

The ceiling was high and dome-shaped, the wall covered with striped white and watered green silk, of the pattern often used to cover Empire furniture.

The fireplace was narrow and tiled, and contained an iron basket grate, while both the scrolled fender and quaint fire-irons were rusty from disuse. The chimney-piece was prettily carved with pomegranates and leaves in white painted wood. On each side stood a tiny lacquer cabinet, empty. An Empire sofa and two chairs, all covered with the same silk as the walls, completed the furniture. A picture of a beautiful boy, dressed in green was above the chimney-piece, framed in white wood and over the sofa opposite another picture of a shepherdess holding a lamb by a red ribbon. The window was high up, and the light obscured by a high balcony.

Below the window was a settee, of backless double chair. There was no door in, except the room where I had entered so ignominiously, and when, sick with pain, I looked round, I found that two steps led up to a third picture, which was my mysterious door.

The floor of the tiny room was laid in parquet; here and there bits of the parquet had become detached, and lay about carelessly.

The pain in my foot prevented me from making further researches. It all "gave me to think" to translate a French phrase literally. How did light get into the room whose only door was through my cupboard, unless another door was concealed behind one of those pictures.

With the help of a chair I managed to get round the room somehow. I found no other door. In fact, there was none, unless some supernaturally ingenious device hid one behind those frames. I thought not, because the handle of my picture door was very obvious. In fact, the picture was a perfectly visible door, at this moment wide open.

This and the pain in my foot recalled me to the present. I got back into my room, locked the door, put the key in my pocket and prayed to my guardian spirit to inspire me with some *raison d'être* for my sprained ankle.

Inspirations come to those who seek them in an earnest spirit. The pain was severe, but something must be decided on. A woman does not twist her ankle while resting on the sofa with a violent headache, Gout, neuralgia, rheumatism—I scorned the thought. Any doctor—and of course a doctor must be summoned—would know it was a sprain. A very strong dose of sal Volatile, my fur cloak thrown round my shoulders, my big hat secured with pins, I crept downstairs, somehow, do not ask me how—and found myself, at a quarter to two, lying prostrate in pain (I am sure the pain was true enough) at the foot of the terrace steps.

There, and it was no pretence, one of the gardeners found me, really and truly almost fainting, and summoning the butler, I was safely laid on

the library sofa, when Diane and Lucian came back from their drive.

I had really slipped (on purpose this time) on the garden steps, and many were Colonel Lacy's sighs over those silly French heels, and tender was Lucian's sympathy, as I lay on the sofa all the afternoon, my foot bandaged in a hideously unbecoming manner. Diane tried to be sorry for me, but she seemed rather bored by all the attentions showered upon me, and when later Lucian offered to carry me to the terrace, or up to my bedroom to rest, Diane's frown was really alarming.

"We have a carrying chair, I believe, somewhere," she said coldly, "and the servants will carry Mrs. Godfrey up and down, to and from her room."

That luckless room! I stayed in it for two or three days, preferring this to being carried up and down by the servants, along miles of passages and staircases.

Dear Colonel Lacy came often and sat with me; we talked of Godfrey; he told me how he had loved Godfrey, how he had mourned his death, how fortunate he found himself in liking this young Lucian, and then his voice trembled how desperately disappointed he was after four years to find himself still childless.

"But," he said, "Diane, darling child, is—so very fragile and delicate. I can only believe, indeed know, that God knows best in withholding this blessing from me. Is she not more to me than ten sons?"

Perhaps my foot hurt me very much at that moment, for I answered rather crossly (also it must be borne in mind that I was a disappointed woman). "Is your marriage such a happiness to you, Uncle Arthur?"

Then he said quickly and deprecatingly, "Don't misjudge Diane, because she is shy and reserved. Venetia, you little know what she is to me, the light of my life, the joy of my old eyes, so gentle, so beautiful!"

"She is very beautiful," I said, kindly. "But think what that beauty means: unlimited admiration, every temptation, that child has, and yet she has no thought for anyone but me. She is cold, yes, thank God, to others, but not to me."

After this I considered Diane even more attentively than before.

Foot or no foot, I continued to creep to my cupboard door in the dead hours of night, and twice again I saw that light. Even to this day I can't understand what made me hold my peace. I believe I have the spirit of a lawyer, or, say, a detective, and absolutely enjoy unravelling a mystery, for a mystery it certainly was.

(To be continued.)

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## The Snakes of Mont Pelee.

Buried under the ashes from Mont Pelee are thousands of the deadly "fer-de-lance." This snake is reputed to be among the most venomous of reptiles. It has abounded on the islands of Martinique and St Lucia, being particularly common on the former.

From scientific observations of the territory smothered by the volcanic showers it appears that at least ten thousand of these serpents have been destroyed.

From the time of the occupation of these islands the fer-de-lance has inspired terror. Many thousands of victims have met quick death from its bite. Its name is appropriate and characteristic, signifying the head of a lance.

Graceful and slender-bodied, and clad in a delicate combination of green, yellow and grey, the serpent might easily be mistaken for an innocuous species if it were not for its head. This is flat and heart-shaped, much like the blade of a javelin mounted upon a slender shaft. In proportion to its size, the fangs of the fer-de-lance are enormously developed. Long, glistening teeth, of precisely the same nature as a hypodermic needle, lie neatly folded against the upper jaw when the reptile's mouth is closed.

The fer-de-lance belongs to a family of snakes known as the pit vipers. These reptiles acquired the name from the presence of a mysterious pit between the eye and the nostril. Scientists have long argued upon


this eccentric organ, and it is now thought to represent a sixth sense.

What powers or benefits this sixth sense may furnish the reptile are quite unknown.

The fer-de-lance is nocturnal in its habits. During the day it lies quietly secreted in the shrubbery, where its colours blend with the surrounding leaves. Its ever open eyes are always alert and watching for the unconscious intruder. The reptile's stroke is like a flash of light, and if opportunity is favourable the fer-de-lance seldom misses its aim.

As a remedy against the fer-de-lance, the Indian mongoose was imported to the island. The little animal resembles a ferret, and delights in killing snakes. Before the mongoose had begun to multiply and settle down, however, it was discovered that its likings extended beyond the snake zone.

Then came the terrific volcanoes at Mount Pelee, which within the space of a very few hours practically wiped the deadly reptile out of existence.



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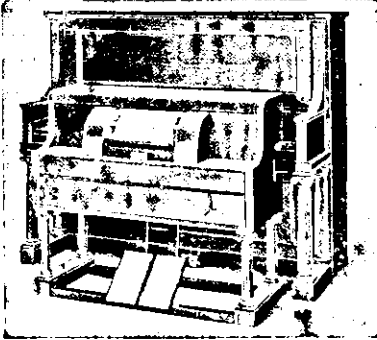
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