



Fontana

# THE 5<sup>TH</sup> FONTANA BOOK OF GREAT GHOST STORIES

Uncanny tales of darkness  
by John Betjeman, Jerome K. Jerome, W. W. Jacobs  
and others  
– selected by Robert Aickman.



**THE FIFTH FONTANA BOOK OF  
GREAT GHOST STORIES**

***Fontana Ghost Stories***

**The 2nd Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories**  
**The 3rd Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories**  
**The 4th Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories**  
**The 5th Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories**  
**The 6th Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories**  
**The 7th Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories**  
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***Edited by Robert Aickman***

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**The 16th Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories**

***Edited by R. Chetwynd-Hayes***

***and many others***

The Fifth Fontana Book of Great

# Ghost Stories

*Selected by Robert Aickman*



Fontana/Collins

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## INTRODUCTION

The remarkable success of the preceding Fontana Books of Great Ghost Stories, and my own correspondence, leave no doubt that the series has happily enlisted a large following of regular readers. In Introductions to the four earlier collections, I have set forth my general view both of ghost stories and of ghosts; devoting thereto much care and considerable thought. The steady students would not wish me to go fully into the matter again. The previous books are still obtainable, and I must ask newcomers to accept here a brief summary. The following I believe to be the crucial points.

The ghost story should be clearly distinguished alike from the horror story on its right and from the science fiction on its left. The ghost story appeals primarily as little to sadomasochism as to scientific prediction. At its best, its true affinity is rather with poetry: it is a projection and symbolisation of thoughts and feelings experienced by most people (perhaps by all) but of their nature excluded from the common plod of ordinary prose narrative and record. These thoughts and feelings, though dependent for their expression upon suggestion rather than upon definition, are often, perhaps for that reason, among the strongest and most real within us.

Historically, the ghost story began as a tale of one returned from the dead; but its scope has widened to include much of the area which Keats described as "the truth of imagination". Ghost stories are exercises of the imagination. Their importance lies partly in the fact that in all of us the imagination requires to be exercised, and today gets desperately little scope, so that society is in danger of madness in consequence. In particular, the ghost story is a great reconciler within the basic realms of love and death; the only things that really matter. Accordingly, the ghost story is very much a work of art: only an artist can induce the essential *frisson* and purgation. In a world ever more bound down and weighed upon with "facts", the good ghost story offers the freedom of a lyric



poem. It is not surprising that the number of first-class ghost stories is small.

An article in *The Times* kindly commending the successive collections assembled by Mr. Edmund Crispin and by myself, stated that both Mr. Crispin and I were opposed to "psycho-analytical" critiques of the supernatural. Speaking for myself, I would observe that Freud himself appears specifically to have excluded the *unheimlich* (splendid word) from the area open to analytical interpretation. (He was wary also about the—related—psychoanalysis of art; and when he embarked upon it, as in his attempt at a mock-analysis of Leonardo da Vinci, seems regularly to have fallen below the level of genius which sets him so immeasurably above all his associates and successors, and seems likely so to do into the considerable future.) Psychoanalysis itself is now widely complained of as insufficiently factual, statistical, and scientific. The dislike felt for ghost stories in many quarters relates to the fact that ghost stories cannot be reduced even to the scientific level of psychoanalysis. Their appeal is entirely emotional and imaginative; and therefore in a different order of importance. The steadily increasing market demand for ghost stories confirms this recognition. Mere facts, the tools of the sorcerer's apprentice, are seldom lovable.

But here should be made one major affirmation. While it is true that serious psychic research (as distinct from psychological) and the ghost stories of fiction are far apart, yet the latter would lose much, and become mere playthings, if the former had nothing to investigate. It is my belief and my experience that "paranormal phenomena" do occur; and my opinion that the future well-being of man might be forwarded by more attention being paid to them. There is evidence that a mystical, clairvoyant faculty of a most practical kind is commonly taken for granted in many "primitive" societies, from pre-communist Tibet to the Hebrides; and is merely bred out and killed off by industrialism, compulsory education, and the belief that every question has an answer.

In my earlier Introductions, I have said a few words about each of the stories chosen; either linking them to a general philosophy of the ghost story, or at least using them to show how wide and varied the range of the best ghost stories can

be. I have sometimes included one story with no precise supernatural or paranormal ingredient in it, but with a strongly spectral atmosphere: such a story will be found in the present group, and a masterpiece of its kind. Otherwise, I propose to comment upon two of the present stories only.

The late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries produced a large number of ghost stories described as Anonymous. Many of them are transcriptions of folk-tales and myths. Their authors (or editors) were entitled at least to the credit attaching to Tom Moore for his versions of Irish songs. Not a few of Anonymous's ghost stories have something of the grandeur, poetry, and humanity we find in the equally anonymous Scottish Border Ballads. But I know of none more remarkable than *The Mysterious Stranger*, herein to be found. This German story is the work of an important artist: familiar elements are cunningly made unfamiliar; the important characters are fully human and authentically moving; the terror builds up irresistibly. There are overtones of Chamisso and of Frankenstein's prophetic monster; even of Goethe himself, a great one for the *unheimlich*. I regret to say that research in Britain and America has failed to uncover the name of the almost equally skilled translator.

Secondly, a few words about my own story. In accordance with an indulgence that has become almost traditional, I included stories by myself in the first, second, and third collections; feeling also that the collection as a whole might become more alive and convincing if the person responsible for the choosing put a little of his own on view also. After the third collection appeared, a person wrote not to me but to the publishers: "How dare Mr. Aickman have the effrontery to include himself among the writers of great ghost stories?" or words to that effect. The thought had naturally occurred to me more than once already; and suspecting that the one critic spoke for many, I modestly omitted myself from volume four. I was rather pleased then to receive a number of expostulations and cries of disappointment. Probably it was solely that an accepted rule was being broken. I have now, with as few false fancies as possible, reinstated it.

There is one more thing to be said. Though the number of great ghost stories is indeed small, I have managed so far to

include no other author, living or dead, more than once. We badly need more living writers of ghost stories with the right kind of imagination and a respect for the power and poetry of the quest,

ROBERT AICKMAN

## THE FIRMIN CHILD

*Richard Blum*

Elizabeth Firmin was an ordinary woman. Her husband was an ordinary man. They lived in a modern apartment in Menlo Park, which is certainly an ordinary town. But their child Tommy was extraordinary.

Elliot Firmin had been a graduate student at Berkeley when he met Elizabeth. She worked in the administrative offices of the University. She was a pretty girl; blonde, snub-nosed, with happily impertinent lips, grey eyes, and a well-moulded body which, not without vanity, she clothed in the latest fashions. She had found Elliot appealing. He was lean, dark-haired, sharp-featured, with shoulders that sloped impatiently forward, giving him an angular stance, as if he were holding himself ready for a sudden start, like a runner in a game. His movements were quick and nervous, enhancing the impression of latent forces tightly reined. He was funny and sarcastic and he startled Elizabeth. She, finding secretarial work dull, liked that.

When they were married they moved into a student apartment which was small, dirty, and Bohemian. Travel posters and penny poetry were thumbtacked to the plywood walls, and half-empty wine bottles stood atmospheric vigil on orange crate tables in the brief intervals between parties. There were a few books lying on the brick-and-board bookcase shelves, but there were not enough of them to lend seriousness to the pretension of scholarship. Elliot himself soon abandoned even the pretensions and shifted his field from chemistry to education.

Tommy was born seven months after their wedding, a premature baby only in the social sense. His development had been normal enough, so it seemed, until the day Elliot had installed the hi-fi set. Elliot was an enthusiast. Stereophonic locomotives roared through the room, stereophonic oceans raged at their door, stereophonic jungle animals rambled across their ear drums—and Elliot loved them all. But Tommy

did not. From the moment it began to play he began to kick and scream and it was at this point that his long war with the stereo set began. His parents thought it was because he had an aversion to music.

Tommy was two when Elliot finished school and got his first job, as a teacher, in Menlo Park. There they lived in an apartment and there, whenever the music played, Tommy ragingly pounded the sound system's heavy doors with his fists. He was unable to affect the set, but eventually he affected his father. Elliot, annoyed, would become peevish himself and would tune the set louder, ostensibly to hear the music over the roar of his son, but in fact he aimed to show just who was boss in the family. The issue was never settled clearly.

During his third year Tommy began to have what Elizabeth called "quiet tantrums". They occurred without any apparent reason. Odd movements they were, contortions, writhing, as though his muscles had some spontaneously sensuous rhythm of their own. Elizabeth tried scolding, massage, and finally, a new mattress, but the movements went on.

Elliot received a raise and they moved to a new and larger apartment, a six-family California two-storey place with a lawn, common utility room, and an enclosed play area out back. The other families had toddlers too, and, in the manner of suburbanites, Elliot and Elizabeth met the other people there through the children. It wasn't long before Elizabeth joined the other mothers in the patio or play area to drink coffee, chat, and watch the children play. Occasionally the girls, as they thought of themselves, had morning Martinis. Evenings and weekends all of the adults shared cocktails and barbecues and Elizabeth loved it. But she wasn't sure about Tommy.

He began the business with the spoon about the time of his fourth birthday. At first it was just a matter of his insisting that he be allowed to carry the spoon, a battered tablespoon he had apparently found somewhere, wherever he went. He kept it carefully in his jumper pocket, treating it with more affection than any puppet or shaggy stuffed animal. Clearly it was *his* spoon and he treasured it.

But soon he began to polish it, daily at first and hourly later. Usually he used his pants cuff or shirt sleeve, gently

rubbing to and fro, holding the spoon this way and that in the light, watching it carefully, breathing excitedly as he did so. At first Elizabeth thought he was mimicking her, for often he watched her fight her weekly kitchen battle with the tarnished silver, but soon she realised it must be something else. He was too intense about it and it made her uneasy.

The three of them were sitting in the living-room one evening, jazz playing loudly, and Tommy huddled in scowling defence in the farthest corner of the room. By now he had abandoned his physical attacks on the record player, now he just stared at it. But this evening he did something more. They watched him as he hauled himself from the floor, tumbling some surrealistic structure he'd made with his plastic blocks as he arose, and pulled that spoon from his pocket. He turned it over repeatedly in his hand, the solemn gravity of the very young bearing his movement company. Slowly he bent towards the loudspeaker, but averting his eyes sideways, focused on the spoon. He moved it in little circles, in long straight lines. Next came spirals and figure eights, all sculpted in the air. These latter he repeated and his head began, an automatism, to nod rhythmically with his baton.

Elliot smiled, "Well, what do you know? We've got a bandleader in the family."

Elizabeth was immensely relieved, "Of course, *that's* what it is!"

"What else?" asked Elliot.

"I'd wondered, that's all," she replied.

He ignored her. "What do you think, Tom Toms," he smiled over his new-coined diminutive, "you want to be a drummer or are you a horn man?"

Tommy paid no attention. His grey eyes followed the slow geometry of his wand. His mouth was open. His tongue moved restlessly, rhythmically, back and forth over his lower lip. His tousled silky light brown hair had fallen over his forehead, and his eyebrows, already bushier, broader, and darker than ordinarily seen in children of his age, seemed to curl downwards, at their ends, as if they were willing themselves to frown.

He *did* look like a symphony conductor thought Elizabeth. Happily she called to the child.

"Tommy? Come on over here to *mommy*,"

Tommy shook his head. He went on carving his symbols out of the air, intense, a tiny necromancer, exorcising.

Elizabeth was hurt. Why had he refused to come to her?

It was a few weeks later that they were sitting in the living-room after dinner, Elliot was correcting papers, Elizabeth was sewing, and Tommy was sitting on the floor pushing some toy cars about. It was quiet except for those muffled sounds which creep through apartment houses in the evening. Tommy stopped playing to stare at the floor. He got to his knees, pulling his spoon from his pocket. With great care he polished it, using his blue corduroy trousers as a cloth. Still kneeling, he cocked his head sideways, averted his eyes again, and began to wave his spoon slowly about, sweeping it in twisting athetoid motions. His wrist seemed like rubber.

A chill coursed through Elizabeth. Tommy was "conducting" when there was no music. Elliot, sensing her shiver, turned. "Tommy, what are you doing that for?" he asked.

Tommy didn't seem to hear. He continued to move the spoon.

"Tommy!! What are you doing?"

The boy made no reply.

Except for the business with the spoon there was nothing else tangible which his mother could point to in order to account for her growing uneasiness. Tommy played with his friends, he ate well, slept well, and seemed capable of entertaining himself. Comparing him to other four-year-olds Elizabeth felt differences which were difficult to pinpoint. There was no question that Tommy was brighter than others, his vocabulary exceeded that of the six-year-old Watkins child downstairs, but it wasn't that kind of idiosyncrasy that troubled her. For one thing he had begun to have long periods of silence, which, unlike the moods of other children, seemed to have nothing to do with his being angry or tired or feeling hurt.

Elizabeth found his silences, preoccupations if they were that, hard to understand. She herself was an extroverted person who rarely gave in to moods. Conversation was her joy; she had never understood the silent people. Elliot would, Elizabeth thought. Most dark-haired people did tend to introversion, but even he liked to be sociable. Where could Tommy have picked it up? Maybe Tommy had inherited his

temperament from Elliot. It was alien to her; alien and repugnant, and now a little frightening.

As the months passed and Tommy grew taller, he began to grow thinner too, looking less and less Elizabeth thought, like her. There was more of Elliot showing in his face now; a development which she didn't welcome, although she wasn't too surprised. Elliot himself had not been growing any better-looking the last year or two, nor was he endearing himself particularly to his wife.

She had come, by now, to view her husband as a little tedious, a little too "practical", and quite unamusing. It had been a long time since he had surprised her, and his old energies seemed to have dissipated, leaving him fatter and too content. She was tired of the apartment house too and had suggested to her husband that a change of scene would do them no harm. But he had argued, a conservative at age twenty-nine, that change had little to recommend. He was comfortable where he was.

She was reluctant to bring up her views on Tommy. That was already a sore subject. Nevertheless there were occasions on which she gathered her courage to confront her husband with her most profound concern; that there was something odd about Tommy. Her husband's usual response was to ridicule her and pompously to advise her to encourage the growth of "uniqueness" in their child. At such times she was overcome with bitterness, for she felt she knew something of Tommy's sinister "uniqueness", and she could well do without it.

Her case was a difficult one to present. Tommy looked well. He never fought with the other children and, when attacked, retreated into an impermeable silence. The other mothers praised him and rightly claimed he was good-looking and had a charming smile. So he might, but it had been some time since his mother had seen him smile at her. Once inside the house he was moody and impenetrable, absorbed in what appeared to her to be nonsensical black magic with his spoon, or twisting into those body-warping rhythmical acrobatics that reminded her of an animal in its death throes. Desperately she had tried to break him of these habits, but she had failed. Now when he began she turned away.

But she couldn't turn away from him all the time, nor did



she want to. Sometimes he was adorable, at other times sad and helpless, and sometimes bright and cheery. These were times for play and love and lullabies. And then there was the other Tommy, the fey child, the stranger, the witch. She saw that side more often now. It made her nervous to be with him.

Elizabeth and Tommy were having lunch together one Wednesday; peanut butter sandwich, apple, and milk,

"Mommy?"

"Yes?"

"Why do the Watkinses hate each other?"

Elizabeth was shocked. The Watkinses, their neighbours downstairs these several years, were a pleasant couple, friendly, and apparently happily married. Their son, nearly Tommy's age, was his play companion.

"Where in heaven's name did you get an idea like that, Tommy?"

He shrugged his shoulders and took another bite of his sandwich.

"Why?" he repeated.

One day, Elizabeth was sitting out back in the play area with Eleanor Watkins and Sally Neubruck while their children scrambled about on the slides and in the sandbox. Tommy was pushing a toy tractor in the sand; he had given up using his precious spoon as a toy and kept it safely tucked away in his jumper pocket. Something had gone wrong with his tractor, sand had jammed the moving parts of the blade in front. He brought it over to Elizabeth,

"Mommy, can you fix this?"

She had taken it from him and using her hairpin, managed to put it in order again.

Eleanor Watkins smiled at Tommy, saying,

"There, Tommy, your mother is a good mechanic, isn't she?"

Tommy nodded, but instead of going back to the sand pile, he stood looking quizzically into Mrs. Watkins' face,

"What is it, Tommy?" she asked,

"What's a divorce?" he asked,

Eleanor Watkins blushed deeply, turning to Elizabeth with a look of fury over Tommy's question.

"Did you tell him?" Eleanor asked Elizabeth bitterly,

"No, certainly not," said Elizabeth, shocked by Tommy's question and by her friend's angry accusation. She faced Tommy.

Tommy looked up at his mother, a look of deep hurt passing over his face. Without answering, he turned his back and shuffled despondently back to the sand pile.

"I told you it was in confidence!" Eleanor Watkins was near tears.

"But I tell you, Elly, I didn't mention a word," cried Elizabeth, "not to a soul."

"I'll bet!" Eleanor Watkins stalked angrily away, pulling her children along after her.

"What's that all about?" asked Sally Neubruck, who had been sitting quietly as an amazed bystander.

Elizabeth was near to tears. "It can't hurt to tell you now, not after that. Eleanor has been thinking of getting a divorce. She's not getting along with Fred at all. I guess they're having some awful scenes. It was a surprise to me, but she just told me about it and asked me not to tell a soul. I feel so embarrassed I could cry. I didn't tell anybody, not even Elliot. I just don't know why Tommy had to ask her *that* question. She had no right to jump to conclusions. Tommy probably didn't know a thing. It was just a coincidence, that's all."

"I'm sure it was," agreed Sally Neubruck. "It had to be."

That evening, in the quiet of the living-room as Elliot graded papers, Tommy waved the spoon with a new violence. It was more than Elizabeth could bear. It hadn't been her day. She walked over to Tommy, shaking him.

"Stop that I say! Stop that silly spoon business this minute!"

Tommy continued to trace his sorcery in the air.

"Stop it!" she screamed, tearing the spoon out of his hand.

Tommy shook his head, stunned, and turned to look at his mother with frightened, troubled eyes. He made no sound.

Elliot had turned and had seen Elizabeth's outburst; he was angry at her.

"Now just what are you trying to prove?"

