

## *Black Magic*

Excerpt from Spooky Massachusetts

Retold by S.E. Schlosser

Mad Henry was a hermit who lived alone in a decrepit mansion at the edge of town. Rumors were rife about the wild-eyed man. Some folks said that he was a magician who called upon the powers of darkness to wreck havoc upon his neighbors. Others called him a mad doctor who could restore life to foul corpses from the local cemetery. No respectable citizen in town had anything to do with Mad Henry

Then one year a new family moved to town with a lovely daughter, Rachel, who caught Mad Henry's eye. He showered the maiden with gifts—goblets of pure gold, necklaces of pearl, and a pot of daisies that never dropped a single petal. Despite the gifts, Rachael fell in love with another, Geoffrey, a handsome young man just home from university. A week after meeting they eloped, leaving behind a stunned Mad Henry.

When Rachael and Geoffrey returned from the elopement, they threw a big ball and invited everyone in town. While Rachel was waltzing with her father, she heard a clap of thunder. Lightning flashed again and again. Suddenly, the double doors blew open and a breeze whirled in, bringing with it the smell of dead, decaying things. Mad Henry loomed in the doorway, pupils gleaming red with anger. He was followed by the grotesque figures of the dead, who came marching two by two into the room. Their eye sockets glowed with blue fire as they surrounded the room. Two of the corpses captured Geoffrey and threw him down at the feet of their lord. Red eyes gleaming, Mad Henry drew a silver-bladed knife and casually cut the bridegroom's throat from ear to ear. Rachel screamed and ran forward, pushing through the foul, stinking corpses of the dead, and flung herself upon her dying husband.

"Kill us both," she cried desperately.

But Mad Henry plucked the lass out of the pool of blood surrounding her dead husband and carried her out into the thundering night. Behind him, the army of the dead turned from the grizzly scene and followed their master. The sounds of thunder and lightning faded away as the alchemist

and his dead companions disappeared into the dark night.

Geoffrey's father and Rachael's father gathered a small mob and followed the evil hermit, intent upon saving Rachel. When they searched Mad Henry's house, they found it completely empty save for a light, which shone from a series of mysterious globes that bobbed near the ceiling of each room. Mad Henry had vanished.

Search parties scoured the countryside for days, but turned up nothing. Geoffrey was buried in the local cemetery, and the dance hall was torn down. No one in town spoke about what had happened, and no one dared imagine what had become of poor Rachel.

A year to the day after the ball, a timid knock sounded upon the door of Rachael's parents' home. When her father opened it, he saw a gaunt, gray figure on the stoop. Her eyes were dull with exhaustion and pain. It was Rachel! Her tongue had been cut out so she couldn't speak. But when she produced a knife from her tattered garments—the knife with a silver blade that they had last seen in the hands of Mad Henry—the gleam of satisfaction in Rachel's eyes told them that the streaks of blood that

coated the knife were those of Mad Henry. That night, Rachel died in her sleep with a peaceful smile upon her ravaged face.