

HAUNTINGS, FANTASTIC STORIES

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649004713

Hauntings, Fantastic stories by Vernon Lee

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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VERNON LEE

**HAUNTINGS,
FANTASTIC STORIES**

HAUNTINGS

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

HORTUS VITÆ. Essays on the
Gardening of Life. By VERNON
LEE.

THE ENCHANTED WOODS and
other Essays on the Genius of
Places. By VERNON LEE.

THE SPIRIT OF ROME. Leaves
from a Diary By VERNON LEE.

HAUNTINGS
FANTASTIC STORIES

BY
VERNON LEE

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE
BODLEY HEAD. NEW YORK:
JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMVI

TO
FLORA PRIESTLEY AND ARTHUR LEMON
Are Dedicated
DIONEA, AMOUR DURE,
AND THESE PAGES OF INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGY.

PREFACE.

WE were talking last evening—as the blue moon-mist poured in through the old-fashioned grated window, and mingled with our yellow lamplight at table—we were talking of a certain castle whose heir is initiated (as folk tell) on his twenty-first birthday to the knowledge of a secret so terrible as to overshadow his subsequent life. It struck us, discussing idly the various mysteries and terrors that may lie behind this fact or this fable, that no doom or horror conceivable and to be defined in words could ever adequately solve this riddle; that no reality of dreadfulness could seem aught but paltry, bearable, and easy to face in comparison with this vague we know not what.

And this leads me to say, that it seems to me that the supernatural, in order to call forth those sensations, terrible to our ancestors and terrible but delicious to ourselves, sceptical posterity, must necessarily, and with but a few exceptions, remain enwrapped in mystery. Indeed, 'tis the mystery that

touches us, the vague shroud of moonbeams that hangs about the haunting lady, the glint on the warrior's breastplate, the click of his unseen spurs, while the figure itself wanders forth, scarcely outlined, scarcely separated from the surrounding trees ; or walks, and sucked back, ever and anon, into the flickering shadows.

A number of ingenious persons of our day, desirous of a pocket-superstition, as men of yore were greedy of a pocket-saint to carry about in gold and enamel, a number of highly reasoning men of semi-science have returned to the notion of our fathers, that ghosts have an existence outside our own fancy and emotion ; and have culled from the experience of some Jemima Jackson, who fifty years ago, being nine years of age, saw her maiden aunt appear six months after decease, abundant proof of this fact. One feels glad to think the maiden aunt should have walked about after death, if it afforded her any satisfaction, poor soul ! but one is struck by the extreme uninterestingness of this lady's appearance in the spirit, corresponding perhaps to her want of charm while in the flesh. Altogether one quite agrees, having duly perused the collection of evidence on the subject, with the wisdom of these modern ghost-experts, when they affirm that you can always tell a genuine ghost-story by the circumstance of its being about a nobody, its having