"Nothing! I just can't stand that crazy spoon business a minute longer. It isn't normal. There's something wrong with him, I tell you!"

"Knock any kid around like you did and there'll be some-

thing wrong with him. The spoon's nothing, just a fancy like kids have. You know as well as I do that he's musical. Let him play conductor if he wants."

"Conductor, my foot," shouted Elizabeth. "He's not a band-leader and never will be. He's a troublemaker, that's what he is. I can't stand it any more."

With wide eyes Tommy listened. In the middle of their quarrel he allowed himself to be packed off to bed by his mother thirty minutes before his ordinary bedtime. Elizabeth was furious, nervous, ashamed. As she turned out the light, she kissed Tommy with the briefest of pecks and turned to walk out of the room.

"Mommy?" It was his first word since she had taken the spoon away.

"Yes?" she said irritably.

"What's my name?"

"Don't ask nonsense. You know very well what your name is."

"Am I Tommy?" he persevered.

"Of course you're Tommy."

"And you're Mommy?"

"Of course," Elizabeth replied angrily.

"But I'm not the same Tommy, am I?" he asked, his voice sad.

"I really don't know," replied his mother, "sometimes I *don't* think you're the same Tommy." With that she stepped out of his room, slamming the door.

In the kitchen the next morning Elizabeth ruminated over the events of the previous evening. She prided herself on being a reasonable woman, but this time she mused, she had been driven too far. Tommy had embarrassed her in front of Eleanor Watkins, embarrassed her sick he had, with that animal cunning of his, and then he'd gone into that unnerving spasm with the spoon which was enough to drive anyone insane. Then there was Elliot, a clod, a stupid blind fool. She'd told him so last night.

Elliot came in for breakfast. He smiled weakly and not with much sincerity. It was his way of saying he was willing to let bygones be bygones. Elizabeth made no effort to smile in return. She nodded her head curtly and turned once again to the stove. Elliot scowled.

Tommy came running in.

"Hi, Tom Toms," cried Elliot, happy to be able to attend to someone other than his ill-tempered wife.

"Hi, Daddy," said Tommy, scurrying up on to his father's lap.

Over her shoulder Elizabeth said, "Good morning, Tommy."

Tommy ignored her.

Elliot smiled in satisfaction.

"That's a boy. Here, do you want your orange juice?"

Tommy gulped down the proffered glass. As he smacked his lips he turned,

"Daddy, can we have an orange tree someday?"

"Sure we can," replied his father.

"Will it grow colours or juices?"

Elliot laughed. "Neither, just oranges."

"Oh," said Tommy, adding, "Daddy?"

"Yes?"

"Is she really my mother?"

Elizabeth turned away from the stove, knocking over a salt cellar in the sweep of her hand. The boy was uncanny, he inscribed her sins like the recording angel. Only in this case it was not an angel. Last night, after they'd gone to bed, she had been talking to Elliot, cursing him really, demanding of him how she could be asked to feel motherly toward a child like Tommy. Part of him was a monster, and that part her nature denied. It was as if her whole self was possessed of that mysterious instinct of organs which recognise their kin but reject alien tissue, building antibodies against it. Antibodies generated themselves in her without her willing.

She knew this, but when she looked at her child she knew that she had exaggerated and been cruelly unkind. He sat there near to tears, pathetic, despairing. How sudden his mood shift had been; from giggles to sorrow like a shutter snapping, closing his inner self. She cursed herself, her evil, her doubts. She wanted to rush over to him and pluck him from his father's lap, sweep him into her arms, crush him in love, reassuring them both that she was his mother and he was her son.

She hesitated. Elliot would resent her picking Tommy up. Lately they had been competing for his affection. But she was remorseful; the poor baby, the tender child. What kind of a

woman was she to have feared him, her own sweet Tommy? Was she, she wondered, insane?

Elliot had ignored Tommy's question, although a hint of satisfaction could be detected as he chewed breakfast with joyful aggressiveness. Tommy waited hopefully, but finding no reply in the offing, turned to his toast and jam. He nibbled disinterestedly for a moment or two and then turned to his mother.

"Mommy?"

Her heart was pounding as she answered; hope and fear balanced precariously within her.

"Yes?"

"Can I have my egg turned over?"

Sweet victory. Redemption. "Of course you can, darling."

How much she loved him,

"Mommy?"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Why do you think Daddy's a stupid fool?"

And the brat smiled as he asked it. Smiled!

At that moment Elizabeth could have killed him.

Elliot came home early, resolved to have it out with Elizabeth. Her behaviour with Tommy had been intolerable. She was all love one minute and all fury the next. And she was so nervous; what a change from the easy-going vivacious girl he had married. Elliot didn't like to think about it, but the marriage was going downhill.

Elliot was convinced that Tommy was at the root of the trouble. Tommy was such a sweet boy, why couldn't Elizabeth enjoy him? Oh, he could agree that Tom Toms was a little moody once in a while, but that was no reason for her to get upset. As for the spoon business, well, it might be a little funny, but why fuss? He'd outgrow it. Elliot believed in permissiveness; let children grow up without carping at them all the time. He was sure Tommy would turn out all right. He needed time, that was all.

No one was home when he arrived at 4.15. He presumed they were probably still out shopping. Elliot looked around the kitchen for something to eat. He was munching a cold leg of chicken when he heard the footsteps on the balcony by the front door. There was a light knock simultaneous with the door being pushed open,

"Hello there, Elizabeth?" It was Eleanor Watkins. She walked into the living-room calling again, "Elizabeth?"

"Nobody in here but us chickens," Elliot called back,

"Oh, Elliot is that you?"

"Nobody else."

Eleanor Watkins walked into the kitchen. She was a pretty girl, petite, dark brown hair, bright brown eyes, a sultry—almost pouting—mouth. Elliot's eyes followed her into the room. She wore a tight sweater and a full flaring skirt. He liked what he saw.

"Oh, but you're home so early," Eleanor smiled, pleased and surprised. She liked Elliot.

"A little I guess. For once this month there wasn't any extracurricular nonsense at school to supervise."

"Oh." Her hand began to stroke her hair. Eleanor stood there smiling, at home, her lips slightly apart.

"Anything I can do for you?" asked Elliot cheerfully. "Cup of sugar, eggs, flour, rattlesnake meat? We aim to please."

"Oh Elliot, you are a tease. No, I just came up because I needed someone to talk to . . ." Her smile disappeared and in its place there came a look of sadness. She lowered her lashes and bit, with even white teeth, into the softness of her lower lip.

"Something wrong?" asked Elliot frowning.

"Nothing, nothing really." She seemed near to tears.

"Gosh Eleanor, what is it?"

"Oh Elliot, it's simply awful, awful," she had begun to cry.

"What's wrong?" Elliot felt awkward, and incompetent.

"It's Fred. He's been beastly to me, just beastly. I can't tell you how awful he's been. He hates me, he said so, and he's just awful. "The tears were coursing down her cheeks, red framed her eyes.

"Well, gosh, well, I'm certainly sorry to hear that."

Elliot had begun to perspire. He blushed a little. He had no idea what to say. Poor Eleanor. She'd always been so cheerful; friendly, too. Elliot wondered what to make of it all. Fred Watkins seemed to be a decent enough fellow. Elliot had known him for—was it four or five years now? He'd never suspected Fred of being ornery. Imagine. Elliot had thought the two of them had gotten along fine. Amazing. Embarrassed, Elliot repeated himself.

"Well, yes, I am sorry to hear that."

The tears sprang from her eyes. She wailed,

"Fred and I are going to get a divorce!"

Before Elliot could comment, Eleanor Watkins had hurled herself against his chest, her arms clinging around his waist, her soft hair nestled against his cheek. She held him as she shuddered, crying.

Elliot was dumbfounded, embarrassed, flattered, pleased. He felt a swell of tenderness arising within him. His conscience told him not to, but nevertheless his own arm went around her, his hand stroked her head. He murmured,

"There, there, Elly, don't you worry. It'll be all right."

She held him tight. He held her.

She raised her tear-wet face expectantly.

"Oh Elliot, I'm so unhappy."

Elliot's heart was pounding. He was hot and dry and churning as he kissed her.

They were still in the kitchen, embracing, when Elliot heard the sounds that he feared; footsteps coming up the outside steps. He recognised them as Elizabeth's and Tommy's. Abruptly he pulled himself from Eleanor's embrace, saying,

"We mustn't be seen Elly, we can't, no no!"

He fled, consumed with panic, guilt, residual excitement; he fled to the bathroom, to lock the door, to secure himself from discovery, to gain time. Once inside he breathed more easily, checking his shirt and face in the mirror for telltale signs of powder or lipstick. Over the ripple of the running faucet he heard the front door close and the voices of the two women greeting each other in the kitchen. Elliot took his time.

"Hi, Daddy," Tommy greeted Elliot cheerfully as he sauntered into the kitchen.

"Hi, Family," he replied.

Elizabeth was unloading groceries on the sideboard. Her greeting was cordial and totally unsuspecting.

Eleanor said nothing, only smiled. Her eyes were red-rimmed but she appeared to Elliot's astonished eye completely composed. He looked at her only once, quickly averting his eyes. It was Eleanor who spoke next.

"Oh Elizabeth, I hate to bother you, but I just stepped in to beg a couple of eggs. I guess Elliot was in the bathroom.

Anyway, I didn't want to take them without asking. May I?"

As Eleanor departed Elliot smiled a secret good-bye.

At dinner time Tommy was in a good mood. He chattered about his toys, asked about going to the park the next day, expressed his solicitude over the fact that Floppy, his monkey hand puppet, was about to lose an ear, and effervesced over toasted almond ice cream with chocolate sauce *and* whipped cream. Watching him affectionately, Elliot wondered what in the world could have made Elizabeth think anything was wrong with a tiptop Tommy like his.

"Daddy?"

"What is it, Tommy?" Elliot was in an exceptionally good mood, yes, exceptionally good.

"When can we go to the beach?"

"Why, as soon as it gets warmer, Tom Toms, maybe in a couple of weeks."

"Can I take Floppy to the beach?"

"Sure, you can take Floppy."

"Will Mrs. Watkins come along with us to the beach too?"

"Mrs. Watkins?" Elizabeth was puzzled. "Why in heaven's name would you think of that, Tommy?"

"Because she's sad, like Floppy. She'd like the beach."

"Why that's very nice of you to think of her, Tommy, but what makes you think Mrs. Watkins is so sad?" said Elizabeth.

"Yes, she is, she is! I know she is." He turned to his father, a serious look on his face.

"Isn't Mrs. Watkins sad, Daddy?"

Elliot, infused with a guilty conscience, turned scarlet.

"Isn't she, Daddy?" Tommy insisted.

"Why yes, Tommy, I suppose she is."

Elizabeth had no idea why Elliot seemed so uncomfortable. Perhaps, she thought, he was reluctant to talk about the private problems of adults, perhaps too he had recognised the arrow of Tommy's perturbing clairvoyance. She was pleased. She hoped Tommy would ask his father more of those intrusive and disconcerting questions. Someday maybe Elliot would begin to get an idea of what she was talking about.

Elliot was seething with anxiety, doom seemed just around the corner. What would Tommy ask next? The wily little . . . Elliot fought to suppress the curse. It would be a miracle, Elliot thought, if he could slip out of this situation without



Elizabeth noticing, without Tommy trapping him. The treacherous . . . Elliot fought to control himself, to outwit his son. There, damn him, Tommy was taking aim again.

"Daddy, why does Mrs. Watkins . . ."

Elliot interrupted. He wasn't going to let Tommy have his say.

"We'll not talk about Mrs. Watkins. Her life isn't our business. You've got to learn that; not to stick your nose into other people's affairs. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Daddy." Tommy's eyes were troubled.

Elliot had spent a sleepless night. He asked himself what had he gotten himself into? Why had he behaved so warily with Tommy? The poor kid, probably just an innocent question, coincidence, that was all. He'd probably seen that Elly's eyes were red when she'd been in the kitchen borrowing the eggs. That had to be it. Imagine, being afraid of your own five-year-old, yes, really afraid of him; it didn't make sense.

The next morning at breakfast, in spite of his own ugly fatigue, Elliot made an especial effort to be nice. Was it a bad conscience or bribery? Elliot wasn't quite sure. He felt uncomfortable being in the same room with the boy. Terrible. Elliot strove for a façade of amiability.

"What do you say, Tom Toms, if it's nice next Sunday maybe we can go to the beach?"

Tommy nodded absent-mindedly.

"What do you say, Tom Toms Boy?" Elliot exuded affected good cheer.

Tommy stared at him.

Elizabeth had been in bed with the flu for four days. Sally Neubruck had taken care of Tommy most of the time, while Elliot, more considerate and affectionate these days than he had been in years, prepared the meals. The apartment had gone to pot. Elizabeth, who was still sick but who had insisted on getting up to eat with the family at dinnertime, surveyed the wreckage. Elliot was certainly no dishwasher. The yellow linoleum-tiled floor was turning beige from the dirt.

"I'll never be able to clean this mess up," she complained plaintively.

"It's a little disorganised, I'll admit," replied Elliot,

"Disorganised! It's simply hopeless. Oh, I wish I'd never gotten sick! What ever will I do?"

"Why don't you get a cleaning woman in to help you for the next week or so? I think we could afford it."

"Oh, Elliot, could we really?"

"Sure. What does it cost?"

"It's expensive," she warned,

"Like?"

"About \$1.50 an hour I'm afraid."

"Wow. Not bad for the cleaning woman, I think I'll give up teaching."

Elliot pulled a pencil from his pocket and scratched some figures on the pink paper napkins,

"Let's say you have her in for five hours a day for the next six days. Would that do the trick?"

"It would be a Godsend!"

"Good. Tell you what, I'll go down to the bank tomorrow and get the money out of savings. You call the employment office and have them send somebody out. Okay?"

"Grand," She smiled weakly,

The cleaning woman, a thin tired-looking coloured lady of about sixty, dressed in an old faded blue print dress and wearing shoes with run-down heels, peered at Tommy. She wore thick old-fashioned spectacles that testified to her short sight.

"Boy?"

"Yes?"

"You run in now and tell your mother I'm all ready to go now."

Obediently Tommy shuffled into the bedroom. Elizabeth was dressed in her pink terry-cloth robe. She was sitting in the lounging chair reading the morning paper, even though it was by now afternoon. For the last few minutes her eyes had been fixed on an advertisement. There was a clearance sale of imported Italian purses; black calfskin, lined in gold-coloured satin, very fashionable. Reduced from \$21.00 to \$10.95.

Elizabeth wanted one of those purses. She'd needed a purse for longer than she cared to remember. They never seemed to have any money for what *she* wanted, only for what Elliot

wanted. It wasn't fair. More debts and tighter budgeting, that's what each year seemed to bring. She was still wearing the things she'd bought when she was single, years ago. Elliot was a real pennypincher, salting it away in the bank. Why the cleaning woman had more money in her purse than she did. Yes, it was true, Elizabeth affirmed to herself, the cleaning woman was better off. One dollar and fifty cents an hour. It was robbery. What had the woman done these last six days? Waved a mop at the dust and run some hot water over the dishes. It was dishonest.

When Tommy came in with his message, Elizabeth pulled the wallet out of her purse. There was the money inside, three ten-dollar bills and three fives, just as Elliot had given her. How self-satisfied he'd been with his generosity, like a millionaire giving dimes to the poor. And there, in her side of the wallet, a measly five dollars. Disgusting.

As she held the wallet in her hand, Elizabeth had an idea. It was a new kind of an idea and she liked it. She liked it very much.

"Tommy," she said, "you go outside and play now. See if some of your friends are home."

Tommy walked obediently to the front door. She listened carefully as his steps ran down the outside stairway and faded away into silence as he reached the patio below. She waited another moment. She needed time to gather her resolve.

The old woman, her face soured by too many of the wrong kind of years, said only:

"I'm done, ma'am. That's forty-five dollars."

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "here you are."

Quickly she counted out the money: "ten, twenty, thirty, forty, forty-five. There you are." She thrust the bills into the other's hand.

The cleaning woman peered nearsightedly at the money. As she did so Elizabeth could feel her own heart pounding rapidly inside. Her mouth was dry and sticky, as if someone had glued the membranes to one another.

The woman thanked Elizabeth and shuffled out the front door, the bills wadded tightly in her claw-like old hand. As soon as the front door closed Elizabeth plummeted into a chair, her shaking legs no longer able to support her. She was breath-

ing heavily. It wasn't easy to do what she had done, still, it had gone well. She opened her palm to look at the two ten-dollar bills flat inside, moist now from her perspiration.

When she heard the knock on the door her stomach twisted inside her and the skin of her body turned dry and prickly. She summoned her strength to answer the door knock. It was, as she had known, the cleaning woman. The woman stood there blinking uncertainly. Her old face was more puckered than ever. What an evil face, thought Elizabeth, evil and corrupt.

"I counted that money you give me. They wasn't two tens you give me, they wuz two fives."

"I don't understand," said Elizabeth sweetly.

"You only give me \$35 not \$45, just then." The old woman's voice rasped and whined.

"But that's impossible. You were there when I counted it out."

"I don't care who wuz there, honey, but you give me fives instead of tens. I want my \$10."

"Well, I'm sorry, but you're mistaken. I've given you your money."

"I don't make mistakes about money, honey. You give me my pay!"

The old woman's yellow teeth, black at the gums, glistened in the afternoon light, wet and dirty like a rodent's. Elizabeth felt a little ill. A fetid mouth. Evil.

"You've been paid," said Elizabeth firmly.

"You cheated me. That's what you done. I'm gonna call the police."

"Please do. On the other hand I don't think you want to get into trouble," Elizabeth's eyes were narrow. She felt suddenly very self-possessed, as if she were made of steel. She continued:

"It's your word against mine. I think I know whom the police will believe, don't you?"

The old woman's eyes gleamed, small and full of hatred. Elizabeth went on, speaking calmly:

"Besides, I think there's some silver missing in the buffet."

The old woman blinked rapidly. Her breath came in short gasps, wheezing, like a squeaky bellows. Her mouth moved but

no sound came. There was a silence of a full minute while the two women measured each other and themselves. The old Negro's shoulders sagged. Bitterly she said,

"Thank you, honey. You must need that money real bad. I won't forget you, no, I won't."

