

the Lost Literature Series

presents

The Malleite Chambre

a novel by

Edward Black

edited and with notes by

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Preface to the Series:

The Lost Literature Series is an attempt to make available to the modern audience books which were highly regarded in their time, but which have now been unjustly forgotten or ignored.

Included in this series are lesser-known books by very well-known authors, such as H.G. Wells or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and also books by great authors generally unknown by modern audiences, such as John Buchan, Edward Black, and Joseph Heller.

Other books in the Lost Literature Series:

John Buchan — The Path of the King

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle — The White Company

H. Rider Haggard — Jess

Joseph Heller — Closing Time

Eleanor King — The Rajah's Promise

George Orwell — Keep the Aspidistra Flying

H. G. Wells — Food of the Gods

A Note on the Text:

“The Malleite Chambre” was published serially in 1904 by the London *Gazetteer* as “The Malleite Chamber”. Edward Black was at that time already well-known for being a man of eccentric spelling, and the editing staff of the *Gazetteer*, chiefly one Silas Chandler, heavily altered each installment before it saw print. When, in 1905, the serials were collected into book format, the publisher, John Highpoint, used the edition as edited by the *Gazetteer* staff. This incensed Black considerably, but no further edition was ever made, and so, Black’s original spellings were never kept.

This edition attempts to re-create, using his notes and by referencing his other works, the unique spellings used by the author. This may make for some difficulties for the reader, how ever, and so I would highlight a few of the more frequent or confusing spellings Black used.

To begin, of course, he used “chambre” in lieu of “chamber”. This should still be pronounced and interpreted as the English word “chamber”. Black argued on numerous occasions, for reverting words to their older forms, and as the word comes from the French, he used this spelling at every occasion.

Black also uses the German spelling of Afrika, claiming to like the harshness of the “k” over the “c”. He also uses archaisms not even in common usage in his time, 100 years ago. For example, “towne”, “whence”, and “naught”. Every attempt has been made to keep these consistent with his other writings.

In Chapter I, We are introduced to Alexander Cabott, a man living on his own in a large country home. He is in poor health, and as such he needs to stay in the country. He is visited by his friend Colonel Johnstone, fresh from a trip to Afrika, where he found a most exciting discovery: a stone that, under certain conditions, can duplicate people. Just what those conditions are, though, Johnstone is unsure. In his brief visit, he charges Cabott with discovering the secret of this 'Copy-Rock'.

II

I went directly to work on the rock Johnstone had given me. I'd been living alone with my journals for so long, it felt good to once again have a project in my hands.

When I got to the laboratory, I was shocked as to the state of the room. It had been quite some time since I'd last been in there. A thick layer of dust covered the central table, and as well all of the cupboard knobs around the edges of the room. Even the floor had such dust that as I walked into the room in my bare feet, I shuddered at the filth on my soles.

Atop of all this, one of the window panes was broken. I've no idea how or when that happened, but the cool night air drifted inward, and that, along with my own movement, kicked up so much dust I was soon coughing again.

I'd wanted to get right to it, but the severe blow to my lungs forced me to retreat to my bedroom. I was normally to take my medicine only in the mornings and at supper, but I needed some thing to clear my oesophagus. I took two tablespoons.

It took me a bit, but I did find a broom, and I very bravely descended again to the laboratory. I lit the lamps and went about cleaning the entire place. The last thing I wanted was for my experiments to be contaminated.

It was nearly dawn by the time I finished the cleaning. I'd cut my foot on a piece of broken glass but was otherwise in fine form, and not at all tired. I filled one of the large sinks with water, and put my mystery rock therein.

I watched it for a moment, through the slight ripple of the water's surface. I could see my own reflection on the water, but not on the rock. I reached in and touched it, and then quickly withdrew my hand. I waited for a second. Naught happened.

I looked then at the neighbouring sink, which though it was a little smaller, looked as it would suit my purposes. I surveyed the remainder of the room. There were no other sinks.

This malleable rock only ever copied a man's face once that I knew of; in that stream in Afrika. As I saw it, two obvious reasons that this might function in that stream and no other water could be the current of the stream, but more likely it had to do with the water itself. There must be some thing in the water there, in the wilds of Afrika, that we do not have in our comfortable English homes. Once I isolate this thing, I should be able to activate the rock.

I would need more sinks. I went down the hall to the bathroom of the West wing. This, too, had not been used for some time, as evidenced by the fact that the door was so sticky I was near unable to open it.

