

to-night. I shall come to you to-morrow and tell you—"

"Robitaille," said the seigneur, "M. Askew has decided, greatly to my regret, to take his departure this afternoon. You will have the goodness to pack his things and to prepare the *calèche* for him, with the new rug. You will drive him to the mill."

The old man bobbed again, muttered, and shuffled away. Hilary turned to Rosny and held out his hand. The action might have been ill-timed, but he felt only gratitude to the old man for his hospitality. He

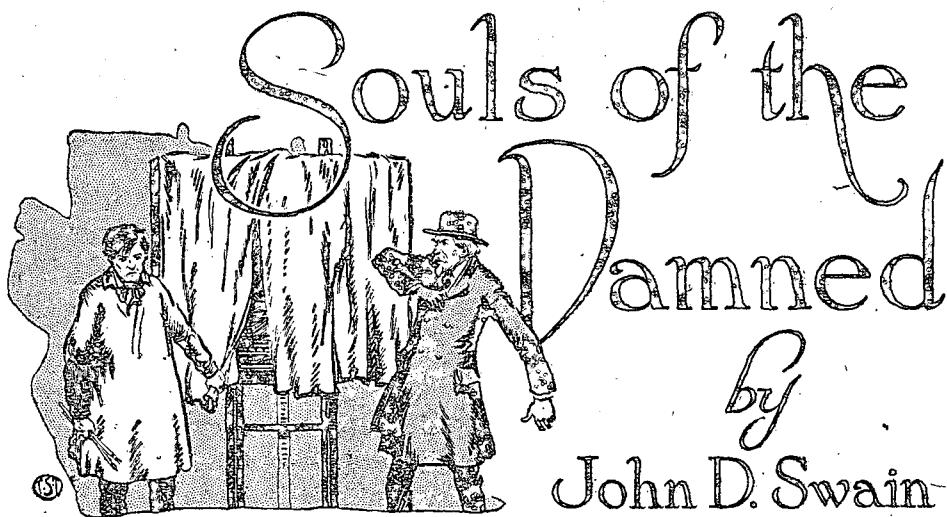
(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

was conscious, too, of a deep-seated affection, almost admiration.

But Rosny did not seem to see the gesture. He stood where he had been, staring after Robitaille, one hand rising toward his spreading collar, and his face, which had been white and red, was purple.

Hilary turned away.

He had reached the door when he heard a sound as if Rosny was clearing his throat. Then Hermine cried out, and Hilary looked back to see her father sit down in his chair heavily. His eyes closed, his arms hung over the sides, his head fell on his breast.



CARRINGTON had a canvas in the Salon while he was a pupil at Lemaitre's. I remember it well, for I saw it on *vernissage* day, and thereafter many times. It wasn't skied by the committee and always there was a crowd before it. The French government ultimately purchased it for the Luxembourg.

In general, good artists may be divided into two classes; those who make you think, and they who make you feel. Carrington did both. "Just Around the Corner," he called his painting; and the fact that he was a wonder in drawing and pretty fair in color doesn't in the least explain the appeal of it.

You saw a typical French village street, the houses linked one to the other, solidly constructed, thatched, with the cross of

the old parish church brooding over all. In the middle of the street a dog lay sleeping in the warm sun whose light—the stippled luminosity of the impressionists—flooded the composition. In a doorway a fat baby rolled on his back and tried to get a toe into his mouth: a pursuit he would abandon later in life, but was surprisingly successful at now.

But the people! They were so still—so strained in their attitudes, as they gazed with fearful eyes at the corner just below—a corner empty of everything save the all-pervading sunshine.

Two or three women were flattened against the walls of the houses, their faces set in a terrified stare. An old man peered from a doorway, with the same horrified attention. And one young peasant was

creeping on hands and knees towards the corner of the street, his head thrust out like a tortoise's, so that the sinews of his neck stood out like whipcord, and his eyes were the ultimate in tragic despair.

What was coming just around the corner, that quiet, sunlit, morning? You see, it could not have been strangers approaching—the sleeping dog told you that. Nor wild beasts. What, then?

I assure you, all day long there was a crowd about this picture. I used to watch them more than it; and many times, on returning half an hour later, I would find the same ones there. It was as if they were patiently waiting to see what nameless menace would presently appear "just around the corner." There was an eery, shuddery quality to it that was enhanced by the very restraint of the serene details.