Elizabeth stood on the balcony and watched as the old woman walked slowly out of sight. Elizabeth was surprised to find herself smiling.

Tommy came in for cookies and milk at four. He was moody, munching the supermarket's newest brand of marshmallow puffs without a word. Just looking at him made Elizabeth uncomfortable, the way his eyes seemed to follow her, the way he seemed to *know* something.

"Well Tommy, is there something you want to say?" she challenged him menacingly.

Tommy shook his head. His fingers, buried in his pocket, caressed his spoon.

It was a Sunday afternoon. The weather was sunny but a crisp wind blew in from the Pacific. The rock-framed beach south of Pescadero was empty, save for the gulls and the long cables of bulbous seaweed which were coiled across the sand. Tommy had run down the narrow twisting path from the tiny parking area to the beach itself. He was exuberant. As he ran, his hands moved rhythmically, snaking in hesitant circles through the air; a spastic Balinese dance. For the last few months any excitement had produced these bizarre wooden gyrations. Now he kicked off his rubber Japanese sandals and rushed up to the water's edge, there to play tag with the foaming, darting waves. Occasionally he stopped to check his coat pocket where Floppy the monkey had been put to ride, head forward, like a baby kangaroo in a pouch.

His parents walked some fifty or sixty feet behind him. They were talking, their heads close together, each straining to hear the other's voice above the roar of the sea.

"Look at him go," said Elliot, "Why, he runs like a sand-piper."

"He loves it," agreed Elizabeth,

"It's good for him to get out."

"Yes," agreed Elizabeth. "It is good for him. Maybe that will help . . ." Her voice trailed off, tentative.

"Yea," said Elliot, "maybe it will."

Elizabeth looked curiously into the face of her husband, "You see it too, then?"

"Yes," said Elliot quietly,

Elizabeth experienced a wave of relief. After all these years of blindness, of lying, of angry denial, Elliot had at last opened himself to the truth. She was no longer alone. She and Elliot were together again, bearing a burden together.

She reached out her hand to grasp his. He responded, holding hers firmly. It had been a long time since they had walked hand-in-hand like that. As far as Elizabeth was concerned it was a rebirth. Elliot, too, was glad that he had stopped lying to himself and to her. He would face the facts head on,

"He's a strange child," mused Elliot,

"Yes."

"Yes."

"He's getting worse."

"The spoon, the dances, the silences, the spells. It's not human. He's like a devil sometimes, or an animal,"

"But he's so sweet sometimes, so intelligent,"

"Too intelligent," Elliot was emphatic.

"Yes, that's true." She spoke bitterly, then asked,

"Do you have any idea, Elliot, I mean why it had to happen to us? What have we done wrong? Why did we deserve it?"

Elliot shook his head. She went on,

"What is it or what is he that makes him this way? What's wrong?"

"I don't know really. Maybe he's sick; sick in the head, nutty. It's hard to believe. I've never heard of any sickness like this. But if it's not sickness, well, maybe it's something even worse, something diabolical. I don't know,"

"It scares me, Elliot. It really does,"

"Yea. Me too."

Ahead of them, Tommy was seated on the sand waiting for them. As they drew near he pulled his precious spoon out of his pocket, gently dispossessing Floppy as he did so. Gripping the spoon in his left hand he gestured like a divine in a benediction. His ritual had begun.

It was the first time that Tommy had ever pointed a spoon at either one of them. They didn't understand his intentions, but they understood evil. They stood transfixed as the spoon

swung through the air, an eerie aura, ominously portending.

Elizabeth's spine chilled, frosty tingling fingers raced out her limbs.

"Tommy!" she shouted. "Stop it! Elliot, make him stop!"

Elliot strode up to his son and grabbed him by the shoulders. He shook the boy so hard that the child's teeth rattled.

"There, that ought to shake some sense into you."

There was a fool's grin on Tommy's face. He began to laugh, but not like a child. It was the cry of a whooping crane hooting from the treetops in the whispering quiet of the seashore's night. That laughter consumed him until he fell back dazed on the sand.

Horror-stricken, spellbound, his parents could only watch.

When he had recovered wit and strength, Tommy, his face bland and expressionless, asked:|

"We're all frightened, aren't we?"

His parents didn't answer.

"We'll go away now, won't we? We'll make it go away."

"Do you want to go home, Tommy? Is that what you mean?" his mother asked.

Tommy clutched the spoon so tightly in his small hand that the knuckles grew white. He aimed the spoon at his parents.

"I'm going to make it go away, Daddy. I'm going to make the ocean drown the noises down. The noises go away in the water. I wave the waves, wave the sounds. Goodwaving sound-byes. The fish will drown. Go down. Round with the sound. Down to drown."

"Oh, Tommy, please!" His mother was pleading, fighting back the terror and the tears. "Please don't talk like that. Listen to me Tommy, I'm your mother. Please. Tell me what's wrong."

"The ocean is wrong, Mommy, the waves are too noisy. It's too deep and nobody can swim. The fish don't play any more, but I'll wave them away. Then Floppy can play and it won't scare me Elliot like the devil sometimes or an animal."

"Tommy, what are you saying?" Elliot was aghast.

"Too intelligent Elizabeth, sick in the head or something worse. Something dies. And Floppy with his ears coming off."

"My God!" Elizabeth's hand covered her mouth, her face was snow pale.

"He heard us. The kid heard us." Elliot was appalled. "He

heard what we said. He must have heard what we said way back there behind him on the beach. He heard us. No. He couldn't have!"

Elizabeth's eyes were closed as she said, "Yes Elliot, he's been hearing us all along. Hearing everybody. I've been wrong. He wasn't reading my mind. He's been *listening*," she whispered the last words.

"It's not right!" Elliot shouted angrily, "He didn't tell us. We didn't know. He'd have to have ears like a dog, like a bat, an animal. No, that's not it. It can't be. It's the other . . ." Elliot's voice had dropped low, as one first discovering the grand conspiracy, triumphant, understanding, but half-insane. He faced his son.

"Well, Tommy, is that it? You can tell us now. We know."

"I love you, Elly. Elizabeth must never know. Oh Elliot I love you. Is that the way I love Elizabeth, Daddy?" Tommy's voice was bland but his face was excited, his eyes overbright. He clenched and unclenched his fist about the spoon.

Elliot began to move toward his son slowly. The muscles in Elliot's cheek twitched. Tommy watched him carefully, like a cat gauging the approach of an antagonist. He raised the spoon and pointed it toward his father, saying:

"You cheated me that's what you done. I'm gonna call the police. They'll take Floppy and he'll kill everybody. He'll kill the ocean. Thank you, honey. I won't forget you, you must need that money, no I won't."

Elliot stood still. Elizabeth stared at her son. The sound of sea surf encompassed all of them; the salt wind burying them with whispers, the ocean roaring oblivion at them.

And her child smiled back. He laughed sweetly, a choir boy, an angel, and then, doubling into twisted deformity, began to roll in the sand, flailing it with his hands. He was screaming; flecks of froth flying, tiny flakes, being blown with the sea foam coming from the sea, his cries merging with the circling gulls, his laughter with the roar of the sea.

The climb up from the beach on the winding path had been exhausting. Both of them were pale and panting. Blood oozed from Elizabeth's knee. She had fallen while running up the steep trail.

"Oh, dear God!" she moaned. "Oh Elliot. It was awful!" She was hysterical.



"Yea."

"Oh, dear God!"

"Try to calm yourself, darling. Maybe in the long run it will work out for the best this way. It wasn't, it wasn't natural to expect it to go on. The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away."

"But Elliot, it wasn't God that did . . ." For a moment she stopped, giving her shocked mind time to search for an acceptable phrase . . . "that did—what happened just now."

Elliot admired her delicate choice of words.

"No darling, it wasn't God, but no one else will ever know that will they, dear?" He put his hand over hers and gave it a reassuring squeeze. They reached the car and got inside.

Her cries were only whimpers now, As she fought for composure she replied:

"No dear."

She held tightly to his hand as they sped away from the empty beach, hurrying to the nearest telephone,

## LORD MOUNT PROSPECT

*John Betjeman*

Whenever I sit down to my solitary meal of an evening, I am put to mind of the many obscure Irish peers who are sitting down to theirs. Some, perhaps, in a room over the stables, gaze at the moonlit ruins of what once was a stately mansion; others sip port as the Adam decoration peels off the ceiling and falls with an accustomed thud to the floor. The wind sighs and sings through the lonely Irish night round the wet walls of every house and down each grass-grown drive until it causes even the stable bell to tinkle, although the clock has long ago ceased to work. Such thoughts as these divert me, and such thoughts as these produced the narrative which I am about to relate.

It was after a dinner where the food and the wine and the guests were well selected, where there was an absence of academic friction, and where an aromatic content had settled in upon us, that the germ of an important society came into being. Did we not follow a tradition handed down in our universities by Wesley, Heber, Tennyson, and Wilde? The Society for the Discovery of Obscure Peers was militantly charitable from its outset. It was produced in the glow caused by good food and drink, it was later to burst with good intentions that would fall on Ireland like golden rain. A desultory conversation upon the acute condition of that country had led up to speculations upon its grander inhabitants. There was that comforting lightness about the talk which unites the intelligent.

How kind it would be, we considered, if we were to arrange a dinner for the obscurer Irish peers! It was very sensibly suggested that some of them might not be able to afford the fare to England, so that a meal in their own country should be arranged, if their own country could provide it. With such a spirit of unselfishness the Society was formed, an example not so much of the waste of talent and pettifogging machinations of the pedant as of the oblique large-heartedness that

typifies a university. The following rules, unwritten but telling, were composed:

1. *Who's Who* shall be accepted as the truth;
2. Any distinction, regarded by the Society as distinguished, disqualifies the peer.

This rule would not affect, for instance, Lord Pentagon, who states in *Who's Who* that he is vice-Chairman of the Ballysligo Branch of the Church of Ireland Jubilee Fund Administrative Committee.

3. A peer who is known to a member of the Society is disqualified;

4. A younger brother or son and heir does not count.

The method of selecting an object for our charity was similar to that used by those with simple faith in the Bible, who have no doubts about the minor prophets. *Who's Who* was opened at random. The nearest peer who conformed to the Society's rules was chosen, and every effort was made to get into touch with him.

The usual device was to write and say we were interested in electrical matters and proposed erecting a plant on his estate. This plan was abandoned after the trouble with Lord Octagon. He replied on crimson note-paper and said he would be delighted to see his correspondent.

Our member set out for the west of Ireland. Octagon Abbey was a glorious extravaganza of the eighteenth century. Within it sat Lord Octagon, surrounded by Indian relics collected by his ancestors and by himself. At great expense he had had electric eels imported into his own fish-ponds. His knowledge of electricity was amazing. With fanatical fervour he explained his device for breeding the eels and conserving their electricity by means of a plant which he intended our member to establish at the edge of the ponds. It was three months before Lord Octagon could be induced to abandon the scheme, three months of anxiety for members, both at home and abroad.

Then there was the other plan of introduction: "Would you be so good as to allow me to consult your library, where I believe there are some valuable sixteenth-century editions of Vergil?" Lord Santry, who is one of our staunchest supporters, replied in the kindest way. He welcomed the request of the member chosen for the task. Soon after his arrival at Cahir

Santry, our member was informed of his host's translation of the libretto of all the Savoy operas into Latin hexameters. The first three volumes have cost the Society more than it can reasonably be expected to pay.

I suppose we had collected something like ninety peers and were considering the extension of our membership in order that a successful dinner might be provided when the problem of Lord Mount Prospect arose.

It was not usual for our letters to be disregarded. Persons as lonely as the objects of our charity become excited even on the receipt of an advertisement. For weeks and weeks they gaze out of their castles at the surrounding swamp, unable, probably, to reach the nearest village owing to the torrents of rain and the floods which mirror the leaden sky. Then, when summer comes, and with it a ray of sunlight, they are overjoyed to get a letter from the outside world.

But not so Lord Mount Prospect. The *Who's Who* was loose in binding and the pages torn and thumbed like a directory outside a public telephone box when we discovered his name. In truth, the mission of the Society was nearly accomplished; there were few obscure peers left, and the fervour and charity which had started our project was waning under disillusion. For the most part our peers were happy in their gloomy mansions, they showed real pleasure as the footman brought in the oil lamps and they could settle down to a long evening of cutting out jig-saw puzzles or pasting halfpenny stamps on to a fire-screen.

We were, then, somewhat disappointed to find the name of Lord Mount Prospect: but even the most lukewarm among us was stimulated by the odd way in which he announced himself.

MOUNT PROSPECT (10th Vis:), cr: 1684. Archibald Standish CosPatrick Reeve, b: 1849. An Ember Day Bryanite. Address: Mount Prospect, County Galway.

What is an Ember Day Bryanite? With trembling hands we turned to Haydn's *Dictionary of Dates*. Allow me to quote from Haydn's *Dictionary of Dates* (1871):

EMBER DAY BRYANITES is the name given to an obscure sect which was founded by William Bryan, a tailor of Paternoster Row, London, and his cousin, John Reeve, a chandler in the city of Exeter. These two declared to the

world in 1717 that they were the two witnesses mentioned in Rev. xi. 3: "And I will give power unto my two witnesses and they shall prophesy a thousand, two hundred and three-score days, clothed in sackcloth". They hold many curious beliefs, among which the chief is that God came down in person on to the cross and left Elijah as vice-regent in Heaven. They believe in a bodily resurrection and the sleep of the soul. They declare that the sun is four miles from the earth. The sect was still in existence, according to the census, in 1851.

That spirit of research and curiosity which made possible the forthcoming adventure prompted me to visit a deserted part of North London during the autumn of last year. Could it be that Ember Day Bryanites were still prophesying away up the Caledonian Road? Could it be that even now tired charwomen and weary tailors dressed themselves in sackcloth to listen? Under "Places of Worship" in the *London Directory* I wondered at the hopeful signs I found. Last and almost least, beneath "Other Denominations", below the Particular Baptists, and the Peculiar People, below the Sandemanians and Independent Calvinistics, came the glorious words, "Ember Day Bryanite", and the address, "Hungerford Green, Barnsbury, N.1".

Fortified with a long and beautiful lunch which lasted until the time when the others have tea, I trod out into the Sunday evening. There was a waiting hush about the Gothic Revival steeples which pricked the starlit London sky: the well-lit thrills of evensong were hardly in preparation, and electric light had not yet thrown up the full richness of nineteenth-century glass which was to stream on to the pavement without.

But what a change met my eye as I left the black brick station, vast and deserted, near the Caledonian Road and saw the fervour of North London's religious life! Above the noise of tram-car bells, above the gear-changing of the cheaper motor-cars, for this day no longer commercial, and back from the deep joys of Epping and Chingford, above the rich peal of a parish church and the insistent tinkle of a chapel-of-ease urgently in need of funds could be heard quavering sopranos and the Cockney hoarseness of men and women pronouncing a warning of the wrath to come. There they stood, amid listless little groups, gathered inside turnings off the main road. Some

political, many religious, and most neither the one nor the other, but vaguely connected with anti-vivisection or the suppression of the Jews, they prophesied with equal fervour of a doom hanging perilously near us.

Small wonder that my progress was slow towards the pleasant little hill embellished with low stucco houses that led up to Hungerford Green! Small wonder that I almost changed my mind as I caught the bright eyes of a thin bearded gentleman proving the inevitability of another deluge. The silence of the empty streets upon the hill enveloped me with the uneasy comfort of a blanket. Only the knowledge of my curious goal urged me on.

Hungerford Green was attractive enough. It was a relic of successful Regency commerce. Two-storeyed houses, once "tight boxes, neatly sashed", surrounded an oblong space of burnt grass with a curious pavilion in the middle, some conceit of a former merchant aping the gazebos of the great and good. The railings round the grass were sadly bent to make loop-holes for dogs and children, the noble urns of ironwork were battered; from all over Hungerford Green came the whooping of hymns loud enough to stream through ventilating spaces in the pointed windows of Baptist and Wesleyan chapel. The worn grass was bright with the rays of gas-light from the places of worship, with an additional brightness from the outside lamp of a more prosperous chapel where electric light had been installed.

Joyous opening strains of a hearty Nonconformist service! How anxious was I to know under what gas or electric light Ember Day Bryanites, possibly in sackcloth, were even now praising the Lord! And so, reining my enthusiasm with happy delay, I asked a girl whether she knew which was the chapel of the Ember Day Bryanites. She burst into those whooping shrieks maid-servants affect on a roundabout. A sympathetic but dreary woman beside her, yellower and more miserable, suggested that perhaps I meant the Baptist chapel. When I replied that I did not, a sad, long, nasal negative streamed out of her mouth and nose.

With no faint heart I walked round the green, yet fearful of breaking silence with irreligious feet, and I scanned the names on black and gilded notice-boards. "Congregational", "Primitive Methodist", "United Methodist", "New Jerusalem",

"Presbyterian Church of England", and the last was the last of the lighted chapels which made glorious Hungerford Green. It could not be that the directory was wrong or that my eyes had betrayed me.

There in the remotest corner of the place was the black pedimented outline of an enormous building, more like a warehouse than anything else. As I approached I saw a space of green before it boldly sheltering a struggling plane tree. But the gates of the pathway were padlocked, and a street lamp showed that the path was almost grass. No light or sound came from the great edifice in front, the hymns of the neighbouring chapels had died down to spontaneous prayer, and only the Sunday roar of North London disturbed the air.

I scaled the rusty railing that protected the grass before the chapel building. The plot was bigger and darker than I had supposed, and the chapel loomed so large and high on my approach that it was almost as if it had moved forward to interrupt me. It was plain and square, with a coating of plaster which had peeled in many places and fallen on to the untidy grass below.

I could just discern a printed notice about an electoral roll, years old and clinging limply to its inefficient paste. The double rows of windows were bolted and boarded up. The great doors were shut. But beside them was a wooden notice-board with the remains of lettering still upon it. I struck a match and read:

THOSE WHO ARE CHOSEN FOR HIS COURTS ABOVE  
WILL MEET HERE (GOD WILLING) ON THE LORD'S  
DAY AT 11 A.M. AND AT 6.30.

Holy Supper by Arrangement.

