

THE BLACK CURSE

IT was not Mary Borden's first school, nor was she easily frightened, but when her landlady went out of the room, still muttering her threat of vengeance, she had a momentary impulse of flight.

She looked about the well-furnished room, crisp and dainty in its cleanliness. Evidently Mrs. Taski had made preparations for her coming. But her words, and the gleam in her gypsy black eyes as she had shut the door and put her back to it, were rather terrifying.

"Now, Miss Teacher, listen to one strong word from me. You leave my man alone. He is good man if left alone. Other teacher was very bad girl, and so I make her go—I make her sick. Maybe I kill her, too. I hope so. And I kill you, too, quick like that," snapping her fingers, "if you take him from me."

Mary Borden's eyes opened to their full width.

"What do you think I am?" she exclaimed. "Do I look like a home-breaker? Why, I am older than you—and you are a pretty woman when you smile. You need have no fears of me, Mrs. Taski. No man was ever tempted to leave home on my account, I assure you!"

Mrs. Taski regarded her critically in the lamp-light.

"You have style," she said simply, "and you know so much. Teachers know so much. It is not fair. Every man wants two wives, one to cook and keep clean house and wash clothes, and one for joy, and go riding, and talk to . . . I busy