

**THE THIEF  
IN THE NIGHT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649283682

The thief in the night by Harriet Prescott Spofford

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD**

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THE  
THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

BY  
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AUTHOR OF "THE AMBER GODS," "NEW-ENGLAND LEGENDS," ETC.



BOSTON:  
ROBERTS BROTHERS.

1872.

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## THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

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### I.

The garden lay sparkling under the earliest light of a June morning. A heaven everywhere a field of rose and azure soared over it; charming bird-songs trilled from its thickets; a breeze, that was only living fragrance, rifled its roses, swept up its avenues, and struck leaf and bough and blossom into light before it stripped them of their dewdrops in a shower. The Triton at the lower end of the little lake sent up a shaft of water-streams from his horn to catch the sunbeams and sprinkle them over the surface beneath, and beds of faintly blue forget-me-nots crept out to meet the pickerel-weed and lily-pads, — blue flags, and bluer weed, and waxen-white lilies just unclasping their petals, with here and there a floating ball of gold among them, — where the breeze dipped again in a shining ripple, and weeds and

flags and lilies rocked and swayed before it. On the one side, the sweet-brier, climbing a pear-tree to reach the robin's nest, looked back with a hundred blushing blossoms, and blew a breath of delight to the damask-rose on the other. The damask said good-morning to the moss-rose; the moss-rose to the red; the red would have passed on the cheerful salutation, but the pale-white rose, upon its lofty stem, had been awake all night, had looked into the sick man's chamber, and learned what the ruddy-checked flowers, which hung their heads and went to sleep with the birds, were not to know. Nevertheless, a red-winged blackbird, lighting there and leaving, shook it so that half its petals fluttered away in pursuit; a little piece of jewel-work of a humming-bird darted by to join the frolic; a blue-bird dropped a measure of melody from the spray where he was tilting, and followed after. Every thing, in all the bright and blooming garden, moved and glanced and blushed and glittered. Every thing spoke of life and joy and hope and health: nothing spoke of sad secrets or ill deeds. Every thing told of beauty and breath, the luxury of living: nothing told of death, or desolation.



A window-casement, looking out upon the garden, had been ajar all night, perhaps: the fresh morning breeze had pushed it open now, had brushed the curtain from its fastenings, and lifted it high in the air within, while rioting round the room. You could see through this open window that the appointments of the room were costly: the carpet was like a soft and springy depth of moss; the bedstead was a mass of carved mother-of-pearl, its snowy silken curtains, though heavy with their golden fringe, yet fluttered and dappled by the wind; on the wall a solitary picture, a portrait set in a panel of unburnished gold.

It was a woman's face there, a fair, white woman, with hair of palest tint, — so white was she that you saw the tracery of blue veins upon her temples and her throat: the large eyes were scarcely bluer. Though dark brows and darker lashes lent those eyes shadow and depth, they had an inner splendor of their own, a light that seemed to burn from the brain: they were strong and searching eyes, rejoicing eyes, that said although the heart should break the spirit would be glad and safe. But the mouth was another thing; for albeit its lips were like some

pulpy fruit, yet the smile that played around its corners was full of melancholy. A face that blended all its contradictions into one perfect charm, a face to lure on its victims, — to smile and smile, and murder while it smiled.

There might have been other objects in the room, but they were not in the line of the window; one only, a silver tripod, bearing a globe of red roses, was to be seen. A level sunbeam smote through them till they seemed to blaze with crimson fire, and, dyed and suffused with all the ripe, rich color, the radiance passed on and lay in a stain of crimson glory on the pillow, as if it did not dare to touch the ashen frozen face beside it there; or as if it spurned to simulate the deeper, darker stain where the sleeper lay, — lay with his ghastly countenance turned toward that portrait still, with his glazed eye open on it even now, while no shadow fell between them, and nothing stirred in all the room save the bright breeze blowing in, tossing draperies and playing idle pranks around the form that lay unconscious and not to be stirred by its wayward will, — the form that lay as a murdered man lies, a man murdered in his sleep, a dead man straight and stark upon his bed with stiffened blood about him.

The room where this hideous sight was to be seen in the midst of so much splendor was on the ground-floor: two great fir-trees stood up on either side the casement to guard it, but there was open view to whomsoever passed that way.

A lady came stepping down the marble stairway on the hither edge of the terrace,—a tall and shapely woman with a gracious presence of her own: a cambric handkerchief was loosely tied over the locks of palest tint. She lifted her gown from the dew and passed on; she was not bound toward the open casement; the face she showed the morning sun was the face of the portrait, the same features cut as if upon an opaque gem, the same cream-white skin, but the eyes were lustreless to-day and sodden with much weeping.

Before the lady was quite lost to sight another person had entered the bright enclosure: it was the gardener, making along with his spade across his shoulder. His way lay directly before the open casement; he passed it by with a half-glance behind him; started, after a few steps, as if he had but just understood the sight he saw, went back, put down his spade, went in. He was within perhaps a single minute: when he came out he was whiter than the thing he had left; he