A great future was predicted for the young artist. It always is, when his first work is admitted to the Salon. Many are never heard from thereafter.

I lost track of Carrington for a long time. I heard that various schools first claimed, then repudiated him. At one time he was regarded as a symbolist. He himself never lined up with any movement. He painted steadily on—the strangest pictures, the sort that people go to look at but do not buy. I once overheard a man say he would as soon live in a haunted house as one in which a Carrington oil hung.

Always the man's infernally clever draftsmanship overtopped his other technical equipment. Even here, a decadent strain showed. Often he would lavish upon the secondary details, the "props," an exquisite craftsmanship, a genius for texture and values that would make the still-life lads green with envy—only to paint in his central figure with a few powerful strokes, leaving it almost sketchy. Beardsley had this same trait.

Carrington never had another painting in the Salon and I never heard of him selling anything big. He eked out a living by doing book illustrations, and was, I imagine, rather miserable on the whole.

Like every other artist, he lived in the expectation of some day achieving a

masterpiece, a work he could leave as his monument, something that would astonish the critics and, of far more importance, satisfy himself. He did not mind pot-boiling as long as he kept his *magnum opus* clearly in view. All artists live more or less on this orchid food, and most of them die leaving a garret full of pot-boilers with the masterpiece still unpainted.

At least this did not happen to Carrington. He did paint his ideal, a picture more eery even than "Just Around the Corner," and was satisfied with it. He was convinced that he had achieved his dream and that it could not be bettered. Then he emerged from the obscurity of his Paris atelier, rolled up the canvas and came home to reap his reward. He expected to be rich and famous, to paint many commissions, but never one to equal "Souls of the Damned," as he called his great work.

I ran across him in a café one night. His father, who had come up from Tennessee to visit him, was present. And what a figure the old gentleman was! Looking at him, you thought at once of dueling pistols beautifully chased, lying ready oiled in their mahogany case; of a serene belief that there existed no such thing as a bad woman; and of old daguerreotypes. You felt somehow that he would never admit to his friendship any man who questioned the Nicene Creed, or used a chaser.

Once more, before I sailed for Spain, I met Carrington, this time alone and greatly depressed. Naturally enough I inquired for his father—and he astonished me by saying that the old gentleman had returned home in a high temper, swearing that he would never again permit his son to cross his threshold nor his name to pass his lips.

"As bad as that!" I cried. "Cut off with a shilling?"

"It's not the shilling part, Bennet; there isn't much money left anyhow. It's because I've loved and admired him so—and he is all I have left in the world!"

"But surely you can fix it up—make concessions to so venerable a man, even though he be entirely in the wrong?"

Carrington shook his head gloomily.

"Not with him; you don't know him! You see, I showed him my 'Souls of the Damned'—you must come to see it—and he looked at it a long time without speaking. Then he turned to me—he was perfectly calm—and told me that if I did not destroy it he would disown me. That was all."

"But—but I don't understand!" I exclaimed. "What sort of a picture is it, Carrington, to affect him so?"

"It's the best thing I ever did, or shall do, Bennet. I'm staking all I am and hope to be on it. Why, man! I painted my own blood, my own soul into that canvas!"

"Even so; to humor the old gentleman, wouldn't it be justifiable to lay it aside for a bit and let him think you had destroyed it? You are still a young man, while he—well, he can't be with you many years longer."

"Destroy it?" There was a quality of horror in Carrington's voice. "I could even do that—although I shall never paint its equal—but can't you see? It's his mind; broken, you know. Even were I to burn it, he would only be appeased for the moment. On some other absurd pretext he would break with me again. It's hard, but I've got to make up my mind that I've lost him. When brains like his begin to go, their obstinacy lives on."

I did not think of Carrington for months after that, as I was busy painting in Granada. When I returned with a steamer trunk full of sketches, I found that "Souls of the Damned" had acted as a strange leaven in artistic circles.

The singular part was that one had so little that was of a definite nature to put one's finger on. Artist friends who admitted having seen Carrington's painting refused to discuss it. Others vehemently denied having seen it at all. There was some talk of a model to whom the artist had got himself engaged—a handsome animal, but with the intellect of a simian—who had broken off the affair because he refused to repudiate "Souls of the Damned." And the committee of the Art League had refused to hang it in their Winter exhibition.

