn up at a small door that pierced the brick wall I have alluded to; and almost at the same moment the door opened and closed again behind two figures in a most singular attire. They were both of the male sex, and one of them was the servant; but it was the dress of these persons that most strangely interested me. They were attired in white from head to heel; coats, vests, trousers, hats, shoes, not to speak of shirts at all, all were white as white could be.

While I stared at this strange spectacle, the gentlemen stepped into the vehicle; but although he did so the

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

coachman made no movement toward driving onward, nor did the attendant leave his post at the carriage door. At the expiration, however, of about a quarter of an hour, the servant closed the door and re-entered through the little gate, closing it, likewise, carefully behind him. Then the driver leisurely made a start, only, however, to stop suddenly again, when the door of the vehicle was burst open and a gentleman jumped out and rapped loudly at the gate.

He turned his face hurriedly around as he did so, hiding, it seemed to me, meanwhile, behind the wall so as not to be seen when it opened. Judge of my astonishment when I recognised in this gentleman the one who had but a few minutes before entered the carriage dressed in white, for he was now in garments of the hue of Erebus. While I wondered at this strange metamorphosis the door in the wall opened, and the gentleman, now attired in black, after giving some hasty instructions to the servant, sprang once more into the carriage and was driven rapidly toward London.

My curiosity was strangely excited; and as I stood at the door before mounting my horse, I asked the landlord who and what were the people who occupied the opposite dwelling.

"Well sir," he replied, looking curiously at the dead wall over against him, "They've been there now a matter of six months, I dare say, and you've seen as much of them as I have. I believe the whole crew of them, servants and all, is foreigners, and we, the is the neighbours around, sir, calls them the 'white mad people.'"

"What! do they always wear that singular dress?"

"Always, sir, saving as soon as ever the old gentleman goes outside and puts black on in the carriage, and as soon as he comes back takes it off again, and leaves it in the carriage."

"And why in the name of gracious does he not dress himself inside?"

"Oh, that I can't tell you, sir! only it's just as you see, always. The driver or coachman never even goes inside the walls, or the horses of any one thing that isn't white in colour, sir; and if the people aren't mad after that, what else can it be?"

"It seems very like it, indeed; but do you mean to say that everything inside the garden wall is white? Surely you must be exaggerating a little?"

"Not a bit on it, sir! The coachman, who can't speak much English, sir, comes here for a drink now and then. He don't live in the house, you see, and is idle most of his time. Well, he told me himself, one day, that every article in the house was white, from the garret to the drawing-room, and that everything outside it is white I can swear, for I saw it myself, and a stranger sight surely no eye ever saw."

"How did you manage to get into the enchanted castle, then?"

"I didn't get in sir, I only saw it outside, and from a place where you can see for yourself too, if you have a mind. When first the people came to the place over there, you see, sir, old Mat the sexton and bell-ringer of the church there, began to talk of the strange goings on he had seen from the belfry; and so my curiosity took me there one day to look for myself. Blest if I ever heard of such a strange sight! no wonder they call them the white mad folk."

"Well, you've roused my curiosity," I said, as I got on my horse, "and I'll certainly pay old Mat's belfry a visit the very next time I pass this way, if I'm not hurried."

It appeared unaccountable to even myself that these mysterious people should make such a singular impression on me; I thought of little else during the next two days. I attended to my duties in an absent manner, and my mind was ever recurring to the one subject — viz. an attempt to account for the strange employment of one hue only in the household of this foreign gentleman. Of whom did the household consist? Had he any family? and could one account for the eccentricity in any other way save by ascribing it to lunacy, as mine host of the inn had already done. As it happened, the study of brain diseases had been my hobby during my noviciate, and I was peculiarly interested in observing a new symptom of madness, if this was really one.

At length I escaped to pay my country patient his usual visit, and on my return alighted at the inn, and desired the landlord to have my horse put in the stable for a bit.

"I'm going to have a peep at your madhouse," I said, "do you think I shall find old Mat about?"

"Yes, doctor; I saw him at work in the churchyard not half an hour ago, but at any rate he won't be farther off than his cottage, and it lies just against the yard wall."