The Lord had received His Ember Day Bryanites,

## II

Meanwhile the Society had not been idle in its attempts to form an acquaintanceship with Lord Mount Prospect, nor had it failed to follow them with experiments more daring. The silence of his lordship and the mystery which surrounded his name made even the idea of his existence uncertain. A

member had written, after a careful study of the geological and political maps of County Galway, professing an interest in the peat bog which extended for some miles round Mount Prospect. His personal and delicately-worded letter had evinced no reply. Undeterred by this he had stolen some paper from the *Methodist Recorder* and written to suggest a union of the Methodist and Ember Day Bryanite churches. He had been equally unsuccessful.

Notwithstanding, he conceived a bolder proposition. It is a general rule that Irish peers are interested in natural history; at considerable expense and with no little trouble, a large rhinoceros, stuffed and redecorated during the latter part of the last century, was moved with little regret from the spacious hall of a member's country mansion. It was packed by a firm which was intimately connected with the Natural History Museum, and transported to Ireland. The duty levied by the Free State Government was enormous.

Three months later the rhinoceros was returned. The workmen had been unable to find the road to Mount Prospect and had wandered about Galway for the greater part of a fortnight. Being English they found it hard to get into communication with the inhabitants. When they finally discovered the way to Lord Mount Prospect's estate they were unable to reach it.

Although it was high summer (the flies and the other insects must have been unpleasant, while even the peat bogs must have been withered in their very channels), the swamps around Mount Prospect were impassable. In a letter, the contractors attempted to describe, in what terms commercial language will allow, the state of things which their employees had encountered. There were large bridges along the road which had either been blown up in the "trouble" or fallen into ruin; vehicular traffic had not been known to go to his lordship's estate within the memory of the said natives, and so the firm regretted inability *re* animal as per contract and would beg to return the same to hand.

The news of the final extinction of the Ember Day Bryanites in London, which I was able to bring before the Society, filled all with gloom and disappointment, but it did not quench the reawakened ardour. A letter was sent to every obscure peer befriended by the Society, seeking information, in a



tactful manner, of Lord Mount Prospect. Only three had heard his name, none had seen him, and only one supplied information. This was Lord Octagon, whose tales were clearly untrue.

We pictured fearful scenes in the silent mansion of Mount Prospect—a skeleton sitting in a ruined dining-room grinning over a now very aged glass of port, a corpse rotting between sheets of coroneted Irish linen.

The natural course was to go to the *Daily Express* and suggest a “scoop”, which would at the same time replenish the funds of the Society. A lord who was the very reverse of all that we stood for kindly undertook the unearthing of Lord Mount Prospect. For a week he was mentioned in the social columns. The Dragoman saw him at Tooth’s Galleries looking at a fascinating exhibition of the etchings of the insides of railway engines by Frank Brangwyn. He met him at a party in St. John’s Wood where everyone was dressed as a clergyman, later in the same evening he met him at another party where everyone was dressed as a policeman.

Possibly some of my readers may remember what happened after this. He was removed to the front page of the paper. He had been about to make an ascent in a balloon from Sydenham when he was kidnapped. “THE MISSING PEER” was billed all over London for three days. But the “scoop” failed. No reply came from Lord Mount Prospect, safe in his castle in Ireland.

The wet weather had by now settled down and it was hopeless to attempt the journey through Galway until the next summer. At Christmas a present of handkerchiefs was sent, purporting to come from a poor relation in Haringay. But it, too, met with no response. After this the practical efforts of the Society ceased until next year should render personal investigation possible,

### III

Oh! My prestidigitation  
Is the bulwark of the nation  
And I like my new creation  
As Mi-Lord High Conjuror-er-er,

## CHORUS:]

Oh! His prestidigitation  
Is the bulwark of the nation  
And he likes his new creation  
As The Lord High Conjuror-er-er-er-er,

With an irregular rattling the persons behind the scenes tugged the curtain across the stage. The applause was deafening and for the fifth time the curtain was pulled apart; and for the last time, for the temporary nature of the fittings had caused it to stick, and there stood the actors, sweat glistening through their grease paint, their smiles happy.

There was a renewed burst of clapping; the spirit of fun was not dead yet. For a sixth, seventh, and up to an eleventh time the enraptured audience called for an encore of that wonderful final chorus. The curtains stood ominously apart. The humourless stage manager turned out the lights on the stage. Peers and their wives in the front, army men, clergymen, and their families in the back, retained the calm of good breeding until the lights were switched on in the hall.

We had known that Gilbert and Sullivan would work miracles. The exquisite humour of that last chorus of the *Bunundrum*, where the hero becomes Chief Conjuror in the land of Og-a-gog after all that trouble with the wicked emperor, the sense of satire and kindly irony that runs through the whole play, the clean wit not unworthy of the pages of Punch, and the perfect poetry of some of the serious stuff as well, make the *Bunundrum* one of the best of the Savoy operas. Of course, like them all, it has been repeated daily ever since 1888; but it does not lose by repetition. No great works of art do, do they?

## IV.

The clouds were lying low but not unpleasantly over the peat bog, and a traveller might have descried, sandwiched between the clouds and the brown earth, little figures delving and hurrying. Were he to have approached closer he would have seen that the figures were of people obviously clever,

Some wore spectacles and little-used cricket shirts, others had bought their ties in Paris.

The road to Mount Prospect was being repaired. The funds of the Society, replenished by the Gilbert and Sullivan performance, had paid for a thoroughly successful dinner for obscure peers which was held in the Shelburne Hotel in Dublin. The speeches were rather long.

With the money left over we were able to hire implements and horses. Like Ruskin we set to work to build a road. The track climbed a slight hill after many miles along the flat bog, and lying below it we saw a black pool whose water was strangely still. The silence was intensified by a sound as of distant applause too half-hearted for Gilbert and Sullivan. It was water lapping and licking the granite on the hillside shore of the pool. This edge was white with the powder of the ground stone, ground by ages of black water. The remaining shores were of reeds and meadow-sweet, which disappeared into a blue and distant hill.

Mount Prospect at last in view! Eagerly we stumbled down the declivity of the shore of the lake, and there it was that a surprise unnerved us. This nether shore was littered with paper, so that it might well have been a Surrey beauty spot, and only when we examined the paper closely did we discover that it was not. Thousands of unopened envelopes and parcels lay everywhere. Upon them "Viscount Mount Prospect" was written in the fading hands of many generations. Someone discovered a package less sodden than most others and battered by but one year's Christmas storms. It was just possible to read the word Harringay on the postmark, while within, the dye had not yet come off six cheap pocket handkerchiefs.

As we were discussing how to cross the lake and the marsh beyond it to where the blue hill swam, a Zion, before our eyes, a postman, black against the skyline, emptied a solitary letter down the slope.

For over a week the sound of hammers and axes resounded on the shore of the black lake. A flat-bottomed boat was built, slim yet not ungainly, and a happy band paddled away in it down the stream that led out of all that black water.

For many hours the weeds and rushes were too high to give a view of the landscape. The dark water writhed with tentacles

of waterweed undisturbed for, probably, more than a century. The stream twisted so abruptly, enclosing us in tall prisons of reed, black water, and grey sky, that conversation was awed into silence, broken by the bravado of community singing.

Now and then we went up backwaters and had to turn, and once we were confronted with a broken bridge in a style formerly Indian, now decayed beyond repair. Here and there, swans, more wild than the wildest of song and story, rushed hissing and flapping on our little party from the dark deep bends of the stream, possibly angered by the community singing. The lights were long among some tattered beech trees when we moored our boat beside the Taj Mahal.

But is the Taj Mahal covered with pink stucco? And are there curious Gothic pinnacles behind it? Has the central dome collapsed so that it looks like a diseased onion? Is there grass along the avenues? And if there are beech trees and box hedges around the Taj Mahal, are they overgrown and straggling?

So long as the lingering day lasted we trod among the deserted courtyards and sparsely furnished rooms—incongruously Adam and Chippendale within—whose fittings and milked portraits, whose hangings and crumbling walls, whose awful silence were stirred only by the hum of a late fly, the squeak of a bat, or the little ticking noises of hurrying beetles. Nowhere was there sign of living person or lifeless corpse. This was Ireland indeed. This was a romantic and poetical finale to a beautiful story. Lord Mount Prospect did not exist. He had been caught up in a bodily resurrection to sit for ever with other Ember Day Bryanites.

Such were our thoughts, and such they would have remained had we not entered what we had taken to be the back of the house, but which turned out to be but another front. Genius of optical illusions, you eighteenth-century builder! What appeared to be the Taj Mahal on one side was like a very rough sketch of the west front of Peterborough Cathedral on the other. It, too, was pink, in order that the sun might always appear to be setting across pinnacle and crocket.

A vast door showed us the way into a bare chapel with walls of dim Pompeian red. The building was lit by frosted glass fixed into windows boldly representing the pointed style.

Never was there so much dust. Yet the eyes involuntarily turned to the pulpit, placed, as in all chapels, where the altar rests in a papistical church.

In the dim light we could see that this plain wooden pulpit, raised above the rows of empty pews, was a welter of papers, piled up to the very sounding board and encumbering the winding staircase. Then—Oh! horror!—a black-gowned figure, whose head was a skull of which all but the spectacles had withered, whose arm rested on a pile of papers, and whose fleshless finger kept a place—a dumb, still, black-gowned figure was propped upright against the papers.

Some time passed of clicking silence before anyone ventured near the papers. When the bravest did so, it was only to see that the papers were all a discourse, and that the fingers rested at the phrase “and three thousand, two hundred, and thirty secondly . . .” Lord Mount Prospect has preached his longest sermon and the mourners go about the streets,

## THE LIBRARY WINDOW.

*Mrs. Oliphant*

### I

I was not aware at first of the many discussions which had gone on about that window. It was almost opposite one of the windows of the large, old-fashioned drawing-room of the house in which I spent that summer, which was of so much importance in my life. Our house and the library were on opposite sides of the broad High Street of St. Rule's, which is a fine street, wide and ample, and very quiet, as strangers think who come from noisier places; but in a summer evening there is much coming and going, and the stillness is full of sound—the sound of footsteps and pleasant voices, softened by the summer air.

There are even exceptional moments when it is noisy: the time of the fair, and on Saturday night sometimes, and when there are excursion trains. Then even the softest sunny air of the evening will not smooth the harsh tones and the stumbling steps; but at these unlovely moments we shut the windows, and even I, who am so fond of that deep recess where I can take refuge from all that is going on inside, and make myself a spectator of all the varied story out of doors, withdraw from my watch-tower. To tell the truth, there never was very much going on inside.

The house belonged to my aunt, to whom (she says, "Thank God!") nothing ever happened. I believe that many things had happened to her in her time; but that was all over at the period of which I am speaking, and she was old, and very quiet. Her life went on in a routine never broken. She got up at the same hour every day, and did the same things in the same rotation, day by day the same. She said that this was the greatest support in the world, and that routine is a kind of salvation. It may be so; but it is a very dull salvation, and I used to feel that I would rather have incident, whatever kind of incident it might be. But then at that time I was not old, which makes all the difference.

At the time of which I speak the deep recess of the drawing-

room window was a great comfort to me. Though she was an old lady (perhaps because she was so old) she was very tolerant, and had a kind of feeling for me. She never said a word, but often gave me a smile when she saw how I had built myself up, with my books and my basket of work.

I did very little work, I fear—now and then a few stitches when the spirit moved me, or when I had got well afloat in a dream, and was more tempted to follow it out than to read my books, as sometimes happened. At other times, and if the book were interesting, I used to get through volume after volume sitting there, paying no attention to anybody. And yet I did pay a kind of attention. Aunt Mary's old ladies came in to call, and I heard them talk, though I very seldom listened; but for all that, if they had anything to say that was interesting, it is curious how I found it in my mind afterwards, as if the air had blown it to me. They came and went, and I had the sensation of their old bonnets gliding in and out, and their dresses rustling; and now and then had to jump up and shake hands with someone who knew me, and asked after my papa and mamma. Then Aunt Mary would give me a little smile again, and I slipped back to my window. She never seemed to mind.

My mother would not have let me do it, I know. She would have remembered dozens of things there were to do. She would have sent me upstairs to fetch something which I was quite sure she did not want, or downstairs to carry some quite unnecessary message to the housemaid. She liked to keep me running about. Perhaps that was one reason why I was so fond of Aunt Mary's drawing-room, and the deep recess of the window, and the curtain that fell half over it, and the broad window-seat where one could collect so many things without being found fault with for untidiness. Whenever we had anything the matter with us in these days we were sent to St. Rule's to get up our strength. And this was my case at the time of which I am going to speak.

Everybody had said, since ever I learned to speak, that I was fantastic and fanciful and dreamy, and all the other words with which a girl who may happen to like poetry, and to be fond of thinking, is so often made uncomfortable. People don't know what they mean when they say fantastic. It sounds

like Madge Wildfire, or something of that sort. My mother thought I should always be busy, to keep nonsense out of my head. But really I was not at all fond of nonsense. I was rather serious than otherwise. I would have been no trouble to anybody if I had been left to myself. It was only that I had a sort of second sight, and was conscious of things to which I paid no attention.

Even when reading the most interesting book, the things that were being talked about blew in to me; and I heard what the people were saying in the streets as they passed under the window. Aunt Mary always said I could do two or indeed three things at once—both read and listen and see. I am sure that I did not listen much, and seldom looked out—of set purpose—as some people do who notice what bonnets the ladies in the street have on. But I did hear what I couldn't help hearing, even when I was reading a book, and I did see all sorts of things, though often for a whole half-hour I might never lift my eyes.

This does not explain what I said at the beginning, that there were many discussions about that window. It was, and still is, the last window in the row of the College Library, which is opposite my aunt's house in the High Street. Yet it is not exactly opposite, but a little to the west, so that I could see it best from the left side of my recess. I took it calmly for granted that it was a window like any other till I first heard the talk about it which was going on in the drawing-room. "Have you never made up your mind, Mrs. Balcarres," said old Mr. Pitmilley, "whether that window opposite is a window or no?" He said Mistress Balcarres—and he was always called Mr. Pitmilley Morton: which was the name of his place.

"I am never sure of it, to tell the truth," said Aunt Mary, "all these years."

"Bless me!" said one of the old ladies, "And what window may that be?"

Mr. Pitmilley had a way of laughing as he spoke, which did not please me; but it was true that he was not perhaps desirous of pleasing me. He said: "Oh, just the window opposite," with his laugh running through his words; "our friend can never make up her mind about it, though she has been living opposite it since——"



"You need never mind the date," said another; "the leebrary window! Dear me, what should it be but a window? Up at that height it could not be a door."

"The question is," said my aunt, "if it is a real window with glass in it, or if it is merely painted, or if it once was a window and has been built up. And the oftener people look at it, the less they are able to say."

"Let me see this window," said old Lady Carnbee, who was very active and strong-minded; and then they all came crowding upon me—three or four old ladies, very eager, and Mr. Pitmilley's white hair appearing over their heads, and my aunt sitting quiet and smiling behind.

"I mind the window very well," said Lady Carnbee; "ay, and so do more than me. But in its present appearance it is just like any other window; but has not been cleaned, I should say, in the memory of man."

"I see what ye mean," said one of the others. "It is just a very dead thing without any reflection in it; but I've seen as bad before."

"Ay, it's dead enough," said another, "but that's no rule; for these huzzies of women-servants in this ill age——"

"Nay, the women are well enough," said the softest voice of all, which was Aunt Mary's. "I will never let them risk their lives cleaning the outside of mine. And there are no women-servants in the old library; there is maybe something more in it than that."

They were all pressing into my recess, pressing upon me, a row of old faces, peering into something they could not understand. I had a sense in my mind how curious it was, the wall of old ladies in their old satin gowns all glazed with age, Lady Carnbee with her lace about her head. Nobody was looking at me or thinking of me; but I felt unconsciously the contrast of my youngness to their oldness, and stared at them as they stared over my head at the library window. I had given it no attention up to this time. I was more taken up with the old ladies than with the thing they were looking at.

"The framework is all right at least, I can see that, and pented black——"

"And the panes are pented black too. It's no window, Mrs. Balcarres. It has been filled in, in the days of the window duties: you will mind, Leddy Carnbee."

"Mind!" said that oldest lady. "I mind when your mother was marriest, Jeanie: and that's neither the day nor yesterday. But as for the window, it's just a delusion; and that is my opinion of the matter, if you ask me."

"There's a great want of light in that muckle room at the college," said another. "If it was a window, the leebrary would have more light."

"One thing is clear," said one of the younger ones; "it cannot be a window to see through. It may be filled or it may be built up, but it is not a window to give light."

"And whoever heard of a window that was no' to see through?" Lady Carnbee said. I was fascinated by the look on her face, which was a curious, scornful look as of one who knew more than she chose to say; and then my wandering fancy was caught by her hand as she held it, throwing back the lace that drooped over it. Lady Carnbee's lace was the chief thing about her—heavy, black, Spanish lace with large flowers. Everything she wore was trimmed with it. A large veil of it hung over her old bonnet. But her hand coming out of this heavy lace was a curious thing to see.

She had very long fingers, very taper, which had been much admired in her youth; and her hand was very white, or rather more than white: pale, bleached, and bloodless, with large blue veins standing up upon the back; and she wore some fine rings, among others a big diamond in an ugly old claw setting. They were too big for her, and were wound round and round with yellow silk to make them keep on: and this little cushion of silk, turned brown with long wearing, had twisted round so that it was more conspicuous than the jewels; while the big diamond blazed underneath in the hollow of her hand, like some dangerous thing hiding and sending out darts of light. The hand, which seemed to come almost to a point, with this strange ornament underneath, clutched at my half-terrified imagination. It too seemed to mean far more than was said. I felt as if it might clutch me with sharp claws, and the lurking, dazzling creature bite—with a sting that would go to the heart.

Presently, however, the circle of the old faces broke up, the old ladies returned to their seats, and Mr. Pitmilley, small but very erect, stood up in the midst of them, talking with mild authority like a little oracle among the ladies. Only Lady

Carnbee always contradicted the neat, little old gentleman. She gesticulated when she talked, like a Frenchwoman, and darted forth that hand of hers with the lace hanging over it, so that I always caught a glimpse of the lurking diamond. I thought she looked like a witch among the comfortable little group which gave such attention to everything Mr. Pitmilley said.