Out of this welter of rumor and innuendo

I did isolate two or three tangible facts. There was the case of Simon Levine, the antique dealer, a man of unsavory reputation and questionable integrity. Twice he had been in trouble with the customs authorities, and he had fought a dozen lawsuits with clients over some of his fake masterpieces.

Levine had heard of Carrington's work and, always quick to mint publicity, had offered him five hundred dollars for the loan of "Souls of the Damned" to exhibit in his shop for one week.

It is some evidence of Carrington's pecuniary condition that he accepted the offer. He knew the old rogue and detested him.

Levine visited his studio to see the painting, and just what took place between them was never known. But "Souls of the Damned" did not appear as advertised, although Levine paid the five hundred dollars. He was square, that way. Once a bargain was struck, he would abide by it. But it certainly must have hurt in this case!

I knew Levine pretty well, and my curiosity was sufficiently roused by now to send me over to his shop to get his story.

"Five hundred tollars!" he wailed, after I had explained the object of my call. "And for notings! In the fire I should as well burn it."

"But tell me about it," I urged. "Why didn't you take it? Is it—er—*salacious*? Something the anti-vice people would row about?"

Levine glared at me disgustedly from beneath puffy lids.

"Vice?" he exploded. "Now, my dear Pennet, you are an artist. You know as well as I do that a photograph may be impure—a painting, never! It is but realism—yes? But I tell you this 'Souls of the Damned' might hang in a synagogue, so far as that goes."

"Then why—?"

He shrugged fat shoulders and waved deprecating palms.

"I am Levine, a *connisoor*!" he declared. "They call me a hard man. Maybe. I enjoy myself. On this earth I live only once. But I tell you, some time I

die. And sooner as I die with that on my soul—to bring peoples to see such a work—I give up not five hundred but five *l'ousand* dollars!”

Nor could I get more out of him.

“Go see for yourself,” he said. “Why ask me to explain what you haf but to visit Carrington to look at-already?”

Which was reasonable enough, of course, and what I intended to do. But first I wanted to learn all I could about what had happened.

When Levine canceled the exhibition he had advertised and actually forfeited five hundred dollars, a clever reporter wrote up the story in lurid style. He played up the quarrel between Carrington and his father; described the tearful scene in which the pure lovely young girl had begged her affianced to destroy the wicked picture, and on his refusal had torn off her diamond engagement ring and cast it dramatically at his feet; emphasized the fact that even Levine would not sell his soul for five hundred dollars; added and embellished every studio rumor he could dig up, and made a corking good story of it all.

So good, in fact, that the *Era* instructed Hartwell to devote a full page to Carrington's masterpiece in the Sunday number, with a cut of it and a likeness of the artist. And Hartwell had gone to the studio with his camera, had interviewed Carrington and seen “Souls of the Damned.”—and flatly refused to have anything to do with it!

Nothing like this had ever happened to the *Era* before. They were obliged to fill in Hartwell's page with what was practically boiler-plate, and the managing editor promptly fired him.

Now Hartwell was a particular friend of mine. He had been with the *Era* for fifteen years, and was the highest salaried art and dramatic critic in town. He was middle-aged, blasé, the author of half a dozen books, a man as little likely to be swept off his feet as the Statue of Liberty from her pedestal. I knew that he had quite lived up to his income, and could ill afford to give up his place, nor expect to secure as good a one elsewhere. Therefore

to Hartwell I went to slake my curiosity once and for all.

I found him, not in the smart apartment hotel where he had lived for some years, but in a standardized bungalow in a little Jersey town. He answered my ring himself—and I am sure I caught sight of the vanishing Mrs. Hartwell with checked apron and duster. A Japanese butler had admitted me on my last call.

Hartwell carried a book in one hand, a finger keeping the place; with the other hand he greeted me cordially—almost defiantly—and ushered me into a tiny library which the bungalow miraculously included, and on whose panel boards I recognized the best of his fine collection of artists' proofs and holograph letters.

“And now,” I asked, after we had successfully despatched the customary preliminaries of friends after a long parting, “how about ‘Souls of the Damned?’”

My host threw out his hands in a gesture of helplessness, his rare smile flashing upon me.

“So that has pursued me clear into the Jersey jungle? Of course, you would have heard about it! You know Carrington pretty well, don't you?”

“So-so,” I nodded. “Never at all chummy. Always thought he would do something unusual—and apparently he has?”