The church was an old, ivy-wreathed structure, with a square Norman belfry, and a large surrounding of grey and grass-grown old headstones. It was essentially a country church, and a country churchyard; and one

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

wondered to find it so close to the borders of a mighty city, until they remembered that the mighty city had crept into the country, year by year, until it had covered with stone and mortar the lowly site of many a cottage home, and swallowed up many an acre of green meadow and golden corn. Old Mat was sitting in the middle of the graves; one tombstone forming his seat, and he was engaged in scraping the moss from a headstone that seemed inclined to tumble over, the inscription on which was all but obliterated by a growth of green slimy-looking moss.

"Good-day, friend, you are busy," I said. "One would fancy that stone so old now, that the living had entirely forgotten their loss. But I suppose they have not, or you would not be cleaning it."

"It's only a notion of my own, sir; I'm idle, and when I was a lad I had a sort o' likin' for this stone, Lord only knows shy. But you see I've clean forgotten what name was on it, and I thought I'd like to see."

"Well, I want to have a look at these 'white mad folk' of yours, Mat, will you let me into the belfry? Mr. Tanning tells me you can see something queer up there."

"By jove you can, sir!" he replied, rising with alacrity, "I often spend an hour watching the mad folk; faith if they had my old church and yard they'd whitewash 'em, belfry and all!" and the old man led the way into the tower.

Of course my first look on reaching the summit was in the direction of the strange house, and I must confess to an ejaculation of astonishment as I peeped through one of the crevices. The belfry was elevated considerably above the premises in which I was interested, and not at a very great distance, so that grounds and house lay spread beneath me like a map.

I scarcely know how to commence describing it to you, it was something I had never seen or imagined. The mansion itself was a square and handsome building of two stories, built in the Corinthian style, with pillared portico, and pointed windows. But the style attracted my attention but little, it was the universal white, white everywhere, that drew from me the ejaculation to which I have alluded.

From the extreme top of the chimneys to the basement, roof, windows, everything was pure white; not a shade lurked even inside a window; the windows themselves were painted white, and the curtains were of a white muslin that fell over every one of them. Every yard of the broad space that one might reasonably have expected to see decorated with flowers and grass and shrubberies, was covered with a glaring and sparkling white gravel, the effect of which, even in the hot brilliant sun of a London afternoon, was to dazzle, and blind, and aggravate. And as if this was not enough, the inside of the very brick walls was whitewashed like snow, and at intervals, here and there, were placed a host of white marble statues and urns that only increased the, to me, horrible aspect of the place.

"I don't wonder thy are mad!" I exclaimed, "I should soon become mad in such a place myself."

"Like enough, sir," replied old Mat, stolidly, "but you see it didn't make them mad, for they did it themselves, so they must 'a been mad afore."

An incontrovertible fact, according to the old man's way of putting it; and as I had no answer for it, I went down the old stone stairs, and having given my guide his donation, left the churchyard as bewildered as I had entered it. Nay, more so, for then I had not seen the extraordinary house that had made so painful an impression upon me.

I was in no humour for a gossip with mine host, but just as I was about to mount my horse, which had been brought round, the same carriage drove round to the mysterious gate, and the same scene was enacted to which I had before been a witness. I drew back until the old gentleman had stepped inside and performed his toilet, and when the carriage drove rapidly toward the city, I rode thoughtfully onward toward home.

I was young, you see, and although steady, and, unlike most young gentlemen of my age and position in society, had a strong vein of romance in my character. That hard study and a sense of its inutility had kept it under, had not rendered it one whit less ready to be at a moment's call; and, in addition to all this, I had never yet, in the seclusion of my student life, met with an opportunity of falling in love, so that you will see I was in the very best mood for making the most of the adventure which was about to befall me, and which had so tragic a termination.

My thoughts were full of the "White mad folk," as I reached my own door; and there, to my utter astonishment, I saw drawn up the very carriage of the white house, which had preceded me. Hastily giving my horse to the groom I passed through the hall and was informed by a servant that a gentleman waited in my private

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

consulting-room.

