

A TOUCH OF BLACK MAGIC

I DRAW the wizard's circle upon the sands, and blue flames spring from its circumference. I describe an inner circle, and green flames come responsive to my words of magic. I touch the common centre of both with my wand, and red flames, like adders' tongues, leap from the earth. Over these flames I place my caldron filled with the blood of a new-killed doe, and as it boils I speak my incantations and make my mystic signs and passes, watching the blood-red mist as it rises to meet the Spirits of Air. I chant my conjurations as I learned them from the Great Key of Solomon, and while I speak, the ruddy fumes take human forms. Out of the dark, fathomless Past—the Past of near four hundred years ago—comes a goodly company of simple, pompous folk all having a touch of childish savagery which shows itself in the fierceness of their love and of their hate.

The fairest castle-château in all England's great domain, the walls and halls of which were builded in the depths of time, takes on again its olden form quick with quivering life, and from the gates of Eagle Tower issues my quaint and radiant company. Some are clad in gold lace, silks, and taffetas; some wear leather, buckram and clanking steel. While the caldron boils, their cloud-forms grow ever more distinct and definite, till at length I can trace their every feature. I see the color of their eyes. I discern the shades of their hair. Some heads are streaked with gray; others are glossy with the sheen of youth.