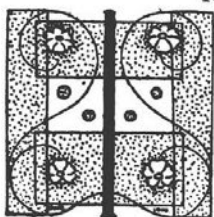


# THE DRUG

BY ALEISTER CROWLEY



NEVER suspected that my quiet friend was a wizard. Until that fatal Sunday afternoon I had always supposed that the little black door was a cupboard.

This was the way of it.

It had long been my habit to spend Sunday with my quiet friend. I believe in Sunday as the Day of Rest, and the British Sunday is usually the acme of restless misery. But in my friend's house and its quiet park the wheels of the week went round very smoothly. Especially so in the little observatory which he had built over the lake. It had no door upon the landward side, but a quay ran within it and beneath, so that (entering by boat) one found oneself at the foot of a small spiral staircase, narrow and dark, which led one out into a bright room, windowed on every side, at a height of near fifty feet from the water. So large and lofty was the room, so narrow seemed the tower, that I may surely be excused for having thought that the little black door in the East was but a shallow cupboard.

Many a Sunday had passed pleasantly within this room. Now we would read, now play chess or cards; or now he would play upon the violin, when our morning's sport among the trout was over. It was our custom to broil the fish over a clear fire, and to eat it with bread and the fruit of his beautiful orchards, while certain goodly vintages refreshed us with their subtle enthusiasm.

I should like you to picture my friend. He was still young, pale and slim, with a certain remote beauty dwelling lively on his cheeks, deep in his eyes. He was quiet as few men are quiet, yet every gesture glittered with starry joy. His quiet, indeed, was the twinkling quiet of the stars.

Upon this fatal Sunday afternoon, as we played chess together, I noticed thrice that his attention wandered to the clock with grave enquiry.

So preoccupied, indeed, was he that the game languished, and we agreed to a draw. "Will you forgive me," he said, "for a moment if I leave you? As you know, I dabble slightly in chemistry, and an important operation awaits a particular instant of time this afternoon. Stay!" he added, "why should you not become (as Kelly says) 'partaker of the mysteries of the creation'?"

Thus saying, he opened the door—the little black door—with a key (for it had no handle), and I beheld a curious apartment built in the thickness of the wall.

Very long, very narrow, very lofty; its walls of dead black. At one end hung in the midst a tall, slim tube of pale violet—a film of fire in whose light we seemed colourless spectres.

On the walls were shelves full of strange apparatus, mostly of glass or—as it seemed—silver.

My quiet friend executed some intricate movements with deft elegance.

"Enough!" he smiled—"twas but a moment's work, yet many a month have I had to wait for the right instant."

"I had no idea," said I, "that so strange a laboratory existed."