Very rarely indeed had my well-strung nerves been so troublesome as upon that occasion; I was so anxious to see this gentleman, and yet so fearful of exposing the interest I had already conceived in his affairs, that my hand absolutely trembled as I turned the handle of the door of the room in which he was seated. The first glance, however, at the aristocratic old gentleman who rose on my entrance, restored all my self-possession, and I was myself once more. In the calm, sweet face of the perfectly dressed gentleman before me there was no trace of the lunacy that had created that strange abode near Kensington; the principal expression in his face was that of ingrained melancholy, and his deep mourning attire might have suggested to a stranger the reason of that melancholy. He addressed me in perfect English, the entire absence of idiom alone declaring him to be a foreigner.

"I have the pleasure of addressing doctor Elveston?" he said.

I bowed, and placed a chair in which he re-seated himself, while I myself took possession of another.

"And Doctor Elveston is a clever physician and a man of honour?"

"I hope to be worthy of the former title, sir, while my position ought at least to guarantee the latter."

"Your public character does, sir," said the old gentleman, emphatically, and it is because I believe that you will preserve the secret of an unfortunate family that I have chosen you to assist me with your advice."

My heart was beating rapidly by this time. There was a secret then, and I was about to become the possessor of it. Had it anything to do with the mania for white?

"Anything in my power," I hastened to reply, "you may depend on; my advice, I fear, may be of little worth, but such as it is —"

"I beg your pardon, Doctor," interrupted he, "it is your medical advice that I allude to, and I require it for a young lady — a relative."

"My dear sir, that is, of course, an every day affair, my professional advice and services belong to the public, and as the public's they are of course yours."

"Oh, my dear young friend, but mine is not an every day affair, and because it is not is the reason that I have applied to you in particular. It is a grievous case, sir, and one which fills many hearts with a bitterness they are obliged to smother from a world whose sneers are poison."

The old gentleman spoke in tones of deep feeling, and I could not help feeling sorry for him at the bottom of my very heart.

"If you will confide in me, my dear sir," I said, "believe that I will prove as faithful and discreet as you could wish."

He pressed my hand, turned away for a moment to collect his agitated feelings and then he spoke again.

"I shall not attempt to hide my name from you sir, though I have hitherto carefully concealed it. I am the Duke de Rohan, and circumstances, which it is impossible for me to relate to you, have driven me to England to keep watch and ward over my sister's daughter, the Princess d'Alberville. It is for this young lady I wish your attendance, her health is rapidly failing within the last week."

"Nothing can be more simple," I observed, eagerly, "I can go with you at once — this very moment."

"Dear Doctor, it is unfortunately far from being as simple a matter as you think," he replied, solemnly, "for my wretched niece is mad."

"Mad!"

"Alas! yes, frightfully — horribly mad!" and he shuddered as if a cold wind had penetrated his bones.

"Has this unhappy state of mind been of long duration?" I questioned.

"God knows; the first intimation her friends had of it was about two years ago, when it culminated in such a fearful event that horrified them. I cannot explain it to you, however, for the honour of a noble house is deeply concerned; and even the very existence of the unfortunate being I beg of you to keep a secret for ever."

"You must at any rate tell me what you wish me to do," I observed, "and give me as much information as you can guide me, or I shall be powerless."

"The sight of one colour has such an effect on the miserable girl that we have found out, by bitter experience, the only way to avoid a repetition of the most fearful tragedies, is to keep every hue or shade away from her vision; for, although it is only one colour that affects her, any of the others seems to suggest that one to her mind and produce uncontrollable agitation. In consequence of this she is virtually imprisoned within the grounds of the

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

house I have provided for her, and every object that meets her eye is white, even the ground, and the very roof of the mansion."

"How very strange!"

"It will be necessary for you, my dear sir," the Duke continued, "to attire yourself in a suite of white. I have brought one in the carriage for your use, and if you will now accompany me I shall be grateful."

Of course I was only too glad to avail myself of the unexpected opportunity of getting into the singular household, and becoming acquainted with the lunatic princess; and in a few moments we were being whirled on our way toward Kensington.

On stopping at the gate of the Duke's residence, I myself became an actor in the scene which had so puzzled me on two previous occasions. My companion produced two suits of white, and proceeded to turn the vehicle into a dressing-room, though not without many apologies for the necessity. I followed his example, and in a few moments we stood inside the gate, and I had an opportunity of more closely surveying the disagreeable enclosure I had seen from the church belfry. And a most disagreeable survey it was; the sun shining brilliantly, rendered the unavoidable contact with the white glare, absolutely painful to the eye; nor was it any escape to stand in the lofty vestibule, save that there the absence of sunshine made the uniformity more bearable.