A non-committal expression crossed Hartwell's face.

“You know, of course, that I have left the *Era*?” he asked.

“Yes: what are you doing now?”

Hartwell shrugged.

“Living on my royalties and growing roses; just marking time. You know, at my age one doesn't fall into another berth like mine with the *Era*. They often keep on old fellows from force of habit—but they don't hire them.”

“Just why did you quit, old man?”

“Why, I fancy the story you must have heard covers the facts. I left Carey in rather an awkward situation—insubordination I suppose you might call it. Had been there so long I'd almost forgotten that I was an employee. I've no grievance.”

I looked him steadily in the eye. He

did not seek to avoid my gaze, yet seemed vaguely uncomfortable.

"But why didn't you give Carrington's painting a write-up? If it was a false alarm you should have said so, at least, and so put an end to all this idle gossip."

"The trouble was," Hartwell said quietly, "it wasn't a false alarm! Had it been, I could have turned off a bit of hack-work. I've done enough in my time."

"Then?" I encouraged.

Hartwell smiled in a tired, sort of way and shook his head.

"It's no use, Bennet. You wouldn't understand. It's something like this: every man, good or bad, comes at length to some wall he knows he must not scale. We say, crudely but expressively, 'one must draw the line somewhere!' And 'the line' may be hard and fast or easy and loose. In Carrington's case I came to that point. You know me for an easy-going creature, tolerant of my own and other men's weaknesses, not critical of religion, but rather bored by it. But here was my crisis. I had to draw the line or damn my own soul—if I have one."

I frowned.

"You mean to tell me that conscientious scruples prevented you from publishing a critique of 'Souls of the Damned?'"

"Call it that if you like," Hartwell replied curtly.

"But what is this painting? What's it all about? You've seen it."

"Yes—I've seen it, but I can't describe it. Its title does that, once and for all."

"You never found any difficulty in describing a picture before, not even when the futurist stuff came in," I objected.

"True: possibly I'm getting old. Hardening of the imagination, perhaps."

"And you always laughed at the idea of morality or immorality in art."

"I did—many a loud hee-haw," Hartwell readily agreed. "What of it?"

"I don't in the least understand," I sighed. "And anyhow, do you suppose the painting won't be written up by someone? It's bound to be exhibited somewhere."

Hartwell went through the motions of washing his hands, the familiar gesture of Pilate and Lady Macbeth.

"It's no go, old fellow!" He closed the interview. "I can't describe 'Souls of the Damned.' My vocabulary doesn't cover the situation. And I wouldn't if I could! But there's nothing to prevent you from going to see it yourself, is there? Come down next June and see my Killarney roses," he invited. "And as often before then as you can stand for the Sabine farm stuff."

I puzzled over his attitude on the train ride back to the city. It gave color to all the silly rot I had heard about Carrington's picture—but left me as much in the dark as before. Well—I had run down every rumor, only to bump into a blind wall at the end. What the devil *had* Carrington done, anyhow! There remained nothing for me to do but to go and see for myself.

I have been so often disappointed when on the trail of a sensation that but for the singular attitude of Hartwell, sane, cynical and self-possessed, I should have expected this to be another wild goose chase: Chambers of horror, spiritualistic séances, an apache dive I had visited in Paris, the first Cubist exhibition—what a succession of anti-climaxes, from my boyhood days on!

I began to feel at last I was to be rewarded. A painting which had produced so profound a revulsion, such nameless horror in people of such divers mentality, must surely have in it the divine touch of madness.

Adam told me where I would find Carrington's studio. Carrington lived for a long time on Levine's five hundred dollars and had no other assets that Adam knew of. He had even heard that Carrington was destitute. Couldn't seem to paint a thing since "Souls of the Damned" was finished.

No, he hadn't seen it himself. Didn't know Carrington personally, but meant to have a look-see one of these days. Glad to be able to give me his address—fancied the poor devil would be pleased enough to see a friend! Everyone deserted him—hard sledding; *et cetera, et cetera*. Our talk drifted to other things.

So, a day or two later, with gray fog muffling the street sounds and sights, I

found myself climbing the dirty stairs to Carrington's attic studio, and presently was reading in the dull yellow light the soiled card tacked onto his door. A voice bade me enter.

The great room was cheerless enough, with the fog drifting in through an open window. In the far end, behind a rickety screen was a cheap iron bed and washstand. And on the bed lay Carrington, dead.