When I had entered, I shone the lamp about. I heard but did not see creatures, probably insects, scuttling from the light. I looked at the sink, and realised it was much too small. Then I noticed the bath.

The bath was perfectly suited to my needs. I grabbed the edge and pulled on it. It did not move.

This far from town, fortunately, there was no internal plumbing. It would have made my job that much more difficult had I to disconnect the bath from pipes and such coming from the wall. Still, as I stared in the near-darkness at the large porcelain tub, I grew concerned.

I considered leaving it for now, and calling a stronger man over from King's Lynn in the morning. This was some thing I'd rather not do, however, and I squeezed my body between the tub and the far wall. Once I'd done this, I tried my best to expand, both against the bath and the wall. The bath moved slightly.

Now I could manoeuvre within my enclosed space, and I shifted my back to the wall, pushing out at the tub with my feet. With a great burst of both effort and luck, the bath moved across the remainder of the floor, and hit the wall on the other side, right next to the door.

Pleased with myself, I stood and went to the door to try to pull the tub through. I soon realised, however, that the tub was wider than the doorway. I should have to tip the bath, and pull it out sidewise. I walked over to one end and tried my best to lift, but met with insufficient success to tip the thing onto its side.

For a minute, I felt frustration and anger building. I could start with the two sinks I have. I could wait for a stronger man to help me extract the tub. I did not wish, however, to not be in constant control of this experiment, my first in so long.

I left the bathroom, and returned soon afterward with a spade I'd found behind the house. I raised it high and struck down onto the door frame. It made but a scratch. I lifted the spade again and brought it down. A chip of wood flew off the frame, landing in the darkened bathroom.

The new sun was shining starkly through the laboratory window when I returned, with great shortness of breath and with the bath in tow. My laboratory had double-doors, so there was thankfully no difficulty getting the bath in the room.

I longed for my medicine, but I pushed on. There was still a metal tub upstairs in the East wing. I would need that, too, likely.

It was a much simpler matter to get the old metal tub out of its respective bathroom. This bath was much lighter and I soon had dragged it all the way to the foyer. At that point, a new problem presented itself.

While it was quite one thing to drag a large metal tub down a hallway, it was another entirely to carry it down a long, winding staircase. I thought for a minute, and then kicked the tub. It seemed sturdy enough. With a great heave, I shoved the tub down the stairs, and it alternately slid and rolled as it went down. It left a multitude of marks on the concave wall, and cracked more than one section of the wooden handrail. It made such a clatter as I couldn't believe. Two-thirds of the way down, it got stuck, so I was forced to descend the stair and give it another push. When it finally landed on the ground floor, it was upside-down.

At this point, my lungs were burning, and my legs were feeling like jelly, so I retreated to my bedroom for some more medicine. I brought the bottle back down with me.

Soon I had both tubs set up in the laboratory, each ready to be filled with water as needed. The first thing I would try to add to the water would be sediment, so I went out into the bright sunny morn and began to take samples of dirt from

varied areas of my property. In my exuberance, I'd not changed my clothes, nor added any thing to my bare feet. The blades of grass tickled the soles of my feet, and the dew cleaned them, but made them cold.

It was nearing noon by the time I returned, a satisfactory number of soil samples under my arm.

I suppose I won't go through each and every step with you. It's only necessary you know that over the next couple of days, I experimented with various sediment solutions, alternating from sink to sink to tub as necessary, so I always had one tub draining, one tub filling, and the rock soaking. When I had exhausted my soil samples, I went to get more, but this time I was also collecting plant leaves. After several more days sequentially going through plant/sediment combinations, I was growing tired. I couldn't recall when I'd last eaten.

I stared at the stone in the sink, I picked it up and looked it right in the eye, or would have, had it had an eye. I was beginning to hate it. I was almost under the very unscientific belief that the rock was alive, and that it was hiding itself from me specifically. It was precisely as I held the rock to my face and leered at it that I heard a small voice call my name.

I put the stone back into the sink and went to the laboratory door leading to the outside. I heard it again, so I walked outside, again barefoot. In fact, I hadn't changed my clothes at all since beginning the project. I realised I smelled a little. I walked around the outside of the house, over to the East wing, where I found little Taddy calling outside my bedroom window.

‘Oh, there you are!’ he said upon seeing me. ‘I sure am sorry for the racket, sir, I thought you might be sleeping.’

‘I’ve been working in the West wing,’ I explained. ‘What can I do for you, Taddy?’

‘I’ve brought your journals, sir,’ the boy said, showing them to me.

