



# Mortlock

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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As a consequence of Man's first disobedience, according to Milton's verse which stands at the head of this novel, the Immortal Amarant was plucked from Paradise to be returned to Heav'n, where it grows close to the Fount of Life. It turns out Milton didn't get it quite right, for in the next few pages we learn that in 1820, three British adventurers found the plant in an Abyssinian oasis. It was too well-guarded by decaying but undead corpses for them to steal, however, and reluctantly they swear upon their own blood that they will leave the Amarant where it grows. Greed to wield the power the plant would bring proves too strong, and the aftermath of the broken oath is worked out some 34 years later in this tale, whose blood-soaked melodramatic pages are worthy of a Penny Dreadful.

Those years take us into the time of our author's namesake, Henry Mayhew, and it is dangerous streets like those of the latter's **London Labour** which provide the setting for the violence which soon besets the orphan Josie, knife-throwing assistant to her guardian, The Great Cardamom. Their almost supernatural magic act is the delight of the audiences who nightly crowd the Erato Theatre. Within a few chapters, Cardamom is dead, the life drained from him by three crow-like ghuls, lusting for carrion. His dying words to Josie direct her to a twin she never knew she had - Alfie, the ward of Wiggins, Undertaker of Seven Dials. Neither Josie nor Alfie knows much about their parents and as their past begins to reveal itself and the consequences of the theft of the Amarant unravel, the twins are pursued by the ferocious ghuls, servants of the evil Lord Corvis. They escape his clutches only to find refuge in the marshy home of Lorenzo's Incredible Circus whose performers are themselves among the undead, condemned to play every evening to an equally ghostly audience. The tortuous plot occasionally drops in pace, but there is a fine graveyard denouement involving a rotting carcass rearing up from the dank earth and the severing of the villain's hand by Josie, who employs her stage skills to bloody effect with a gravedigger's spade. Here among the tombstones all the mysteries surrounding the Amarant and the twins' parents are resolved and the future looks distinctly brighter for the intrepid pair.

Running Order:

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