My companion led the way up a broad staircase covered with white cloth, and balustraded with carved rails, the effect of which was totally destroyed by their covering of white paint. The very stair-rod were of white enamel, and the corners and landing places served as room for more marble statues, that held enamelled white lamps in their hands, lamps that were shaded by globes of ground glass. At the door of an apartment pertaining, as he informed me, to the Princess d'Alberville, the Duke stopped, and shook my hand, "I leave you to make your own way," he said, pointing to the door. "She has never showed any symptoms of violence while under the calm influence of white; but, nevertheless, we shall be at hand, the least sound will bring you assistance," and he turned away.

I opened the door without a word, and entered the room, full of curiosity as to what I should see and hear of this mysterious princess. It was a room of vast and magnificent proportions, and, without having beheld such a scene, one can hardly conceive the strange cold look the utter absence of colour gave it. A Turkey carpet that looked like a woven fall of snow; white satin damask on chair, couch, and ottoman; draped satin and snowy lace around the windows, with rod, rings, and snowy marble, and paper on the walls of purest white; altogether it was a weird-looking room, and I shook with cold as I entered it.

The principal object of my curiosity was seated in a deep chair with her side toward me, and I had an opportunity of examining her leisurely, as she neither moved or took the slightest notice of my entrance; most probably she was quite unaware of it. She was the most lovely being I had ever beheld, a fair and perfect peace of statuary one might have thought, so immobile and abstracted, nay, so entirely expressionless were her beautiful features. Her dress was pure white, her hair of a pale golden hue, and her eyes dark as midnight. Her hands rested idly on her lap, her gaze seemed intent on the high white wall that shot up outside the window near her; and in the whole room there was neither the heavy, white-covered furniture, and the draping curtains. I advanced directly before her and bowed deeply, and then I calmly drew forward a chair and seated myself. As I did so she moved her eyes from the window and rested them on me, but, for all the interest they evinced, I might as well have been the white-washed wall outside. She was once more returning her eyes to the blank window, when I took her hand and laid my fingers on her blue-veined wrist. The action seemed to arouse her, for she looked keenly into my face, and then she laughed sadly.

"One may guess you are a physician," she said, in a musical, low, voice, and with a slightly foreign accent, that was in my opinion a great improvement to our harsh language.

"I am," I replied, with a smile, "your uncle has sent me to see about your health, which alarms him."

"Poor man!" she said, with a shade of commiseration clouding her beautiful face, "poor uncle! But I assure you there is nothing the matter with me; nothing but what must be the natural consequence of the life I am leading."

"Why do you lead one which you know to be injurious then?" I asked, still keeping my fingers on the pulse, that beat as calmly as a sleeping infant's, and was not increased by a single throb though a stranger sat beside her.

"How can I help it?" she asked, calmly meeting my inquisitorial gaze, "do you think a sane person would choose to be imprisoned thus, and to be surrounded by the colour of death ever? Had mine not been a strong mind

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

I should have been mad long ago."

"Mad!" I could not help ejaculating, in a puzzled tone.

"Yes, mad," she replied, "could you live here, month after month, in a hueless atmosphere and with nothing but that to look at," and she pointed her slender finger toward the white wall, "could you, I ask, and retain your reason?"

"I do not believe I could!" I answered, with sudden vehemence, "then, again I repeat why do it?"

"And again I reply, how can I help it?"

I was silent. I was looking in the eyes of the beautiful being before me for a single trace of the madness I had been told of, but I could not find it. It was a lovely girl, pale and delicate from confinement, and was about twenty years old, perhaps, and the most perfect creature, I have already said, that I had ever beheld; and so we sat looking into each other's eyes; and mine expressed I cannot say, but her's were purity, and sweetness itself.

"Who are you?" she asked, suddenly, "tell me something of yourself. It will be at least a change from this white solitude."

"I am a doctor, as you have guessed; and a rich and fashionable doctor," I added, smilingly.

"To be either is to be also the other," she remarked, "you need not have used the repetition."