‘Journals? Is it already Friday?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘That’s odd. I could have sworn it was still Monday. No matter, come along to my laboratory with those, boy.’

‘Yes sir,’ agreed Taddy, and he followed me back inside. I pointed out a corner of the room for him to place the journals. Then I reached into my robe for the money to give him.

‘That’s odd,’ I said. ‘I always have money in here.’ I double-checked the pockets. There was naught in them. ‘I’ll have to go upstairs, Taddy. I’m afraid I haven’t brought my money down with me.’

‘Oh, don’t worry about that, sir. I don’t wish to distract you any more from your work than I must. What are you doing here, any way?’

I thought again of the stone, how mayhap it just wasn’t working for me alone.

‘Come over here, Taddy, and reach into this sink and touch this rock.’

Taddy put his hand in a bit, and pulled it out right away. ‘Sorry, sir,’ he said. ‘I wasn’t expecting it to be so cold.’

He put his hand back in and touched the rock. Naught happed.

‘That’s it,’ I said. ‘Taddy, you’ve helped me immeasurably.’

‘I’m glad to do it, sir.’

‘Of course you are, lad,’ I said. I looked around the room and my eyes fixed on the fireplace. ‘Tell me, Taddy, what is the temperature in Afrika?’

‘Well, I never been, sir,’ Taddy said. ‘But I heard it’s hot.’

‘Very hot indeed, Taddy. I shall need some more firewood.’

‘I can fetch it for you, sir!’ said Taddy.

‘Oh, you’ve done so much for me already, son, I wouldn’t feel right putting you to work like that.’

‘I don’t mind, sir. My mum’s in a terrible mood to-day, sir.’

I laughed. ‘All right, then, Taddy. You go get so much firewood as you can and bring it back here. I’m going to go get more soil and plant samples.’

Taddy helped me that day until nearly dusk. I set about heating all my solutions, now, and when they’d cooled enough, I would stick my arm into the water to test the rock.

As night approached, I lit all the lamps. My right arm was red due to all the hot water with which it had been in contact. I was a little tired as I prepared one more sink. With the rock at the bottom, I also put in the soil and leaves for the next ratio I was to attempt. I wrapped my hands in towels and then grabbed the two kettles I’d had over the fire. I could feel the water boiling and bouncing inside them. When I poured them into the sink, the steam that came up in my face both burned me slightly, and re-invigorated me. I was ready to go all night, if I had to.

I put more water over the fire to prepare for the next attempt, as I waited for the current one to cool sufficiently. After a few minutes, I could wait no longer. I reached into the sink and touched the stone. Naught happened. And yet, as I pulled my pained hand out of the water, I thought I saw. Nay, I did see the contours of the rock changing slightly. In another second, I was staring at a carving of my face.

My eyes were closed. The mouth as well. It just sat there, unmoving at the bottom of the sink. And yet, it looked so real, as though it could at any moment wake and begin to speak to me. I stared at its impeccable detail. I was in awe at the exactness of the copy. My face is slightly asymmetrical, and as such this didn't look as my reflection in the glass, rather this was how every one else saw me, how I truly was.

As I stared at it, I started noticing it becoming less distinct. The whites of my eyes began to turn greyish, my hair began to lighten. I stuck two fingers into the water, and realised the problem: the water was cooling.

I rushed over to get the kettles again. The water inside them was again boiling and steaming. I hoped it wouldn't be too hot for the stone, but I didn't wish to lose this, even if I did think I could bring it back. I poured the kettles in and threw them down to the ground to see how it affected things.

Instantly, all detail had returned to the face, and then the eyes opened. It looked around, and expression of shock and fear on its face. It looked at me, and the fear turned to confusion. As all this was happening, the back of the head was becoming more distinct, and I could see even the stone was expanding, and creating

my neck, my shoulders. Before my very eyes, the stone grew, and it had a torso, arms. It was wearing my robe, even. I quickly realised there wouldn't be enough space in the sink for a full human body.

I put more water on the fire, hoping that I might be able to somehow transplant the stone to the porcelain bath, where there would just be enough room. As I was putting the necessary soil and plant leaves into the tub, however, I heard and then saw my double climbing out of the sink, and instantly reverting to his rock form. The stone had a human shape out of the water, and was still growing my legs under the water, but then it was too top-heavy, and it flipped out of the sink, onto the floor beneath it. I looked at the grey, semi-soft stone, as it lay on its back in my laboratory. It didn't really have a back, any more, and the unformed legs were becoming a mass of stone, once again.

I'd discovered the secret. And I'd need a larger tub.