

Then, in the midst of confused voices, the door was shut, and shut, too, after some difficulty.

Suddenly, however, a Jacob's footfall echoed in the passage on his return, and the bell rang again, and more loudly than ever.

"By heaven!" and old Jacob sprang from his chair. "In the name of Satan, what is the meaning of all this? 'Tis not Basil!"

Again voices sounded without, for Jacob determined this time, at all hazards, to get rid of the persistent caller who had returned to the door.

"Oh with you, as I'll call an officer!" he said, menacingly.

"I'll not go until I see him when I came to see," answered a shrill, tremulous voice. "Never, I say, varlet. Let me in!"

As the sound of a voice fell on Philip's ears—and he lost not a word—he recoiled back, and sank into the chair. His head-bowed face, the blood fled from his lips, his eyes almost closed, and his body dropped in a faint.

"Only show the man this!" he rose the shrill voice. "Then if he does not admit me, I'll go without another word. Now, fellow, take it—take it, I say, and begone!"

The tones were commanding. A moment later, a timid rap fell on the study door.

By a desperate effort Philip Froze nervously, and forced an artificial calm to his pallid, wretched face, and said:

"Come in!"

"An old woman, sir—uncommon sorry," said Jacob, apologetically. "She swears she will see you, sir; and says you must look at this."

He handed to Mr. Froze a small, oval-shaped, velvet-covered case.

It was open.

The rich man grasped it with his trembling fingers, and glanced at it.

"Tis well, Jacob," he said in a whisper. "The only old woman I'll ever see, I'll see of her. Send her—no, go to bed, at once. Put out the light. Go!"

The wonderful, hoarse, despairing, ever since he had seen old Philip Froze, when he went to the front door, her face to him had been as death.

He hesitated only a moment. His face was as pale as death, as at last, with firm step, he entered the dim, silent passage, and crept toward the front door.

CHAPTER VI.  
A PHANTOM OF THE PAST.

Philip Froze was resolved. He had a set purpose in his head, to which nothing should serve him. Besides that, the huge draught of brandy which, not for the first time, he had taken, had made his brain, making too, his already weakened heart more fixed and steadfast than ever.

But his step grew slower as he neared the door which Jacob had left partly ajar. Then he stopped and peered ahead.

No wonder that he started and recoiled, for standing upon the topmost step, and full in the murky glare of the lamp before the door, was the bent form of an old woman. She was standing almost motionless—only slightly swaying her withered frame to and fro as she leaned both hands upon a long staff. It was plain that she had not been waiting long, for she was concealed in the shadows of the gloomy passage.

She was waiting silently and patiently. She had noted the sudden putting out of the light in the hall, and had seen the colored man cast a curious, half-awed gaze toward the where she stood, and he hurried away. But still she waited for her message to be answered.

Firm and erect in the darkness of the hallway, Philip Froze glared at her—his strong right hand shading his eyes toward his bosom. But at last he moved on, and in a moment stood by the door.

The woman started as his tall form darkened the doorway, and towered above her. She drew back, and as she did so, though she would retreat from his presence; but she checked herself; and as a low, glad cry issued from her trembling lips, she murmured:

"Oh, Philip! Philip! I meet again! And 'tis thus. Oh, woman, striving to be a household. What brings you here?"

Mr. Froze spoke in a low, guarded tone; but his words were cold and repellent. His strong right hand clutched the door-latch as though he would bar entrance.

Again the old woman recoiled, and she slipped from her feeble grasp, and she came near falling down the tall steps. But she clutched at the door, and she saved herself. As a shiver passed over her thin, clad form, she murmured:

"By Jove!" he muttered, in a scornful tone, and oblivious of the presence of his late visitor. "I am sure that I heard something—something in this room."

He laughed contemptuously, but just as the old woman fell upon him, and the light shined upon him from the window.

It was moving up and down with a gentle, rustling sound. The upper shaft of the window was slightly lowered, and through the open space the raw, wild wind of the night was blowing against the curtain.

He wheeled, looked the door, and confronted, with menacing view, the poor woman who had called upon him at such an unusual hour of the night.

As for the woman, she stood silent, mute before the splendour of the richly furnished apartment, her eyes fixed upon the man, her thin old face lit up as though she was enjoying some ravishing vision of fairy land.

She was a strange-looking old creature. In years she seemed more advanced in life than did the rich, hearty old man in whose presence she stood. But in her case, looks were not perhaps a fitting criterion for trouble, untold, want, and misery, spoke aloud in every feature. Her frame was bowed as with the weight of years, and her dress, at most bare, showing in many places through the gaping apertures for shoes. Her form was clad in tatters, and her head, covered with a shawl, was drawn over the drooping shoulders and pinned across the breast.

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and, more than all, the matter which now agitated his mind was important.

It was very grave; for it seriously affected the honesty of his partner in the Maritime Mills. Philip Froze remembered that to which we have referred.

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