"Come," I thought to myself, "there is little appearance of lunacy in that observation."

"But you doubtless have a name, what is it?"

"My name is Elveston — Doctor Elveston."

"Your christian name?"

"No, my christian name is Charles."

"Charles," she repeated dreamily.

"I think it is your turn now," I remarked, "it is but fair that you should make me acquainted with your name, since I have told you mine."

"Oh! my name is d'Alberville — Blanche d'Alberville. Perhaps it was in consequence of my christian name that my poor uncle decided upon burying me in white," she added, with a look round the cold room, "poor old man!"

"Why do you pity him so?" I asked, "he seems to me little to require it. He is strong and rich, and the uncle of Blanche," I added, with a bow; but the compliment seemed to glide off her as if it had been a liquid, and she were made of glassy marble like one of the statues that stood behind her.

"And you are a physician," she said, looking wonderingly at me, "and have been in the Duke's company, without discovering it?"

"Discovering what, my dear young lady?"

"That he is mad."

"Mad!" How often had I already ejaculated that word since I had become interested in this singular household; but his time it must assuredly have expressed the utmost astonishment, for I was never more confounded in my life; and yet alight seemed to be breaking in upon my bewilderment, as I stared in wondering silence at the calm face of the lovely maiden before me.

"Alas, yes!" she replied, sadly, to my look, "my poor uncle is a maniac, but a harmless one to all but me; it is I who suffer all."

"And why you?" I gasped.

"Because it is his mania to believe me mad," she replied, "and so he treats me"

"But in the name of justice why should you endure this?" I cried, angrily starting to my feet, "you are in a free land at least, and doors will open!"

"Calm yourself, my friend," she said, laying her white hand on my arm, and the contact, I confess, thrilled through every nerve of my system, "compose yourself, and see things as they are; what could a young, frail girl like me do out in the world alone? and I have not a living relative but my uncle. Besides, would it be charitable to desert him and leave him to his own madness thus! Poor old man!"

"You are an angel!" I ejaculated, "and I would die for you!"

The reader need not be told that my enthusiastic youth was at last beginning to make its way through the crust of worldly wisdom that had hitherto subdued it.

"It is not necessary that anyone should die for me; I can do that for myself, and no doubt shall ere long, die of

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

the want of colour and air," she said, with a sad smile.

There is little use following our conversation to the end. I satisfied myself that there was really nothing wrong with her constitution, save the effects of the life she was obliged to lead; and I determined, instead of interfering with her at present, to devote myself to the poor Duke, with a hope that I might be of service to him, and succeed in gaining the liberation of poor Blanche. We parted, I might almost say as lovers, although no words of affection were spoken; but I carried away her image entwined with every fibre of my heart, and in the deep sweetness of her lingering eyes I fancied I read hope and love.

The Duke was waiting impatiently in the corridor as I left the lovely girl, and he led me into another apartment to question me eagerly. What did I think of the princess's state of health? Had she shown any symptoms of uneasiness during my visit? As the old gentleman asked these questions he watched my countenance keenly; while on my part I observed him with deep interest to discover traces of his unfortunate mental derangement.

"My dear sir, I perceive nothing alarming whatever in the state of your niece; she is simply suffering from confinement and monotony of existence, and wants nothing whatever but fresh air and amusement, and exercise; in short, life."

"Alas! you know that is impossible; have I not told you that her state precludes everything of the sort?"

"You must excuse me, my friend," I said, firmly, "I have conversed for a considerable time with the Princess d'Alberville, and I am a medical man accustomed to dealing with, and the observation of, lunacy, and I give you my word of honour there is no weakness whatever in the brain of this fair girl; you are simply killing her, it is my duty to tell you so, killing her under the influence of some, to me, most unaccountable whim."

The duke wrung his hands in silence, but his excited eye fell under my steady gaze. It was apparently with a strong effort that he composed in himself sufficiently to speak, and when he did his words had a solemnity in their tone that ought to have made a deep impression upon me; but it did not, for the sweetness of the imprisoned Blanche's voice was still lingering in my ears.

"You are a young man, Doctor Elveston; it is one of the happy provisions of youth, no doubt, to be convinced of its own infallibility. But you must believe that one of my race does not lie, and I swear to you that my niece is the victim of a most fearful insanity, which but to name makes humanity shudder with horror."

