

lips, so the earl, in dumb agony, felt himself drawn onward to tell the dread secret of his life.

The jewelled hilt of the stiletto protruding from the skull exercised a fascination over him : he could not take his gaze from it : like a gleaming eye it seemed to be commanding him to admit his guilt.

Idris, attentive to every variation in the face of the earl, saw that he was sinking into a cataleptic state. Unable to obtain the required confession in any other way Lorelie had resorted to her knowledge of hypnotism, and had found the earl powerless to resist her mesmeric influence.

"Speak! Whose skull is this?" she asked once more.

"*My brother's.*"

The earl spoke like an automaton, in a tone, cold, mechanical, passionless—a tone he maintained throughout the whole of his subsequent answering.

A wave of surprise passed over the audience. Till that moment it had not been known that Urien Ravengar, the preceding earl, had had more than one son.

"When did your brother die?"

"Twenty-one years ago."

"In what place did he die?"

"In the interior of Ormfell."

"How came he to die?"

"*I killed him!*"

At this answer a thrill pervaded the assembly. Half-articulate screams arose from the ladies. From fair jewelled hands play-bills and books of the words slid to the floor. There they lay unheeded, being no longer required. The sham-tragedy was over : a new and unrehearsed drama of real life was taking place before their eyes, and the audience bent forward to watch and to listen.

Ivar, with a troubled look, rose at this point and made an attempt to stay Lorelie's action.