"For my part, it is my opinion there is no window there at all," he said. "It's very like the thing that's called in scienteefic language an optical illusion. It arises generally, if I may use such a word in the presence of ladies, from a liver that is not just in the perfitt order and balance that organ demands—and then you will see things—a blue dog, I remember, was the thing in one case, and in another——"

"The man has gane gyte," said Lady Carnbee; "I mind the windows in the auld leebrary as long as I mind anything. Is the leebrary itself an optical illusion too?"

"Na, na," and "No, no," said the old ladies. "A blue dogue would be a strange vagary; but the library we have all kent from our youth," said one. "And I mind when the Assemblies were held there one year when the Town Hall was building," another said.

"It is just a great divert to me," said Aunt Mary; but what was strange was that she paused there, and said in a low tone, "now," and then went on again, "For whoever comes to my house, there are aye discussions about that window. I have never just made up my mind about it myself. Sometimes I think it's a case of these wicked window duties, as you said, Miss Jeanie, when half the windows in our houses were blacked up to save the tax. And then I think it may be due to that blank kind of building like the great new buildings on the Earthen Mound in Edinburgh, where the windows are just ornaments. And then wiles I am sure I can see the glass shining when the sun catches it in the afternoon."

"You could so easily satisfy yourself, Mrs. Balcarres, if you were to——"

"Give a laddie a penny to cast a stone, and see what happens," said Lady Carnbee.

"But I am not sure that I have any desire to satisfy myself," Aunt Mary said. And then there was a stir in the room, and I had to come out from my recess and open the door for

the old ladies and see them downstairs as they all went away following one another. Mr. Pitmilley gave his arm to Lady Carnbee, though she was always contradicting him; and so the tea-party dispersed. Aunt Mary came to the head of the stairs with her guests in an old-fashioned gracious way, while I went down with them to see that the maid was ready at the door. When I came back Aunt Mary was still standing in the recess looking out. Returning to my seat she said, with a kind of wistful look, "Well, honey, and what is your opinion?"

"I have no opinion, I was reading my book all the time," I said.

"And so you were, honey, and no' very civil; but all the same I ken well you heard every word we said,"

## II

It was a night in June; dinner was long over, and had it been winter the maids would have been shutting up the house, and my Aunt Mary preparing to go upstairs to her room. But it was still clear daylight, that daylight out of which the sun has been long gone, and which has no longer any rose reflections, but all has sunk into a pearly, neutral tint—a light which is daylight yet is not day. We had taken a turn in the garden after dinner, and now we had returned to what we called our usual occupations. My aunt was reading. The English post had come in, and she had got her *Times*, which was her great diversion. The *Scotsman* was her morning reading, but she liked her *Times* at night.

As for me, I too was at my usual occupation, which at that time was doing nothing. I had a book as usual, and was absorbed in it; but I was conscious of all that was going on all the same. The people strolled along the broad pavement, making remarks as they passed under the open window, which came up into my story or my dream, and sometimes made me laugh. The tone and the faint sing-song, or rather chant, of the accent, which was "a wee Fifeish", was novel to me, and associated with holiday, and pleasant; and sometimes they said to each other something that was amusing, and often that suggested a whole story; but presently they

began to drop off, the footsteps slackened, the voices died away. It was getting late, though the clear, soft daylight went on and on.

All through the lingering evening, which seemed to consist of interminable hours, long but not weary, drawn out as if the spell of the light and the outdoor life might never end, I had now and then, quite unawares, cast a glance at the mysterious window which my aunt and her friends had discussed, as I felt, though I dared not say it even to myself, rather foolishly. It caught my eye without any intention on my part, as I paused, as it were, to take breath, in the flowing and current of undistinguishable thoughts and things from without and within which carried me along.

First it occurred to me, with a little sensation of discovery, how absurd to say it was not a window, a living window, one to see through! Why, then, had they never *seen* it, these old folk? I saw as I looked up suddenly the faint greyness as of visible space within—a room behind, certainly—dim, as it was natural a room should be on the other side of the street—quite indefinite; yet so clear that if someone were to come to the window there would be nothing surprising in it. For certainly there was a feeling of space behind the panes which these old half-blind ladies had disputed about whether they were glass or only fictitious panes marked on the wall. How silly, when eyes that could see could make it out in a minute! It was only a greyness at present, but it was unmistakable; a space that went back into gloom, as every room does when you look into it across a street.

There were no curtains to show whether it was inhabited or not; but a room—oh, as distinctly as ever room was! I was pleased with myself, but said nothing, while Aunt Mary rustled her paper, waiting for a favourable moment to announce a discovery which settled her problem at once. Then I was carried away upon the stream again, and forgot the window, till somebody threw, unawares, a word from the outer world, "I'm goin' hame; it'll soon be dark." Dark! what was the fool thinking of? It never would be dark if one waited out, wandering in the soft air for hours longer; and then my eyes, acquiring easily that new habit, looked across the way again.

Ah, now! nobody indeed had come to the window; and no light had been lighted, seeing it was still beautiful to read by—

a still, clear, colourless light; but the room inside had certainly widened. I could see the grey space and air a little deeper, and a sort of vision, very dim, of a wall, and something against it—something dark, with the blackness that a solid article, however indistinctly seen, takes in the lighter darkness that is only space: a large, black, dark thing coming out into the grey. I looked more intently, and made sure it was a piece of furniture, either a writing-table or perhaps a large bookcase. No doubt it must be the last, since this was part of the old library. I never visited the old College Library, but I had seen such places before, and I could well imagine it to myself. How curious that for all the time these old people had looked at it they had never seen this before!

It was more silent now, and my eyes, I suppose, had grown dim with gazing, doing my best to make it out, when suddenly Aunt Mary said: "Will you ring the bell, my dear? I must have my lamp."

"Your lamp?" I cried, "when it is still daylight." But then I gave another look at my window, and perceived with a start that the light had indeed changed: for now I saw nothing. It was still light, but there was so much change in the light that my room, with the grey space and the large shadowy bookcase, had gone out, and I saw them no more; for even a Scotch night in June, though it looks as if it would never end, does darken at the last. I had almost cried out, but checked myself, and rang the bell for Aunt Mary, and made up my mind I would say nothing till next morning, when, to be sure, naturally, it would be more clear.

Next morning I rather think I forgot all about it, or was busy, or was more idle than usual—the two things meant nearly the same. At all events I thought no more of the window, though I still sat in my own, opposite to it, but occupied with some other fancy. Aunt Mary's visitors came as usual in the afternoon; but their talk was of other things, and for a day or two nothing at all happened to bring back my thoughts into this channel.

It might be nearly a week before the subject came back, and once more it was old Lady Carnbee who set me thinking. Not that she said anything upon that particular theme, but she was the last of my aunt's afternoon guests to go away, and when she rose to leave she threw up her hands, with those

lively gesticulations which so many old Scotch ladies have. "My faith!" said she, "there is that bairn there still like a dream. Is the creature bewitched, Mary Balcarres? And is she bound to sit there by night and by day for the rest of her days? You should mind that there's things about, uncanny for women of our blood."

I was too much startled at first to recognise that it was of me she was speaking. She was like a figure in a picture, with her pale face the colour of ashes, and the big pattern of the Spanish lace hanging half over it, and her hand held up, with the big diamond blazing at me from the inside of her up-lifted palm. It was held up in surprise, but it looked as if it were raised in malediction; and the diamond threw out darts of light, and glared and twinkled at me. If it had been in its right place it would not have mattered; but there, in the open of the hand! I started up, half in terror, half in wrath. And then the old lady laughed, and her hand dropped.

"I've wakened you to life and broke the spell," she said, nodding her old head at me, while the large-black silk flowers of the lace waved and threatened. And she took my arm to go downstairs, laughing and bidding me be steady, and no' tremble and shake like a broken reed. "You should be as steady as a rock at your age, I was like a young tree," she said, leaning so heavily that my willowy girlish frame quivered. "I was a support to virtue, like Pamela, in my time."

"Aunt Mary, Lady Carnbee is a witch!" I cried, when I came back.

"Is that what you think, honey? Well, maybe she once was," said Aunt Mary, whom nothing surprised.

And it was that night once more after dinner, and after the post came in, and *The Times*, that I suddenly saw the library window again. I had seen it every day—and noticed nothing; but tonight, still in a little tumult of mind over Lady Carnbee and her wicked diamond which wished me harm, and her lace which waved threats and warnings at me, I looked across the street, and there I saw quite plainly the room opposite, far more clear than before.

I saw dimly that it must be a large room, and that the big piece of furniture against the wall was a writing-desk. That in a moment, when first my eyes rested upon it, was quite clear: a large, old-fashioned escritoire, standing out into the room;

and I knew by the shape of it that it had a great many pigeon-holes and little drawers in the back, and a large table for writing. There was one just like it in my father's library at home. It was such a surprise to see it all so clearly that I closed my eyes, for the moment almost giddy, wondering how papa's desk could have come here—and then when I reminded myself that this was nonsense, and that there were many such writing-tables besides papa's, and looked again—lo! it had all become quite vague and indistinct as it was at first; and I saw nothing but the blank window of which the old ladies could never be certain whether it was filled up to avoid the window-tax, or whether it had ever been a window at all.

This occupied my mind very much, and yet I did not say anything to Aunt Mary. For one thing, I rarely saw anything at all in the early part of the day; but, then, that is natural: you can never see into a place from outside, whether it is an empty room or a looking-glass or people's eyes or anything else that is mysterious, in the day. It has, I suppose, something to do with the light. But in the evening in June in Scotland—then is the time to see. For it is daylight, yet it is not day, and there is a quality in it which I cannot describe, it is so clear, as if every object was a reflection of itself.

I used to see more and more of the room as the days went on. The large escritoire stood out more and more into the space: with sometimes white glimmering things, which looked like papers, lying on it: and once or twice I was sure I saw a pile of books on the floor close to the writing-table, as if they had gilding upon them in broken specks, like old books. It was always about the time when the lads in the street began to call to one another that they were going home, and sometimes a shriller voice would come from one of the doors, bidding somebody to "cry upon the laddies" to come back to their suppers. That was always the time I saw best, though it was close upon the moment when the veil seemed to fall and the clear radiance became less living, and all the sounds died out of the street, and Aunt Mary said in her soft voice, "Honey, will you ring for the lamp?" She said honey as people say darling; and I think it is a prettier word.

Then, finally, while I sat one evening with my book in my hand, looking straight across the street, not distracted by



anything, I saw a little movement within. It was not anyone visible—but everybody must know what it is to see the stir in the air, the little disturbance—you cannot tell what it is, but that it indicates someone there, even though you can see no one. Perhaps it is a shadow making just one flicker in the still place. You may look at an empty room and the furniture in it for hours, and then suddenly there will be the flicker, and you know that something has come into it. It might only be a dog or a cat; it might be, if that were possible, a bird flying across; but it is someone, something living, which is so different, so completely different, in a moment from the things that are not living. It seemed to strike right through me, and I gave a little cry. Then Aunt Mary stirred a little, and put down the huge newspaper that almost covered her from sight, and said, "What is it, honey?" I cried, "Nothing," with a little gasp, quickly, for I did not want to be disturbed just at this moment when somebody was coming! But I suppose she was not satisfied, for she got up and stood behind to see what it was, putting her hand on my shoulder. It was the softest touch in the world, but I could have flung it off angrily; for that moment everything was still again, and the place grew grey and I saw no more.

"Nothing," I repeated, but I was so vexed I could have cried, "I told you it was nothing, Aunt Mary. Don't you believe me, that you come to look—and spoil it all?"

I did not mean, of course, to say these last words; they were forced out of me. I was so much annoyed to see it all melt away like a dream: for it was no dream, but as real as—as real as—myself or anything I ever saw.

She gave my shoulder a little pat with her hand. "Honey," she said, "were you looking at something? Is't that? is't that?" "Is it what?" I wanted to say, shaking off her hand, but something in me stopped me; for I said nothing at all, and she went quietly back to her place. I suppose she must have rung the bell herself, for immediately I felt the soft flood of the light behind me, and the evening outside dimmed down, as it did every night, and I saw nothing more.

It was next day, I think, in the afternoon that I spoke. It was brought on by something she said about her fine work, "I get a mist before my eyes," she said, "you will have to learn

my old lace stitches, honey, for I soon will not see to draw the threads."

"Oh, I hope you will keep your sight," I cried, without thinking of what I was saying. I was then young and very matter of fact. I had not found out that one may mean something, yet no half or a hundredth part of what one seems to mean; and even then probably hoping to be contradicted if it is anyhow against one's self.

"My sight!" she said, looking up at me with a look that was almost angry; "there is no question of losing my sight—on the contrary, my eyes are very strong. I may not see to draw fine threads, but I see at a distance as well as ever I did—as well as you do."

"I did not mean any harm, Aunt Mary," I said. "I thought you said—But how can your sight be as good as ever when you are in doubt about that window? I can see into the room as clear as——" My voice wavered, for I had just looked up and across the street, and I could have sworn that there was no window at all, but only a false image of one painted on the wall.

"Ah!" she said, with a little tone of keenness and of surprise; and she half rose up, throwing down her work hastily, as if she meant to come to me. Then, perhaps seeing the bewildered look on my face, she paused and hesitated. "Ay, honey!" she said, "have you got so far ben as that?"

What did she mean? Of course I knew all the Scotch phrases as well as I knew myself; but it is a comfort to take refuge in a little ignorance, and I know I pretended not to understand whenever I was put out. "I don't know what you mean by 'far ben'," I cried out, very impatient. I don't know what might have followed, but someone just then came to call, and she could only give me a look before she went forward, putting out her hand to her visitor. It was a very soft look, but anxious, and as if she did not know what to do: and she shook her head a very little, and I thought, though there was a smile on her face, there was something wet about her eyes. I retired into my recess, and nothing more was said.

But it was very tantalising that it should fluctuate so; for sometimes I saw that room quite plain and clear—quite as clear as I could see papa's library, for example, when I shut

my eyes. I compared it naturally to my father's study, because of the shape of the writing-table, which, as I tell you, was the same as his. At times I saw the papers on the table quite plain, just as I had seen his papers many a day. And the little pile of books on the floor at the foot—not ranged regularly in order, but put down one above the other, with all their angles going different ways, and a speck of the old gilding shining here and there. And then again at other times I saw nothing, absolutely nothing, and was no better than the old ladies, who had peered over my head, drawing their eyelids together, and arguing that the window had been shut up because of the old, long-abolished window tax, or else that it had never been a window at all. It annoyed me very much at those dull moments to feel that I too puckered up my eyelids and saw no better than they.

Aunt Mary's old ladies came and went day after day while June went on. I was to go back in July, and I felt that I should be very unwilling to leave until I had quite cleared up—as I was inclined in the way of doing—the mystery of that window which changed so strangely and appeared quite a different thing, not only to different people, but to the same eyes at different times. "Of course," I said to myself, "it must simply be an effect of the light." And yet I did not quite like that explanation either, but would have been better pleased to make out to myself that it was some superiority in me which made it so clear to me, if it were only the great superiority of young eyes over old—though that was not quite enough to satisfy me, seeing it was a superiority which I shared with every little lass and lad in the street. I rather wanted, I believe, to think that there was some particular insight in me which gave clearness to my sight—which was a most impertinent assumption, but really did not mean half the harm it seems to mean when it is put down here in black and white. I had several times again, however, seen the room quite plain, and made out that it was a large room, with a great picture in a dim, gilded frame hanging on the farther wall, and many other pieces of solid furniture making a blackness here and there, besides the great escritoire against the wall, which had evidently been placed near the window for the sake of the light. One thing became visible to me after another, till I almost thought I should end by being able to read the old lettering on one of

the big volumes which projected from the others and caught the light; but this was all preliminary to the great event which happened about Midsummer Day—the day of St. John, which was once so much thought of as a festival, but now means nothing at all in Scotland any more than any other of the saints' days: which I shall always think a great pity and loss to Scotland, whatever Aunt Mary may say,

### III

It was about midsummer, I cannot say exactly to a day when, but near that time, when the great event happened. I had grown very well acquainted by this time with that large, dim room. Not only the *escritoire*, which was very plain to me now, with the papers upon it, and the books at its foot, but the great picture that hung against the farther wall, and various other shadowy pieces of furniture, especially a chair which one evening I saw had been moved into the space before the *escritoire*—a little change which made my heart beat, for it spoke so distinctly of someone who must have been there, the someone who had already made me start, two or three times before, by some vague shadow of him or thrill of him which made a sort of movement in the silent space: a movement which made me sure that next minute I must see something or hear something which would explain the whole—if it were not that something always happened outside to stop it, at the very moment of its accomplishment.

I had no warning this time of movement or shadow. I had been looking into the room very attentively a little while before, and had made out everything almost clearer than ever; and then had bent my attention again on my book, and read a chapter or two at a most exciting period of the story: and consequently had quite left St. Rule's, and the High Street, and the College Library, and was really in a South American forest, almost throttled by the flowery creepers, and treading softly lest I should put my foot on a scorpion or a dangerous snake. At this moment something suddenly called my attention to the outside. I looked across, and then, with a start, sprang up, for I could not contain myself. I don't know what I said, but enough to startle the people in the room, one of whom was

old Mr. Pitmilley. They all looked round upon me to ask what was the matter. And when I gave my usual answer of "Nothing," sitting down again, shamefaced, but very much excited, Mr. Pitmilley got up and came forward, and looked out, apparently to see what was the cause. He saw nothing, for he went back again, and I could hear him telling Aunt Mary not to be alarmed, for Missy had fallen into a doze with the heat, and had startled herself waking up, at which they all laughed: another time I could have killed him for his impertinence, but my mind was too much taken up now to pay any attention. My head was throbbing and my heart beating. I was in such high excitement, however, that to restrain myself completely, to be perfectly silent, was more easy to me then than at any other time of my life. I waited until the old gentleman had taken his seat again, and then I looked back. Yes, there he was. I had not been deceived. I knew then, when I looked across, that this was what I had been looking for all the time—that I had known he was there, and had been waiting for him, every time there was that flicker of movement in the room—him and no one else. And there at last, just as I had expected, he was. I don't know that in reality I ever had expected him, or anyone: but this was what I felt when, suddenly looking into that curious dim room, I saw him there.