"I do not doubt that you believe such to be the case, my dear sir," I said, soothingly, for I fancied I saw the fearful light of insanity in his glaring eye at that moment, "but to my vision everything seems different."

"Well, my young friend, do not decide yet too hastily. Visit us again, but Got in mercy grant that you may never see the reality as I have seen it!"

And so I did repeat my visits, and repeat them so often and that without changing my opinion, that the Duke, in spite of his mania began to see that they were no longer necessary. One day on my leaving Blanche he requested a few moments of my time, and drawing me into his study, locked the door. I began to be a little alarmed, and more particularly as he seemed to be in a state of great agitation; but, as it appeared, my alarm of personal violence was entirely without foundation.

He placed a chair for me, and I seated myself with all the calmness I could muster, while I kept my eyes firmly fixed upon his as he addressed me.

"My dear young friend; I hope it is unnecessary for me to say that these are no idle words, for I have truly conceived an ardent appreciation of your character; yet it is absolutely necessary that I should put a stop to your visits to my niece. Good Heavens, what could I say — how could I ever forgive myself if any — any ——"

"I beg of you to go no farther, Duke," I said, interrupting him. "You have only by a short time anticipated what I was about to communicate myself. If your words allude to an attachment between Blanche and myself, your care is now too late. We love each other, and intend, subject to your approval, to be united immediately."

Had a sudden clap of thunder reverberated in the quiet room the poor man could not have been more affected. He started to his feet, and glared into my eyes with terror.

"Married! he gasped, "Married! Blanche d'Alberville wedded! Oh God!" and then he fell back into his chair as powerless as a child.

"And why should this alarm you?" I asked. "She is youthful and lovely, and as sane, I believe in my should, as I am myself. I am rich, and of a family which may aspire to mate with the best. You are her only relative and guardian, and you say that you esteem me; whence then this great distaste to hear even a mention of your fair ward's marriage?"

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

"She is not my ward!" he cried, hoarsely, and it seemed to me angrily, "her father and mother are both in existence, and destroyed for all time by the horror she had brought around them! But, my God, what is the use of speaking — I talk to a madman!" and he turned to his desk and began to write rapidly.

There I sat in bewilderment. I had not now the slightest doubt but that my poor friend was the victim of monomania; his one idea was uppermost, and that idea was that his unfortunate niece was mad. I was fully determined now to carry her away and make her my wife at once, so as to relieve the poor girl from an imprisonment, to which there seemed no other prospect of an end. And my hopes went still farther; who could tell but that the sight of Blanche living and enjoying life as did others of her sex, might have a beneficial effect upon the poor duke's brain, and help to eradicate his fixed idea.

As I was thus cogitating, the old gentleman rose from his desk and handed me a letter addressed, but unsealed. His manner was now almost unearthly calm, as if he had come to some great determination, to which he had only been driven by the most dreadful necessity.

"My words are wasted, Charles," he said, "and I cannot tell the truth; but if you ever prized home and name, friends or family, mother or wife, send that letter to its address after you have perused it, and await its reply."

I took the letter and put it into my pocket, and then I took his hand and pressed it warmly. I was truly sorry for the poor old gentleman, who suffered, no doubt, as much from his fancied trouble as if it were the most terrible of realities.

"I hope you will forgive me for grieving you, my dear sir; believe me it pains me much to see you thus. I will do as you wish about the letter. But oh, how I wish you could see Blanche with my eyes! To me she is the most perfect of women!"

"You have never seen her yet!" — he responded, bitterly, "could you — dare you only once witness but a part of her actions under one influence, you would shudder to your very marrow!"

"To what influence do you allude, dear sir!"

"To that of colour — one colour."

"And that colour? have you any objection to name it?"

"It is red!" and as the duke answered he turned away abruptly, and left me standing bewildered, but still unbelieving.

I hastened home that day, anxious to peruse the letter given me by the duke, and as soon as I had reached my own study drew it from my pocket and spread it before me. It was addressed to the Prince d'Alberville, Chateau Gris, Melun, France; and the following were its singular contents: —

"DEAR BROTHER. — A terrible necessity for letting another into our fearful secret has arisen. A young gentleman of birth and fortune has, in spite of my assurances that she is insane, determined to wed Blanche. Such a sacrifice cannot be permitted, even were such a thing not morally impossible. You are her parent, it is then your place to inform this unhappy young man of the unspoken curse that rests on our wretched name. I enclose his address. Write to him at once.

