



The Beetle: A Mystery

Richard Marsh

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The Beetle: A Mystery By Richard Marsh The Beetle (or The Beetle: A Mystery) is an 1897 horror novel by the British writer Richard Marsh, in which a polymorphous Ancient Egyptian entity seeks revenge on a British Member of Parliament. It initially out-sold Bram Stoker's similar horror story Dracula, which appeared the same year. The story is told from four points of view, which generally flow from each other with limited scene repetition. In order, the four narrators are Robert Holt, Sydney Atherton, Marjorie Lindon, and Augustus Champnell. The story is written down as elaborate testimonies gathered by Champnell, who is a detective and who, despite only appearing during his own narration, provides the context of the antagonists' motives and the wrap-up of how the rest of the cast fared after the adventure. The events described are insinuated to be based on fact and several names used in the novel are supposedly altered to protect the identities of those involved. The year is not given, or rather left ambiguous at 18—, but everything takes place over a three day-period around June 2 on a Friday. Robert Holt, a clerk who has been looking all day for a place to work, which he hasn't had for a long time, seeks shelter and food at a workhouse in Fulham. He is, however, denied, and in the dark and rain walks on looking for another place to stay. He comes upon a road occupied by only two houses, one of which in terrible state. He finds that one to have the window open and invites himself in. This proves to be a mistake, as he comes face to face with what is later revealed to be a beetle. He is hypnotized into paralysis and the beetle takes their human form again, if covered largely by a blanket; an unsightly man with distinctly female behavior who is later referred to as the Arab. The Arab accuses Holt of being a thief and promises to treat him like one, though they make clear they have use for them. Feeding him but taking his clothes and forcing a kiss on him that appears their way of feeding themselves from him, the Arab sends Holt nearly naked to the home of Paul Lessingham, a member of the House of Commons, to steal the contents of a protected drawer in his desk. If Holt is to encounter Lessingham, he is instructed to say "The Beetle", which should incapacitate him. Despite having no experience with burglary, Holt succeeds, in part because the Arab sees through his eyes and orders him onward. Before he can leave with the contents, letters tied together with a ribbon, Lessingham confronts him. In a voice not his, Holt shouts "The Beetle" twice, forcing Lessingham to shiver in a corner and allowing him to get away by jumping through the window. In the streets, he is accosted by another man, who asks if he committed a crime against Lessingham. The man is pleased by the prospect and lets Holt go, who delivers the letters to the Arab. The Arab finds they are love letters from one Marjorie Lindon and proclaims they will hurt Lessingham through her.

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