He was sitting in the chair, which he must have placed for himself, or which someone else in the dead of night when nobody was looking must have set for him, in front of the escritoire—with the back of his head towards me—writing. The light fell upon him from the left hand, and therefore upon his shoulders and the side of his head, which, however, was too much turned away to show anything of his face. Oh, how strange that there should be someone staring at him as I was doing, and he never to turn his head, to make a movement! If anyone stood and looked at me, were I in the soundest sleep that ever was, I would wake, I would jump up, I would feel it through everything. But there he sat and never moved. You are not to suppose, though I said the light fell upon him from the left hand, that there was very much light. There never is in a room you are looking into like that across the street; but there was enough to see him by—the outline of his figure, dark and solid, seated in the chair, and

the fairness of his head visible faintly, a clear spot against the dimness. I saw this outline against the dim gilding of the frame of the large picture which hung on the farther wall.

I sat, all the time the visitors were there, in a sort of rapture, gazing at this figure. I knew no reason why I should be so much moved. In an ordinary way, to see a student at an opposite window quietly doing his work might have interested me a little, but certainly it would not have moved me in any such way. It is always interesting to have a glimpse like this of an unknown life—to see so much and yet know so little, and to wonder, perhaps, what the man is doing, and why he never turns his head. One would go to the window—but not too close, lest he should see you and think you were spying upon him—and one would ask, "Is he still there? Is he writing, writing always? I wonder what he is writing!" And it would be a great amusement but no more. This was not my feeling at all in the present case. It was a sort of breathless watch, and absorption. I did not feel that I had eyes for anything else, or any room in my mind for another thought. I no longer heard, as I generally did, the stories and the wise remarks (or foolish) of Aunt Mary's old ladies or Mr. Pittmilly. I heard only a murmur behind me, the interchange of voices, one softer, one sharper; but it was not as in the time when I sat reading and heard every word, till the story in my book and the stories they were telling (what they said almost always shaped into stories), were all mingled into one another, and the hero in the novel became somehow the hero (or more likely heroine) of them all. But I took no notice of what they were saying now. And it was not that there was anything very interesting to look at, except the fact that he was there. He did nothing to keep up the absorption of my thoughts. He moved just so much as a man will do when he is very busily writing, thinking of nothing else.

There was a faint turn of his head as he went from one side to another of the page he was writing; but it appeared to be a long, long page which never wanted turning. Just a little outward inclination when he was at the end of the line, and then a little inclination inward when he began the next. That was little enough to keep one gazing. But I suppose it was the gradual onset of events leading up to this, the finding out of one thing after another as the eyes got accustomed to the

vague light; first the room itself, and then the writing-table, and then the other furniture, and last of all the human inhabitant who gave it all meaning. This was all so interesting that it was like a country which one had discovered. And then the extraordinary blindness of the other people who disputed among themselves whether it was a window at all! I did not, I am sure, wish to be disrespectful, and I was very fond of my Aunt Mary, and I liked Mr. Pitmilley well enough, and I was afraid of Lady Carnbee. But yet to think of the—I know I ought not to say stupidity—the blindness of them, the foolishness, the insensibility! discussing it as if a thing that your eyes could see was a thing to discuss! It would have been unkind to think it was because they were old and their faculties dimmed. It is so sad to think that the faculties grow dim, that such a woman as my Aunt Mary should fail in seeing, or hearing, or feeling, that I would not have dwelt on it for a moment, it would have seemed so cruel! And then such a clever old lady as Lady Carnbee—who could see through a millstone, people said—and Mr. Pitmilley, such an old man of the world. It did indeed bring tears to my eyes to think that all those clever people, solely by reason of being no longer young as I was, should have the simplest things shut out from them; and for all their wisdom and their knowledge be unable to see what a girl like me could see so easily. I was too much grieved for them to dwell upon that thought, and half ashamed, though perhaps half proud too, to be so much better off than they.

All those thoughts flitted through my mind as I sat and gazed across the street. And I felt there was so much going on in that room across the street! He was so absorbed in his writing, never looked up, never paused for a word, never turned round in his chair, or got up and walked about the room as my father did. Papa is a great writer, everybody says: but he would have come to the window and looked out, he would have drummed with his fingers on the pane, he would have watched a fly and helped it over a difficulty, and played with the fringe of the curtain, and done a dozen other nice, pleasant, foolish things, till the next sentence took shape.

“My dear, I am waiting for a word,” he would say to my mother when she looked at him, with a question why he was so idle, in her eyes; and then he would laugh, and go back

again to his writing-table. But He over there never stopped at all. It was like a fascination. I could not take my eyes from him and that little scarcely perceptible movement he made, turning his head. I trembled with impatience to see him turn the page, or perhaps throw down his finished sheet on the floor, as somebody looking into a window like me once saw Sir Walter do, sheet after sheet.

I should have cried out if this Unknown had done that. I should not have been able to help myself, whoever had been present; and gradually I got into such a state of suspense waiting for it to be done that my head grew hot and my hands cold. And then, just when there was a little movement of his elbow, as if he were about to do this, to be called away by Aunt Mary to see Lady Carnbee to the door! I believe I did not hear her till she had called me three times, and then I stumbled up, all flushed and hot, and nearly crying. When I came out from the recess to give the old lady my arm (Mr. Pitmilley had gone away some time before) she put up her hand and stroked my cheek. "What ails the bairn?" she said; "she's fevered. You must not let her sit her lane in the window, Mary Balcarres. You and me know what comes of that." Her old fingers had a strange touch, cold like something not living, and I felt that dreadful diamond sting me on the cheek.

I do not say that this was not just a part of my excitement and suspense; and I know it is enough to make anyone laugh when the excitement was all about an unknown man writing in a room on the other side of the way, and my impatience because he never came to an end of the page. If you think I was not quite as well aware of this as anyone could be! But the worst was that this dreadful old lady felt my heart beating against her arm that was within mine. "You are just in a dream," she said to me, with her old voice close at my ear as we went downstairs. "I don't know who it is about, but it's bound to be some man that is not worth it. If you were wise you would think of him no more."

"I am thinking of no man!" I said, half-crying. "It is very unkind and dreadful of you to say so, Lady Carnbee. I never thought of—any man, in all my life!" I cried in a passion of indignation. The old lady clung tighter to my arm, and pressed it to her, not unkindly.



"Poor little bird," she said, "how it's strugglin' and flutterin'! I'm not saying but what it's more dangerous when it's all for a dream."

She was not at all unkind; but I was very angry and excited, and would scarcely shake that old pale hand which she put out to me from her carriage window when I had helped her in. I was angry with her, and I was afraid of the diamond, which looked up from under her finger as if it saw through and through me; and whether you believe me or not, I am certain that it stung me again—a sharp, malignant prick, oh, full of meaning! She never wore gloves, but only black lace mittens, through which that horrible diamond gleamed. I ran upstairs—she had been the last to go—and Aunt Mary too had gone to get ready for dinner, for it was late. I hurried to my place, and looked across, with my heart beating more than ever. I made quite sure I should see the finished sheet lying white upon the floor. But what I gazed at was only the dim blank of that window which they said was no window.

The light had changed in some wonderful way during that five minutes I had been gone, and there was nothing, nothing, not a reflection, not a glimmer. It looked exactly as they all said, the blank form of a window painted on the wall. It was too much: I sat down in my excitement and cried as if my heart would break. I felt that they had done something to it, that it was not natural, that I could not bear their unkindness—even Aunt Mary. They thought it not good for me! not good for me! and they had done something—even Aunt Mary herself—and that wicked diamond that hid itself in Lady Carnbee's hand.

Of course I knew all this was ridiculous as well as you could tell me; but I was exasperated by the disappointment and the sudden stop to all my excited feelings, and I could not bear it. It was more strong than I.

I was late for dinner, and naturally there were some traces in my eyes that I had been crying when I came into the full light in the dining-room, where Aunt Mary could look at me at her pleasure, and I could not run away. She said, "Honey, you have been shedding tears. I'm loth, loth that a bairn of your mother's should be made to shed tears in my house."

"I have not been made to shed tears," cried I; and then, to save myself another fit of crying, I burst out laughing and

said, "I am afraid of that dreadful diamond on old Lady Carnbee's hand. It bites—I am sure it bites! Aunt Mary, look here."

"You foolish lassie," Aunt Mary said; but she looked at my cheek under the light of the lamp, and then she gave it a little pat with her soft hand. "Go away with you, you silly bairn. There is no bite; but a flushed cheek, my honey, and a wet eye. You must just read out my paper to me after dinner when the post is in; and we'll have no more thinking and no more dreaming for tonight."

"Yes, Aunt Mary," said I. But I knew what would happen; for when she opens up her *Times*, all full of the news of the world, and the speeches and things which she takes an interest in—though I cannot tell why—she forgets. And as I kept very quiet and made not a sound, she forgot tonight what she had said, and the curtain hung a little more over me than usual, and I sat down in my recess as if I had been a hundred miles away.

And my heart gave a great jump, as if it would have come out of my breast; for he was there. But not as he had been in the morning—I suppose the light, perhaps, was not good enough to go on with his work without a lamp or candles—for he had turned away from the table and was fronting the window, sitting leaning back in his chair, and turning his head to me. Not to me—he knew nothing about me. I thought he was not looking at anything; but with his face turned my way.

My heart was in my mouth: it was so unexpected, so strange! Though why it should have seemed strange I know not, for there was no communication between him and me that it should have moved me; and what could be more natural than that a man, wearied of his work, and feeling the want, perhaps, of more light, and yet that it was not dark enough to light a lamp, should turn round in his own chair, and rest a little, and think—perhaps of nothing at all? Papa always says he is thinking of nothing at all. He says things blow through his mind as if the doors were open, and he has no responsibility. What sort of things were blowing through this man's mind? Or was he thinking, still thinking, of what he had been writing and going on with it still?

The thing that troubled me most was that I could not make

out his face. It is very difficult to do so when you see a person only through two windows, your own and his. I wanted very much to recognise him afterwards if I should chance to meet him in the street. If he had only stood up and moved about the room I should have made out the rest of his figure, and then I should have known him again; or if he had only come to the window (as papa always did), then I should have seen his face clearly enough to have recognised him.

But to be sure, he did not see any need to do anything in order that I might recognise him, for he did not know I existed; and probably if he had known I was watching him, he would have been annoyed and gone away.

But he was as immovable there, facing the window, as he had been seated at the desk. Sometimes he made a little faint stir with a hand or a foot, and I held my breath, hoping he was about to rise from his chair—but he never did. And with all the efforts I made I could not be sure of his face. I puckered my eyelids together, as old Miss Jeanie did who was short-sighted, and I put my hands on each side of my face to concentrate the light on him: but it was all in vain. Either the face changed as I sat staring, or else it was the light that was not good enough, or I don't know what it was.

His hair seemed to me light—certainly there was no dark line about his head, as there would have been had it been very dark—and I saw, where it came across the old gilt frame on the wall behind, that it must be fair: and I am almost sure he had no beard. Indeed I am sure that he had no beard, for the outline of his face was distinct enough; and the daylight was still quite clear out of doors, so that I recognised perfectly a baker's boy who was on the pavement opposite, and whom I should have known again whenever I had met him: as if it were of the least importance to recognise a baker's boy.

There was one thing, however, rather curious about this boy. He had been throwing stones at something or somebody. In St. Rule's they have a great way of throwing stones at one another, and I suppose there had been a battle. I suppose also that he had one stone in his hand left over from the battle, and his roving eye took in all the incidents of the street to judge where he could throw it with most effect and mischief. But apparently he found nothing worthy of it in the street,

for he suddenly turned round with a flick under his leg to show his cleverness, and aimed it straight at the window.

I remarked without remarking that it struck with a hard sound and without any breaking of glass, and fell straight down on the pavement. But I took no notice of this even in my mind, so intently was I watching the figure within, which moved not nor took the slightest notice, and remained just as dimly clear, as perfectly seen, yet as undistinguishable, as before. And then the light began to fail a little, not diminishing the prospect within, but making it still less distinct than it had been.

Then I jumped up, feeling Aunt Mary's hand upon my shoulder. "Honey," she said, "I asked you twice to ring the bell; but you did not hear me."

"Oh, Aunt Mary!" I cried in great penitence, but turned again to the window in spite of myself.

"You must come away from there; you must come away from there," she said, almost as if she were angry: and then her soft voice grew softer, and she gave me a kiss. "Never mind about the lamp, honey; I have rung myself, and it is coming; but, silly bairn, you must not aye be dreaming—your little head will turn."

All the answer I made, for I could scarcely speak, was to give a little wave with my hand to the window on the other side of the street.

She stood there patting me softly on the shoulder for a whole minute or more, murmuring something that sounded like, "She must go away, she must go away." Then she said, always with her hand soft on my shoulder, "Like a dream when one awaketh." And when I looked again I saw the blank of an opaque surface and nothing more.

Aunt Mary asked me no more questions. She made me come into the room and sit in the light and read something to her. But I did not know what I was reading, for there suddenly came into my mind and took possession of it, the thud of the stone upon the window, and its descent straight down, as if from some hard substance that threw it off: though I had myself seen it strike upon the glass of the panes across the way.

## IV.

I am afraid I continued in a state of great exaltation and commotion of mind for some time. I used to hurry through the day till the evening came, when I could watch my neighbour through the window opposite. I did not talk much to anyone, and I never said a word about my own questions and wonderings. I wondered who he was, what he was doing, and why he never came till the evening (or very rarely); and I also wondered much to what house the room belonged in which he sat. It seemed to form a portion of the old College Library, as I have often said.

The window was one of the line of windows which, I understood, lighted the large hall; but whether this room belonged to the library itself, or how its occupant gained access to it, I could not tell. I made up my mind that it must open out of the hall, and that the gentleman must be the librarian or one of his assistants, perhaps kept busy all the day in his official duties, and only able to get to his desk and do his own private work in the evening. One had heard of so many things like that—a man who had to take up some other kind of work for his living, and then when his leisure time came, gave it all up to something he really loved—some study or some book he was writing.

My father himself at one time had been like that. He had been in the Treasury all day, and then in the evening, wrote his books, which made him famous. His daughter, however little she might know of other things, could not but know that! But it discouraged me very much when somebody pointed out to me one day in the street an old gentleman who wore a wig and took a great deal of snuff, and said, "That's the librarian of the old college." It gave me a great shock for a moment; but then I remembered that an old gentleman has generally assistants, and that it must be one of them.

Gradually I became quite sure of this. There was another small window above, which twinkled very much when the sun shone, and looked a very kindly, bright little window, above that dullness of the other which hid so much. I made

up my mind this was the window of his other room, and that these two chambers at the end of the beautiful hall were really beautiful for him to live in, so near all the books, and so retired and quiet, that nobody knew of them. What a fine thing for him! And you could see what use he made of his good fortune as he sat there, so constant at his writing for hours together.

Was it a book he was writing, or could it be perhaps poems? This was a thought which made my heart beat; but I concluded with much regret that it could not be poems, because no one could possibly write poems like that, straight off, without pausing for a word or a rhyme. Had they been poems he must have risen up, he must have paced about the room or come to the window as papa did—not that papa wrote poems. He always said, “I am not worthy even to speak of such prevailing mysteries,” shaking his head—which gave me a wonderful admiration and almost awe of a poet, who was thus much greater even than papa.

But I could not believe that a poet could have kept still for hours and hours like that. What could it be, then? Perhaps it was history; that is a great thing to work at, but you would not, perhaps, need to move nor to stride up and down, or look out upon the sky and the wonderful light.

He did move now and then, however, though he never came to the window. Sometimes, as I have said, he would turn round in his chair and turn his face towards it, and sit there for a long time musing when the light had begun to fail, and the world was full of that strange day which was night, that light without colour, in which everything was so clearly visible, and there were no shadows. “It was between the night and the day, when the fairy folk have power.” This was the after-light of the wonderful, long, long summer evening, the light without shadows. It had a spell in it, and sometimes it made me afraid: and all manner of strange thoughts seemed to come in, and I always felt that if only we had a little more vision in our eyes we might see beautiful folk walking about in it, who were not of our world. I thought most likely he saw them, from the way he sat there looking out: and this made my heart expand with the most curious sensation, as if of pride that, though I could not see, he did, and did not even require to come to the window, as I did, sitting close in

the depth of the recess, with my eyes upon him, and almost seeing things through his eyes.

I was so much absorbed in these thoughts and in watching him every evening—for now he never missed an evening, but was always there—that people began to remark that I was looking pale and that I could not be well, for I paid no attention when they talked to me, and did not care to go out, nor to join the other girls for their tennis, nor to do anything that others did. And some said to Aunt Mary that I was quickly losing all the ground I had gained, and that she could never send me back to my mother with a white face like that.

Aunt Mary had begun to look at me anxiously for some time before that, and I am sure, held secret consultations over me, sometimes with the doctor, and sometimes with her old ladies, who thought they knew more about young girls than even the doctors. And I could hear them saying to her that I wanted diversion, that I must be diverted, and that she must take me out more, and give a party, and that when the summer visitors began to come there would perhaps be a ball or two, or Lady Carnbee would get up a picnic.

"And there's my young lord coming home," said the old lady whom they called Miss Jeanie, "and I never knew the young lassie yet that would not cock up her bonnet at the sight of a young lord."

But Aunt Mary shook her head. "I would not lippen much to the young lord," she said. "His mother is sore set upon siller for him; and my poor bit honey has no fortune to speak of. No, we must not fly so high as the young lord; but I will gladly take her about the country to see the old castles and towers. It will perhaps rouse her up a little."

"And if that does not answer we must think of something else," the old lady said.

I heard them, perhaps, that day because they were talking of me, which is always so effective a way of making you hear—for latterly I had not been paying any attention to what they were saying; and I thought to myself how little they knew, and how little I cared about even the old castles and curious houses, having something else in my mind. But just about that time Mr. Pitmilley came in, who was always a friend to me, and, when he heard them talking, he managed

And after a while, when the ladies were gone away, he came up to my recess, and gave a glance right over my head. And then he asked my Aunt Mary if ever she had settled her question about the window opposite "that you thought was a window sometimes, and then not a window, and many curious things," the old gentleman said.