"Your afflicted brother,

"DE ROHAN."

I folded up this strange epistle and despatched it; and then I devoted nearly an hour to pondering over the strange contradictions of human nature, and more particularly diseased human nature. Of course I carried the key to this poor man's strangeness in my firm conviction of his insanity, and my entire belief in the martyrdom of Blanche; yet I could not divest myself of an anxiety to receive a reply to this letter, a reply which I was certain would explain the duke's lunacy, and beg of me to pardon it. That is to say if such a party as the Prince d'Alberville existed at all, and I did not quite lose sight of the fact that Blanche had assured me that, with the exception of her uncle, she had not a living relative.

It seemed a long week to me ere the French reply, that made my hand tremble as I received it, was put into it. I had abstained from visiting my beloved Blanche, under a determination that I would not do so until armed with such a letter as I anticipated receiving; or until I should be able to say, "ample time for a reply to your communication has elapsed; none to come, give me then my betrothed." Here then at last was the letter, and I shut myself into my own room and opened it; the words are engraven on my memory and will never become less vivid.

"SIR, — You wish to wed my daughter, the Princess Blanche d'Alberville. Words would vainly try to express

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

the pain with which I expose our disgrace — our horrible secret — to a stranger, but it is to save from a fate worse than death. Blanche d'Alberville is an anthropophagus, already has one of her own family fallen victim to her thirst for a human blood. Spare us if you can, and pray for us.

"D'ALBERVILLE."

I sat like one turned to stone and stared at the fearful paper! An anthropophagus! a cannibal! Good heavens, the subject was just now engaging the attention of the medical world in a remarkable degree, in consequence of two frightful and well authenticated cases that had lately occurred in France! All the particulars of these cases, in which I had taken a deep interest, flashed before me, but not for one moment did I credit the frightful story of my beloved. Some detestable plot had been formed against her, for what vile purpose, or what end in view I was ignorant; and I cast the whole subject from my mind with an effort, and went to attend my daily round of duties. During the two or three hours that followed, and under the influence of the human suffering I had witnessed, a revolution took place in my feelings, God only knows by what means induced; but when I returned home, to prepare for my eventful visit to the "white house," a dreadful doubt had stolen into my heart, and filled it with a fearful determination.

Having ordered my carriage and prepared the white suit, which I was now possessor of, I went directly to the conservatory, and looked around among the brilliant array of blossoms most suitable to my purpose. I chose the flaring scarlet verbena to form my bouquet; a tasteless one it is true, but one decidedly distinctive in colour. I collected quite a large nosegay of this flower, without a single spray of green to relieve its bright hue. Then I went to my carriage, and gave directions to be driven to Kensington.

At the gate of the Duke's residence I dressed myself in the white suit mechanically, and followed the usual servant into the house, carefully holding my flowers, which I had enveloped in a newspaper. I was received as usual also by the Duke, and in a few seconds we stood, face to face in his study. In answer to his look of fearful inquiry I handed him my French epistle, and stood silently by as he read it tremblingly.

"Well, are you satisfied now?" he asked, looking at me pitifully in the face, "has this dreadful exposure convinced you?"

"No!" I answered, recklessly, "I am neither satisfied nor convinced of anything save that you are either a lunatic yourself, or in collusion with the writer of that abominable letter!" and as I spoke I uncovered my scarlet bouquet and shook out its blossoms. The sight of it made a terrible impression upon my companion; his knees trembled as if he were about to fall, and his face grew whiter than his garments.

"In the name of heaven what are you going to do?" he gasped.

"I am simply going to present my bride with a bouquet," said, and as I said so I laughed an empty, hollow laugh. I cannot describe my strange state of mind at that moment; I felt as if myself under the influence of some fearful mania.

"By all you hold sacred, Charles Elveston, I charge you to desist! who or what are you that you should set your youth, and ignorance of this woman against my age and bitter experience?"

"Ha, ha!" was my only response, as I made toward the door.