But what startled me even more, was the figure of Carrington's father standing by his side, grief and pride struggling in his face for mastery.

"I am so sorry," I murmured inanely. "I came to call on your son—and to see his picture."

The senior Carrington bowed with a dignity that was at once kindly and compelling.

"Pray, do my son this last honor," he said. "It is my wish."

Vastly uncomfortable, I turned to the canvas I had come to see. There it stood—the one conspicuous object in the bare and barren room, apart from poor Carrington himself.

I moved slowly toward where it hung on the wall, shrouded by a black curtain, the title plate just showing on the edge of the

frame beneath. I seized the cord almost with hesitation.

Truly the stage was set for a climax. The silent man lay on his bed, face turned toward me and eyes half open, as if curious to know what I would think of his strange composition. The casual noises of the street came to me muffled by the pall of fog; a rat which squeaked in the wall at my elbow sounded loudly.

Impatient of the suspense, I jerked the curtain back so sharply that it parted from its string, and hung like a funeral weed across the upper corner of the frame.

With a gasp I started back from it—for Carrington had painted it entirely out with a thick coat of bister! The dark, shiny mess was still wet to my touch.

It seemed to me that a faint chuckle echoed through the room. It was but the ghost of a chuckle—such as might come from the dry lips of Thothmes III. in the museum, were it to be discovered that he was not Thothmes at all, but some one else: say, the queen's favorite.

Yet when I turned nervously toward the living and the dead there was no change, save indeed—and this may have been a fancy—the pride in the old gentleman's face seemed to have overmastered the grief!

## THE NECKLACE


ABOUT her throat my kisses cling,  
Each gold and small and sweet to see;  
Linked in a little row, they sing  
A love-song to her ceaselessly.

Each little golden kiss is set  
Near, very near, by night and day,  
That she may never quite forget  
Who placed them there and went away,

My little kisses, guard her then  
And love her. When I come again,  
Your kingdom shall be overthrown  
By kisses she has never known;  
So is it written in my heart.

But, wee ones, stanchly play your part,  
And for the sake of one away  
Guard, guard her well by night and day;  
Upon her throat lie soft and light  
By day and night!

*Mary Carolyn Davies.*



# Riddle Gawne

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "The Two-Gun Man," "The Coming of the Law," etc.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### FIREWORKS.

A SECOND or two dragged while Baldy grasped at the significance of Gawne's words. They had caught him off his mental balance. He had been elated with the prospect of victory; he was facing the specter of defeat and sudden death. His face blanched; his right hand dropped to his pistol holster. He had long yearned for an opportunity to test the traditional quickness of Gawne; mentally—and sometimes verbally—he had scoffed at men of the Bozzam outfit who had been ridiculously slow with their weapons when confronted by Gawne.

Now—with his right hand gripping the stock of the pistol at his hip—he saw the barrel of Gawne's gun glinting over Meteor's mane.

A paralysis seized him—a ghastly, cringing dread; and, like Jess Cass, on the day of Kathleen Harkless's coming to Bozzam City, he could not have drawn his weapon for the riches of the world. It was a physical impossibility.

"Pull it, Baldy!" came Gawne's voice mockingly, urging him to hazard his life on that slender thread of chance. "No?" he said, still gently, as Baldy's hand came

up—higher and higher—until it was above his shoulder. "Well, then—slope!"

He sat quietly in the saddle, watching, while Baldy, his forehead clammy with sweat, his face still a ghastly white, mounted his horse and raced toward the desert. Then he grinned at the others.

"I think Baldy wanted to go all the time, gentlemen. But he wanted, like some women, to have the last word. Do you men want to go now, or do you want to wait and see the fireworks?" he added, as he saw the members of the vigilance committee approaching.

"Fireworks?" queried Lowery.

"We're wiping the Bozzam ranch off the map," said Gawne.

"Goin' to burn it?" gasped Lowery.

"The committee insists," said Gawne.

Baldy did not ride far. Once he was screened from sight by the gnarled chaparral growth fringing the pasture, he pulled his horse to a slow lope, skirted the chaparral, and made his way deep into the timber where Lowery had seen the vigilance committee.

Concealed there, he watched the burning of the buildings, drawing farther back so that the fierce light of the flames might not betray him to the eyes of his enemies.

This story began in *The Argosy* for September.