My Aunt Mary gave me another very wistful look; and then she said, "Indeed, Mr. Pitmilly, we are just where we were, and I am quite as unsettled as ever; and I think my niece she has taken up my views, for I see her many a time looking across and wondering, and I am not clear now what her opinion is."

"My opinion!" I said. "Aunt Mary!" I could not help being a little scornful, as one is when one is very young. "I have no opinion. There is not only a window but there is a room, and I could show you——" I was going to say, "show you the gentleman who sits and writes in it", but I stopped, not knowing what they might say, and looked from one to another. "I could tell you—all the furniture that is in it," I said. And then I felt something like a flame that went over my face, and that all at once my cheeks were burning. I thought they gave a little glance at one another, but that may have been folly. "There is a great picture, in a big dim frame," I said, feeling a little breathless, "on the wall opposite the window——"

"Is there so?" said Mr. Pitmilly, with a little laugh. And he said, "Now I will tell you what we'll do. You know that there is a conversation party, or whatever they call it, in the big room tonight, and it will be all open and lighted up. And it is a handsome room, and two-three things well worth looking at. I will just step along after we have all got our dinner, and take you over to the party, madam—Missy and you——"

"Dear me!" said Aunt Mary. "I have not gone to a party for more years than I would like to say—and never once to the Library Hall." Then she gave a little shiver, and said quite low, "I could not go there."

"Then you will just begin again tonight, madam," said Mr. Pitmilly, taking no notice of this, "and a proud man will I be leading in Mistress Balcarres that was once the pride of the ball."

"Ah, once!" said Aunt Mary, with a low little laugh and



then a sigh. "And we'll not say how long ago," and after that she made a pause, looking always at me: and then she said, "I accept your offer, and we'll put on our brows; and I hope you will have no occasion to think shame of us. But why not take your dinner here?"

That was how it was settled, and the old gentleman went away to dress, looking quite pleased. But I came to Aunt Mary as soon as he was gone, and besought her not to make me go. "I like the long bonnie night and the light that lasts so long. And I cannot bear to dress up and go out, wasting it all in a stupid party. I hate parties, Aunt Mary!" I cried, "and I would far rather stay here."

"My honey," she said, taking both my hands, "I know it will maybe be a blow to you—but it's better so."

"How could it be a blow to me?" I cried; "but I would far rather not go."

"You'll just go with me, honey, just this once; it is not often I go out. You will go with me this one night, just this one night, my honey sweet."

I am sure there were tears in Aunt Mary's eyes, and she kissed me between the words. There was nothing more that I could say; but how I grudged the evening! A mere party, a *conversazione* (when all the college was away, too, and nobody to make conversation!) instead of my enchanted hour at my window and the soft, strange light, and the dim face looking out, which kept me wondering and wondering what was he thinking of, what was he looking for, who was he? all one wonder and mystery and question, through the long, long, slowly fading night.

It occurred to me, however, when I was dressing—though I was so sure that he would prefer his solitude to everything—that he might perhaps, it was just possible, be there. And when I had thought of that, I took out my white frock—though Janet had laid out my blue one—and my little pearl necklace which I had thought was too good to wear. They were not very large pearls, but they were real pearls, and very even and lustrous though they were small; and though I did not think much of my appearance then, there must have been something about me—pale as I was but apt to colour in a moment, with my dress so white, and my pearls so white, and my hair all shadowy—perhaps, that was pleasant to look at:

for even old Mr. Pitmilley had a strange look in his eyes, as if he was not only pleased but sorry too, perhaps thinking me a creature that would have troubles in this life, though I was so young and knew them not.

And when Aunt Mary looked at me, there was a little quiver about her mouth. She herself had on her pretty lace and her white hair very nicely done, and looking her best. As for Mr. Pitmilley, he had a beautiful fine French cambric frill to his shirt, plaited in the most minute plaits, and with a diamond pin in it which sparkled as much as Lady Carnbee's ring; but this was a fine, frank, kindly stone that looked you straight in the face and sparkled, with the light dancing in it as if it were pleased to see you, and to be shining on that old gentleman's honest and faithful breast: for he had been one of Aunt Mary's lovers in their early days, and still thought there was nobody like her in the world.

I had got into quite a happy commotion of mind by the time we set out across the street in the soft light of the evening to the Library Hall. Perhaps, after all, I should see him, and see the room which I was so well acquainted with, and find out why he sat there so constantly and never was seen abroad. I thought I might even hear what he was working at, which would be such a pleasant thing to tell papa when I went home. A friend of mine at St. Rule's—oh, far, far more busy than you ever were, papa!—and then my father would laugh as he always did, and say he was but an idler and never busy at all.

The room was all light and bright, flowers wherever flowers could be, and the long lines of the books that went along the walls on each side, lighting up wherever there was a line of gilding or an ornament, with a little response. It dazzled me at first all that light; but I was very eager, though I kept very quiet, looking round to see if perhaps in any corner, in the middle of any group, he would be there. I did not expect to see him among the ladies. He would not be with them—he was too studious, too silent: but perhaps among that circle of grey heads at the upper end of the room—perhaps—

No: I am not sure that it was not half a pleasure to me to make quite sure that there was not one whom I could take for him, who was at all like my vague image of him. No: it was absurd to think that he would be here, amid all that

sound of voices, under the glare of that light. I felt a little proud to think that he was in his room as usual, doing his work, or thinking so deeply over it, as when he turned round in his chair with his face to the light.

I was thus getting a little composed and quiet in my mind—for now that the expectation of seeing him was over, though it was a disappointment it was a satisfaction too—when Mr. Pitmilley came up to me, holding out his arm. "Now," he said, "I am going to take you to see the curiosities." I thought to myself that after I had seen them and spoken to everybody I knew, Aunt Mary would let me go home, so I went very willingly, though I did not care for the curiosities. Something, however, struck me strangely as we walked up the room. It was the air, rather fresh and strong, from an open window at the east end of the hall. How should there be a window there? I hardly saw what it meant for the first moment, but it blew in my face as if there was some meaning in it, and I felt very uneasy without seeing why.

Then there was another thing that startled me. On that side of the wall which was to the street there seemed no windows at all. A long line of bookcases filled it from end to end. I could not see what that meant either, but it confused me. I was altogether confused. I felt as if I was in a strange country, not knowing where I was going, not knowing what I might find out next. If there were no windows, on the wall to the street where was my window? My heart, which had been jumping up and calming down again all the time, gave a great leap at this, as if it would have come out of me—but I did not know what it could mean.

Then we stopped before a glass case, and Mr. Pitmilley showed me some things in it. I could not pay much attention to them. My head was going round and round. I heard his voice going on, and then myself speaking with a queer sound that was hollow in my ears; but I did not know what I was saying or what he was saying.

Then he took me to the very end of the room, the east end, saying something that I caught—that I was pale, that the air would do me good. The air was blowing full on me, lifting the lace of my dress, lifting my hair, almost chilly. The window opened into the pale daylight, into the little lane that ran by

could not make out a word he said. Then I heard my own voice speaking through it, though I did not seem to be aware that I was speaking. "Where is my window?—where, then, is my window?" I seemed to be saying, and I turned right round, dragging him with me, still holding his arm. As I did this my eyes fell upon something at last which I knew. It was a large picture in a broad frame, hanging against the farther wall.

What did it mean? Oh, what did it mean? I turned round again to the open window at the east end, and to the daylight, the strange light without any shadow that was all round about this lighted hall, holding it like a bubble that would burst, like something that was not real. The real place was the room I knew in which that picture was hanging, where the writing-table was, and where he sat with his face to the light. But where was the light and the window through which it came? I think my senses must have left me. I went up to the picture which I knew, and then I walked straight across the room, always dragging Mr. Pitmilly whose face was pale, but who did not struggle but allowed me to lead him, straight across to where the window was—where the window was not—where there was no sign of it. "Where is my window? where is my window?" I said. And all the time I was sure that I was in a dream, and these lights were all some theatrical illusion, and the people talking; and nothing real but the pale, pale, watching, lingering day standing by to wait until that foolish bubble should burst.

"My dear," said Mr. Pitmilly, "my dear! Mind that you are in public. Mind where you are. You must not make an outcry and frighten your Aunt Mary. Come away with me. Come away, my dear young lady, and you'll take a seat for a minute or two and compose yourself; and I'll get you an ice or a little wine." He kept patting my hand, which was on his arm, and looking at me very anxiously. "Bless me! bless me! I never thought it would have this effect," he said.

But I would not allow him to take me away in that direction. I went to the picture again and looked at it without seeing it: and then I went across the room again, with some kind of wild thought that if I insisted I should find it. "My window, my window!" I said.

There was one of the professors standing there, and he heard me. "The window!" said he. "Ah, you've been taken in

with what appears outside. It was put there to be in uniformity with the window on the stair. But it never was a real window. It is just behind that bookcase. Many people are taken in by it," he said.

His voice seemed to sound from somewhere far away, and as if it would go on forever; and the hall swam in a dazzle of shining and of noises round me; and the daylight through the open window grew greyer, waiting till it should be over, and the bubble burst,

## V.

It was Mr. Pitmilley who took me home: or rather it was I who took him, pushing him on a little in front of me, holding fast by his arm, not waiting for Aunt Mary or anyone. We came out into the daylight again outside, I, without even a cloak or a shawl, with my bare arms, and uncovered head, and the pearls round my neck. There was a rush of people about, and a baker's boy, that baker's boy, stood right in my way and cried, "Here's a braw ane!" shouting to the others: the words struck me somehow, as his stone had struck the window, without any reason. But I did not mind the people staring, and hurried across the street, with Mr. Pitmilley half a step in advance.

The door was open, and Janet standing at it, looking out to see what she could see of the ladies in their grand dresses. She gave a shriek when she saw me hurrying across the street; but I brushed past her, and pushed Mr. Pitmilley up the stairs, and took him breathless to the recess, where I threw myself down on the seat, feeling as if I could not have gone another step farther, and waved my hand across to the window. "There! there!" I cried. Ah! there it was—not that senseless mob—not the theatre and the gas, and the people all in a murmur and clang of talking. Never in all these days had I seen that room so clearly.

There was a faint tone of light behind, as if it might have been a reflection from some of those vulgar lights in the hall, and he sat against it, calm, wrapped in his thoughts, with his face to the window. Nobody but must have seen him. Janet could have seen him had I called her upstairs. It was like a

picture, all the things I knew, and the same attitude, and the atmosphere, full of quietness, not disturbed by anything. I pulled Mr. Pitmilly's arm before I let him go. "You see, you see!" I cried. He gave me the most bewildered look, as if he would have liked to cry. He saw nothing! I was sure of that from his eyes. He was an old man, and there was no vision in him. If I had called up Janet, she would have seen it all. "My dear!" he said, "My dear!" waving his hands in a helpless way.

"He has been there all these nights," I cried, "and I thought you could tell me who he was and what he was doing; and that he might have taken me in to that room, and showed me, that I might tell papa. Papa would understand, he would like to hear. Oh, can't you tell me what work he is doing, Mr. Pitmilly? He never lifts his head as long as the light throws a shadow, and then when it is like this he turns round and thinks, and takes a rest!"

Mr. Pitmilly was trembling, whether it was with cold or I know not what. He said, with a shake in his voice, "My dear young lady, my dear——" and then stopped and looked at me as if he were going to cry. "It's peetiful, it's peetiful," he said; and then in another voice, "I'm going across there again to bring your Aunt Mary home; do you understand, my poor little thing, my—I am going to bring her home—you will be better when she is here."

I was glad when he went away, as he could not see anything: and I sat alone in the dark which was not dark, but quite clear light—a light like nothing I ever saw. How clear it was in that room! Not glaring, like the gas and the voices, but so quiet, everything so visible, as if it were in another world. I heard a little rustle behind me, and there was Janet, standing staring at me with two big eyes wide open. She was only a little older than I was. I called to her, "Janet, come here, come here, and you will see him—come here and see him!" impatient that she should be so shy and keep behind. "Oh, my bonnie young leddy!" she said, and burst out crying. I stamped my foot at her, in my indignation that she would not come, and she fled before me with a rustle and swing of haste, as if she were afraid.

None of them, none of them! not even a girl like myself, with the sight in her eyes, would understand. I turned back

again, and held out my hands to him sitting there, who was the only one that knew. "Oh," I said, "say something to me! I don't know who you are, or what you are: but you're lonely and so am I; and I only—feel for you. Say something to me!" I neither hoped that he would hear, nor expected any answer. How could he hear, with the street between us, and his window shut, and all the murmuring of the voices and the people standing about? But for one moment it seemed to me that there was only him and me in the whole world.

But I gasped with my breath, that had almost gone from me, when I saw him move in his chair! He had heard me, though I knew not how. He rose up, and I rose too, speechless, incapable of anything but this mechanical movement. He seemed to draw me as if I were a puppet moved by his will. He came forward to the window, and stood looking across at me. I was sure that he looked at me. At last he had seen me: at last he had found out that somebody, though only a girl, was watching him, looking for him, believing in him.

I was in such trouble and commotion of mind and trembling, that I could not keep on my feet, but dropped kneeling on the window-seat, supporting myself against the window, feeling as if my heart were being drawn out of me. I cannot describe his face. It was all dim, yet there was a light on it: I think it must have been a smile; and as closely as I looked at him he looked at me. His hair was fair, and there was a little quiver about his lips. Then he put his hands upon the window to open it. It was stiff and hard to move; but at last he forced it open with a sound that echoed all along the street. I saw that the people heard it, and several looked up.

As for me, I put my hands together, leaning with my face against the glass, drawn to him as if I could have gone out of myself, my heart out of my bosom, my eyes out of my head. He opened the window with a noise that was heard from the West Port to the Abbey. Could anyone doubt that?

And then he leaned forward out of the window, looking out. There was not one in the street but must have seen him. He looked at me first, with a little wave of his hand, as if it were a salutation—yet not exactly that either, for I thought he waved me away; and then he looked up and down in the dim shining of the ending day, first to the east, to the old Abbey towers, and then to the west, along the broad line of

the street where so many people were coming and going, but so little noise, all like enchanted folk in an enchanted place.

I watched him with such a melting heart, with such a deep satisfaction as words could not say; for nobody could tell me now that he was not there—nobody could say I was dreaming any more. I watched him as if I could not breathe—my heart in my throat, my eyes upon him. He looked up and down, and then he looked back to me. I was the first, and I was the last, though it was not for long; he did know, he did see, who it was that had recognised him and sympathised with him all the time. I was in a kind of rapture, yet stupor too; my look went with his look, following it as if I were his shadow; and then suddenly he was gone, and I saw him no more.

I dropped back again upon my seat, seeking something to support me; something to lean upon. He had lifted his hand and waved it once again to me. How he went I cannot tell, nor where he went I cannot tell; but in a moment he was away, and the window standing open, and the room fading into stillness and dimness, yet so clear, with all its space, and the great picture in its gilded frame upon the wall.

It gave me no pain to see him go away. My heart was so content, and I was so worn out and satisfied—for what doubt or question could there be about him now? As I was lying back as weak as water, Aunt Mary came in behind me and flew to me with a little rustle as if she had come on wings, and put her arms round me, and drew my head on to her breast. I had begun to cry a little, with sobs like a child. "You saw him, you saw him!" I said.

To lean upon her, and feel her so soft, so kind, gave me a pleasure I cannot describe, and her arms round me, and her voice saying "Honey, my honey!" as if she were nearly crying too. Lying there I came back to myself, quite sweetly, glad of everything. But I wanted some assurance from them that they had seen him too.

I waved my hand to the window that was still standing open, and the room that was stealing away into the faint dark. "This time you saw it all!" I said, getting more eager. "My honey!" said Aunt Mary, giving me a kiss; and Mr. Pitmilly began to walk about the room with short little steps behind, as if he were out of patience. I sat straight up and



put away Aunt Mary's arms. "You cannot be so blind, so blind!" I cried. "Oh, not tonight." But neither the one nor the other made any reply.

I shook myself quite free, and raised myself up. And there, in the middle of the street, stood the baker's boy like a statue, staring up at the open window, with his mouth open and his face full of wonder—breathless, as if he could not believe what he saw. I darted forward, calling to him, and beckoned him to come to me. "Oh, bring him up! bring him, bring him to me!" I cried.

Mr. Pitmilley went out directly, and got the boy by the shoulder. He did not want to come. It was strange to see the little old gentleman, with his beautiful frill and his diamond pin, standing out in the street, with his hand upon the boy's shoulder, and the other boys round, all in a little crowd. And presently they came towards the house, the others all following, gaping and wondering. He came in unwilling, almost resisting, looking as if we meant him some harm.

"Come away, my laddie, come and speak to the young lady," Mr. Pitmilley was saying. And Aunt Mary took my hands to keep me back. But I would not be kept back.

"Boy," I cried, "you saw it too, you saw it, tell them you saw it! It is that I want, and no more."

He looked at me as they all did, as if he thought I were mad. "What's she wantin' wi' me?" he said; and then, "I did nae harm, even if I did throw a big stane at it—and it's nae sin to throw a stane."

"You rascal!" said Mr. Pitmilley, giving him a shake; "have you been throwing stones? You'll kill somebody one of these days with your stones." The old gentleman was confused and troubled, for he did not understand what I wanted, nor anything that had happened. And then Aunt Mary, holding my hands and drawing me close to her, spoke.

"Laddie," she said, "answer the young lady, like a good lad. There's no intention of finding fault with you. Answer her, my man, and then Janet will give ye your supper before you go."

"Oh, speak, speak!" I cried, "answer them and tell them! You saw that window opened, and the gentleman look out and

"I saw nae gentleman," he said, with his head down, "except this wee gentleman here."

"Listen, laddie," said Aunt Mary. "I saw ye standing in the middle of the street staring. What were ye looking at?"

"It was naething to make a wark about. It was just yon windy yonder in the library that is nae windy. And it was open—as sure's death. You may laugh if you like. Is that a' she's wantin' wi' me?"

"You are telling a pack of lies, laddie," Mr. Pitmilley said,

"I'm tellin' naie lees—it was standin' open just like ony ither windy. It's as sure's death, I couldna believe it mysel'; but it's true."

"And there it is," I cried, turning round and pointing it out to them with great triumph in my heart. But the light was all grey, it had faded, it had changed. The window was just as it had always been, a sombre break upon the wall.