"By heavens, he is mad!" cried the excited nobleman, "young man, I tell you that you carry in your hand a colour which had better be shaken in the eyes of a mad bull than be placed in sight of my miserable niece! Fool! I tell you it will arouse in her an unquenchable thirst for blood, and the blood may be yours!"

"Let it!" I cried, and passed on my way to Blanche.

I was conscious of the Duke's cries to the servants as I hurried up the broad staircase, and guessed that they were about to follow me; but to describe my feelings is utterly impossible.

I was beginning now to believe that my betrothed was something terrible, and I faced her desperately, as one who had lost everything worth living for, or placed his last stake upon the cast of a die.

I opened the well-known door of the white room, that seemed to me colder, and more death-like than ever; and I saw the figure of Blanche seated in her old way, and in her old seat, looking out of the window. I did not wait to scan her appearance just then, however, for I caught a glimpse of myself in a large mirror opposite, and was fascinated, as it were by the strange sight.

The mirror reflected, in unbroken stillness, the cold whiteness of the large apartment, but it also reflected my face and form, wearing an expression that half awoke me to a consciousness of physical indisposition. There was a wild look in my pallid countenance, and a reckless air in my figure which the very garments seemed to have

THE WHITE MANIAC; A DOCTOR'S TALE

imbibed, and which was awry; the collar of my shirt was unbuttoned, and I had even neglected to put on my neck-tie; but it was upon the blood-red bouquet that my momentary gaze became riveted.

It was such a contrast; the cold, pure white of all the surroundings, and that circled patch of blood-colour that I held in my hand was so suggestive! "Of what?" I asked myself "am I really mad?" and then I laughed loudly and turned toward Blanche.

Possibly the noise of the opening door had attracted her, for whom I turned she was standing on her feet, directly confronting me. Her eyes were distended with astonishment at my peculiar examination of myself in the mirror, no doubt, but they flashed into madness at the sight of the flowers as I turned. Her face grew scarlet, her hands clenched, and her regards devoured the scarlet bouquet, as I madly held it towards her. At this moment my eye caught a side glimpse of half-a-dozen terrified faces peeping in the doorway, and conspicuous and foremost that of the poor terrified Duke; but my fate must be accomplished, and I still held the bouquet tauntingly toward the transfixed girl. She gave one wild look into my face, and recognised the sarcasm which I felt in my eyes, and then she snatched the flowers from my hand, and scattered them in a thousand pieces at her feet.

How well I remember that picture to-day. The white room — the torn and brilliant flowers — and the mad fury of that lovely being. A laugh echoed again upon my lips, an involuntary laugh it was, for I knew not that I laughed; and then there was a rush, and white teeth were at my throat, tearing flesh, and sinews, and veins; and a horrible sound was in my ears, as if some wild animal was tearing at my body! I dreamt that I was in a jungle of Africa, and that a tiger, with a tawney coat, was devouring my still living flesh, and then I became insensible!

When I opened my eyes faintly, I lay in my own bed, and the form of the Duke was bending over me. One of my medical confreres held my wrist between his fingers, and the room was still and dark.

"How is this, Bernard?" I asked, with difficulty, for my voice seemed lost, and the weakness of death hanging around my tongue, "what has happened?"

"Hush! my dear fellow, you must not speak. You have been nearly worried to death by a maniac, and you have lost a fearful quantity of blood."

"Oh!" I recollected it all, and turned to the Duke, "and Blanche?"

"She is dead, thank God!" he whispered, calmly.

I shuddered through every nerve and was silent.

It was many long weeks ere I was able to listen to the Duke as he told the fearful tale of the dead girl's disease. The first intimation her wretched relatives had of the horrible thing was upon the morning of her eighteenth year. They went to her room to congratulate her, and found her lying upon the dead body of her younger sister, who occupied the same chamber; she had literally torn her throat with her teeth, and was sucking the hot blood as she was discovered. No words could describe the horror of the wretched parents. The end we have seen.

I never asked how Blanche had died, I did not wish to know; but I guessed that force had been obliged to be used in dragging her teeth from my throat, and that the necessary force was sufficient to destroy her. I have never since met with a case of anthropophagy, but I fancy I still feel Blanche's teeth at my throat.