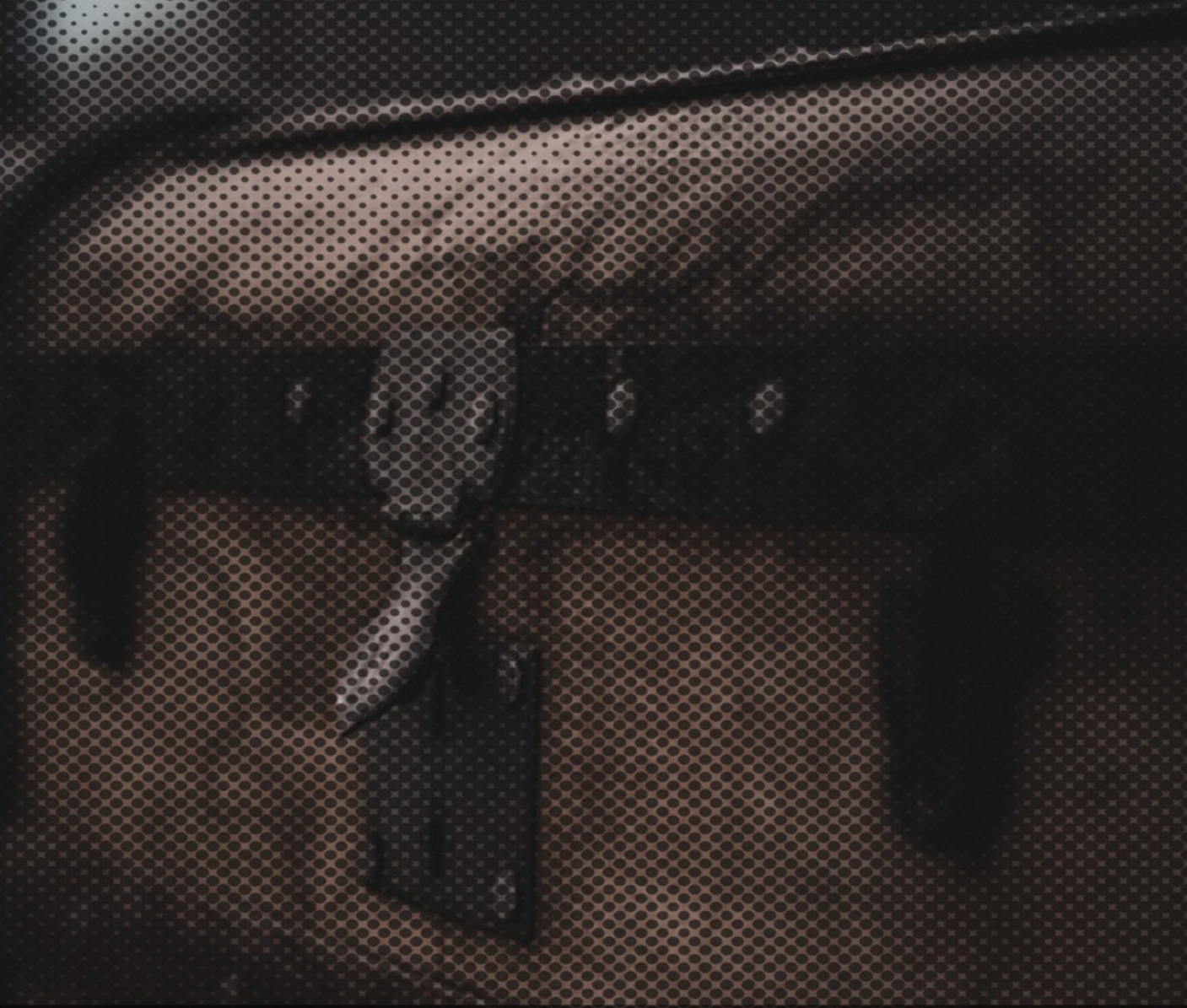


Grant Allen



*The Beckoning
Hand: John
Cann's Treasure*

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Cecil Mitford sat at a desk in the Record Office with a stained and tattered sheet of dark dirty-brown antique paper spread before him in triumph, and with an eager air of anxious inquiry speaking forth from every line in his white face and every convulsive twitch at the irrepressible corners of his firm pallid mouth. Yes, there was no doubt at all about it; the piece of torn and greasy paper which he had at last discovered was nothing more or less than John Cann's missing letter. For two years Cecil Mitford had given up all his spare time, day and night, to the search for that lost fragment of crabbed seventeenth-century handwriting; and now at length, after so many disappointments and so much fruitless anxious hunting, the clue to the secret of John Cann's treasure was lying there positively before him. The young man's hand trembled violently as he held the paper fast unopened in his feverish grasp, and read upon its back the autograph endorsement of Charles the Second's Secretary of State—"Letter in cypher from Io. Cann, the noted Buccaneer, to his brother Will^m., intercepted at Port Royal by his Ma^{tie's} command, and despatched by General Ed. D'Oyley, his Ma^{tie's} Captain-Gen^l and Governor-in-Chief of the Island of Jamaica, to me, H. NICHOLAS." That was it, beyond the shadow of a doubt; and though Cecil Mitford had still to apply to the cypher John Cann's own written key, and to find out the precise import of the directions it contained, he felt at that moment that the secret was now at last