I was treated like an invalid all that evening, and taken upstairs to bed, and Aunt Mary sat up in my room the whole night through. Whenever I opened my eyes she was always sitting there close to me, watching. And there never was in all my life so strange a night. When I would talk in my excitement, she kissed me and hushed me like a child. "Oh, honey, you are not the only one!" she said. "Oh, whisht, whisht, bairn! I should never have let you be there!"

"Aunt Mary, Aunt Mary, you have seen him too?"

"Oh, whisht, whisht, honey!" Aunt Mary said; her eyes were shining—there were tears in them. "Oh, whisht, whisht! Put it out of your mind, and try to sleep. I will not speak another word," she cried.

But I had my arms round her, and my mouth at her ear, "Who is he there? Tel' me that and I will ask no more——"

"Oh, honey, rest, and try to sleep! It is just—how can I tell you?—a dream, a dream! Did you not hear what Lady Carnbee said?—the women of our blood——"

"What? What? Aunt Mary, oh, Aunt Mary——?"

"I canna tell you," she cried in her agitation, "I canna tell you! How can I tell you, when I know just what you know and no more? It is a longing all your life after—it is a looking—for what never comes."

"He will come," I cried, "I shall see him tomorrow—that I know, I know!"

She kissed me and cried over me, her cheek hot and wet like mine. "My honey, try if you can sleep—try if you can sleep: and we'll wait to see what tomorrow brings."

"I have no fear," said I. And then, I suppose, though it is strange to think of, I must have fallen asleep—I was so worn out, and young, and not used to lying in my bed awake. From time to time I opened my eyes, and sometimes jumped up remembering everything; but Aunt Mary was always there to soothe me, and I lay down again in her shelter like a bird in its nest.

But I would not let them keep me in bed next day. I was in a kind of fever, not knowing what I did. The window was quite opaque, without the least glimmer in it, flat and blank like a piece of wood. Never from the first day had I seen it so little like a window.

"It cannot be wondered at," I said to myself, "that seeing it like that, and with eyes that are old, not so clear as mine, they should think what they do." And then I smiled to myself to think of the evening and the long light, and whether he would look out again, or only give me a signal with his hand. I decided I would like that best: not that he should take the trouble to come forward and open it again, but just a turn of his head and a wave of his hand. It would be more friendly, and show more confidence—not as if I wanted that kind of demonstration every night.

I did not come down in the afternoon, but kept at my own window upstairs alone, till the tea-party should be over. I could hear them making a great talk; and I was sure they were all in the recess staring at the window, and laughing at the silly lassie. Let them laugh! I felt above all that now.

At dinner I was very restless, hurrying to get it over; and I think Aunt Mary was restless too. I doubt whether she read her *Times* when it came; she opened it up so as to shield her, and watched from a corner. And I settled myself in the recess, with my heart full of expectation. I wanted nothing more than to see him writing at his table, and to turn his head and give me a little wave of his hand, just to show that he knew I was there. I sat from half past seven o'clock to ten o'clock; and the daylight grew softer and softer, till at last it was as if it was shining through a pearl, and not a shadow to be seen,

But the window all the time was as black as night, and there was nothing, nothing there.

Well: but other nights it had been like that; he would not be there every night only to please me. There are other things in a man's life, a great learned man like that. I said to myself I was not disappointed. Why should I be disappointed? There had been other nights when he was not there. Aunt Mary watched me, every movement I made, her eyes shining, often wet, with a pity in them that almost made me cry: but I felt as if I were more sorry for her than for myself. And then I flung myself upon her, and asked her, again and again, what it was, and who it was, imploring her to tell me if she knew? and when she had seen him, and what had happened? and what it meant about the women of our blood?

She told me that how it was she could not tell, nor when: it was just at the time it had to be; and that we all saw him in our time. "That is," she said, "the ones that are like you and me." What was it that made her and me different from the rest? But she only shook her head and would not tell me.

"They say," she said, and then stopped short. "Oh, honey, try to forget all about it—if I had but known you were of that kind! They say—that once there was one that was a scholar, and liked his books more than any lady's love. Honey, do not look at me like that. To think I should have brought all this on you!"

"He was a scholar?" I cried.

"And one of us, that must have been a light woman, not like you and me—But may be it was just in innocence; for who can tell? She waved to him and waved to him to come over: and yon ring was the token: but he would not come. But still she sat at her window and waved and waved—till at last her brothers heard of it, that were stirring men; and then—— Oh, my honey, let us speak of it no more!"

"They killed him!" I cried, carried away. And then I grasped her with my hands, and gave her a shake, and flung away from her. "You tell me that to throw dust in my eyes—when I saw him only last night: and he as living as I am, and as young!"

"My honey, my honey!" Aunt Mary said.

After that I would not speak to her for a long time; but she

kept close to me, never leaving me when she could help it, and always with that pity in her eyes. For the next night it was the same; and the third night. That third night I thought I could not bear it any longer. I would have to do something—if only I knew what to do! If it would ever get dark, quite dark, there might be something to be done. I had wild dreams of stealing out of the house and getting a ladder, and mounting up to try if I could not open that window in the middle of the night—if perhaps I could get the baker's boy to help me; and then my mind got into a whirl, and it was as if I had done it; and I could almost see the boy put the ladder to the window, and hear him cry out that there was nothing there.

Oh, how slow it was, the night! and how light it was, and everything so clear—no darkness to cover you, no shadow, whether on one side of the street or on the other side. I could not sleep, though I was forced to go to bed. And in the deep midnight, when it is dark, dark in every other place, I slipped very softly downstairs, though there was one board on the landing-place that creaked—and opened the door and stepped out.

There was not a soul to be seen, up or down, from the Abbey to the West Port: and the trees stood like ghosts, and the silence was terrible, and everything as clear as day. You don't know what silence is till you find it in the light like that, not morning but night, no sun rising, no shadow, but everything as clear as the day.

It did not make any difference as the slow minutes went on: one o'clock, two o'clock. How strange it was to hear the clocks striking in that dead light when there was nobody to hear them! But it made no difference. The window was quite blank; even the marking of the panes seemed to have melted away. I stole up again, cold and trembling, after a long time, through the silent house, in the clear light with despair in my heart.

I am sure Aunt Mary must have watched and seen me coming back, for after a while I heard faint sounds in the house, and very early, when there had come a little sunshine into the air, she came to my bedside with a cup of tea in her hand; and she, too, was looking like a ghost. "Are you warm, honey—are you comfortable?" she said. "It doesn't matter," said I. I did not feel as if anything mattered; unless if one could

get into the dark somewhere—the soft, deep dark that would cover you over and hide you—but I could not tell from what. The dreadful thing was that there was nothing, nothing to look for, nothing to hide from—only the silence and the light.

That day my mother came and took me home. I had not heard she was coming; she arrived quite unexpectedly, and said she had no time to stay but must start the same evening so as to be in London next day, papa having settled to go abroad. At first I had a wild thought I would not go. But how can a girl say I will not, when her mother has come for her, and there is no reason, no reason in the world, to resist, and no right. I had to go, whatever I might wish or anyone might say. Aunt Mary's dear eyes were wet; she went about the house drying them quietly with her handkerchief, but she always said, "It is the best thing for you, honey, the best thing for you!" Oh, how I hated to hear it said that it was the best thing, as if anything mattered, one more than another!

The old ladies were all there in the afternoon, Lady Carnbee looking at me from under her black lace, and the diamond lurking, sending out darts from under her finger. She patted me on the shoulder, and told me to be a good bairn. "And never lippen to what you see from the window," she said. "The eye is deceitful as well as the heart." She kept patting me on the shoulder, and I felt again as if that sharp, wicked stone stung me. Was that what Aunt Mary meant when she said yon ring was the token? I thought afterwards I saw the mark on my shoulder. You will say why? How can I tell why? If I had known, I should have been contented, and it would not have mattered any more.

I never went back to St. Rule's, and for years of my life I never again looked out of a window when any other window was in sight. You ask me did I ever see him again? I cannot tell: the imagination is a great deceiver, as Lady Carnbee said: and if he stayed there so long, only to punish the race that had wronged him, why should I ever have seen him again? for I had received my share. But who can tell what happens in a heart that often, often, and so long as that, comes back to do its errand? If it was he whom I have seen again, the anger is gone from him, and he means good

and no longer harm to the house of the woman who loved him.

I have seen his face looking at me from a crowd. There was one time when I came home a widow from India, very sad, with my little children; I am certain I saw him there among all the people coming to welcome their friends. There was nobody to welcome me—for I was not expected: and very sad was I, without a face I knew: when all at once I saw him, and he waved his hand to me. My heart leaped up again: I had forgotten who he was, but only that it was a face I knew, and I landed almost cheerfully, thinking here was someone who would help me. But he had disappeared, as he did from the window, with that one wave of his hand.

And again, I was reminded of it all when old Lady Carnbee died—an old, old woman—and it was found in her will that she had left me that diamond ring. I am afraid of it still. It is locked up in an old sandal-wood box in the lumber-room in the little old country house which belongs to me, but where I never live. If anyone would steal it, it would be a relief to my mind. Yet I never knew what Aunt Mary meant when she said: "Yon ring was the token", nor what it could have to do with that strange window in the old College Library of St. Rule's,

## *THE DANCING-PARTNER*

Jerome K. Jerome

"This story," commenced MacShaugnassy, "comes from Furtwangen, a small town in the Black Forest. There lived there a very wonderful old fellow named Nicholau Geibel. His business was the making of mechanical toys, at which work he had acquired an almost European reputation. He made rabbits that would emerge from the heart of a cabbage, flop their ears, smooth their whiskers, and disappear again; cats that would wash their faces, and mew so naturally that dogs would mistake them for real cats, and fly at them; dolls, with phonographs concealed within them, that would raise their hats and say, 'Good morning; how do you do?' and some that would even sing a song.

"But he was something more than a mere mechanic; he was an artist. His work was with him a hobby, almost a passion. His shop was filled with all manner of strange things that never would, or could, be sold—things he had made for the pure love of making them. He had contrived a mechanical donkey that would trot for two hours by means of stored electricity, and trot, too, much faster than the live article, and with less need for exertion on the part of the driver; a bird that would shoot up into the air, fly round and round in a circle, and drop to earth at the exact spot from where it started; a skeleton that, supported by an upright iron bar, would dance a hornpipe; a life-size lady doll that could play the fiddle; and a gentleman with a hollow inside who could smoke a pipe and drink more lager beer than any three average German students put together, which is saying much.

"Indeed, it was the belief of the town that old Geibel could make a man capable of doing everything that a respectable man need want to do. One day he made a man who did too much, and it came about in this way:|

"Young Doctor Follen had a baby, and the baby had a birthday. Its first birthday put Doctor Follen's household into somewhat of a flurry, but on the occasion of its second



birthday, Mrs. Doctor Follen gave a ball in honour of the event. Old Geibel and his daughter Olga were among the guests.

"During the afternoon of the next day some three or four of Olga's bosom friends, who had also been present at the ball, dropped in to have a chat about it. They naturally fell to discussing the men, and to criticising their dancing. Old Geibel was in the room, but he appeared to be absorbed in his newspaper, and the girls took no notice of him.

" 'There seem to be fewer men who can dance at every ball you go to,' said one of the girls.

" 'Yes, and don't the ones who can, give themselves airs,' said another; 'they make quite a favour of asking you.'

" 'And how stupidly they talk,' added a third. 'They always say exactly the same things: "How charming you are looking tonight." "Do you often go to Vienna? Oh, you should, it's delightful." "What a charming dress you have on." "What a warm day it has been." "Do you like Wagner?" I do wish they'd think of something new.'

" 'Oh, I never mind how they talk,' said a fourth, 'If a man dances well he may be a fool for all I care.'

" 'He generally is,' slipped in a thin girl, rather spitefully.

" 'I go to a ball to dance,' continued the previous speaker, not noticing the interruption. 'All I ask of a partner is that he shall hold me firmly, take me round steadily, and not get tired before I do.'

" 'A clockwork figure would be the thing for you,' said the girl who had interrupted.

" 'Bravo!' cried one of the others, clapping her hands, 'what a capital idea!'

" 'What's a capital idea?' they asked.

" 'Why, a clockwork dancer, or, better still, one that would go by electricity and never run down.'

" 'The girls took up the idea with enthusiasm.'

" 'Oh, what a lovely partner he would make,' said one; 'he would never kick you, or tread on your toes,'

" 'Or tear your dress,' said another,

" 'Or get out of step.'

" 'Or get giddy and lean on you.'

" 'And he would never want to mop his face with his

handkerchief. I do hate to see a man do that after every dance.'

"'And wouldn't want to spend the whole evening in the supper-room.'

"'Why, with a phonograph inside him to grind out all the stock remarks, you would not be able to tell him from a real man,' said the girl who had first suggested the idea.

"'Oh yes, you would,' said the thin girl, 'he would be so much nicer.'

"Old Geibel had laid down his paper, and was listening with both his ears. On one of the girls glancing in his direction, however, he hurriedly hid himself again behind it.

"After the girls were gone, he went into his workshop, where Olga heard him walking up and down, and every now and then chuckling to himself; and that night he talked to her a good deal about dancing and dancing men—asked what they usually said and did—what dances were most popular—what steps were gone through, with many other questions bearing on the subject.

"Then for a couple of weeks he kept much to his factory, and was very thoughtful and busy, though prone at unexpected moments to break into a quiet low laugh, as if enjoying a joke that nobody else knew of.

"A month later another ball took place in Furtwangen. On this occasion it was given by old Wenzel, the wealthy timber merchant, to celebrate his niece's betrothal, and Geibel and his daughter was again among the invited.

"When the hour arrived to set out, Olga sought her father. Not finding him in the house, she tapped at the door of his workshop. He appeared in his shirt-sleeves, looking hot but radiant.

"'Don't wait for me,' he said, 'you go on, I'll follow you, I've got something to finish.'

"As she turned to obey he called after her, 'Tell them I'm going to bring a young man with me—such a nice young man, and an excellent dancer. All the girls will like him.' Then he laughed and closed the door.

"Her father generally kept his doings secret from everybody, but she had a pretty shrewd suspicion of what he had been planning, and so, to a certain extent, was able to prepare

the guests for what was coming. Anticipation ran high, and the arrival of the famous mechanist was eagerly awaited.

"At length the sound of wheels was heard outside, followed by a great commotion in the passage, and old Wenzel himself, his jolly face red with excitement and suppressed laughter, burst into the room and announced in stentorian tones:

"Herr Geibel—and a friend."

"Herr Geibel and his 'friend' entered, greeted with shouts of laughter and applause, and advanced to the centre of the room.

"Allow me, ladies and gentlemen," said Herr Geibel, "to introduce you to my friend, Lieutenant Fritz. Fritz, my dear fellow, bow to the ladies and gentlemen."

"Geibel placed his hand encouragingly on Fritz's shoulder, and the lieutenant bowed low, accompanying the action with a harsh clicking noise in his throat, unpleasantly suggestive of a death rattle. But that was only a detail.

"He walks a little stiffly" (old Geibel took his arm and walked him forward a few steps. He certainly did walk stiffly), 'but then walking is not his forte. He is essentially a dancing man. I have only been able to teach him the waltz as yet, but at that he is faultless. Come, which of you ladies may I introduce him to as a partner. He keeps perfect time; he never gets tired; he won't kick you or tread on your dress; he will hold you as firmly as you like, and go as quickly or as slowly as you please; he never gets giddy; and he is full of conversation. Come, speak up for yourself, my boy.'

"The old gentleman twisted one of the buttons at the back of his coat, and immediately Fritz opened his mouth, and in thin tones that appeared to proceed from the back of his head, remarked suddenly, 'May I have the pleasure?' and then shut his mouth again with a snap.

"That Lieutenant Fritz had made a strong impression on the company was undoubted, yet none of the girls seemed inclined to dance with him. They looked askance at his waxen face, with its staring eyes and fixed smile, and shuddered. At last old Geibel came to the girl who had conceived the idea.

"It is your own suggestion, carried out to the letter," said Geibel, 'an electric dancer. You owe it to the gentleman to give him a trial.'

"She was a bright, saucy little girl, fond of a frolic. Her host added his entreaties, and she consented.

"Herr Geibel fixed the figure to her. Its right arm was screwed round her waist, and held her firmly; its delicately jointed left hand was made to fasten itself upon her right. The old toy-maker showed her how to regulate its speed, and how to stop it, and release her.

" 'It will take you round in a complete circle,' he explained, 'be careful that no one knocks against you, and alters its course.'

"The music struck up. Old Geibel put the current in motion, and Annette and her strange partner began to dance.

"For a while everyone stood watching them. The figure performed its purpose admirably. Keeping perfect time and step, and holding its little partner tight clasped in an unyielding embrace, it revolved steadily, pouring forth at the same time a constant flow of squeaky conversation, broken by brief intervals of grinding silence.

" 'How charming you are looking tonight,' it remarked in its thin, far-away voice. 'What a lovely day it has been. Do you like dancing? How well our steps agree. You will give me another, won't you? Oh, don't be so cruel. What a charming gown you have on. Isn't waltzing delightful? I could go on dancing for ever—with you. Have you had supper?'

"As she grew more familiar with the uncanny creature, the girl's nervousness wore off, and she entered into the fun of the thing.

" 'Oh, he's just lovely,' she cried, laughing, 'I could go on dancing with him all my life.'

"Couple after couple now joined them, and soon all the dancers in the room were whirling round behind them. Nicholas Geibel stood looking on, beaming with childish delight at his success.

"Old Wenzel approached him, and whispered something in his ear. Geibel laughed and nodded, and the two worked their way quietly towards the door.

" 'This is the young people's house tonight,' said Wenzel, so soon as they were outside; 'you and I will have a quiet pipe and a glass of hock, over in the counting-house.'

"Meanwhile the dancing grew more fast and furious. Little

Annette loosened the screw regulating her partner's rate of progress, and the figure flew round with her, swifter and swifter. Couple after couple dropped out exhausted, but they only went the faster, till at length they remained dancing alone.

"Madder and madder became the waltz. The music lagged behind: the musicians, unable to keep pace, ceased, and sat staring. The younger guests applauded, but the older faces began to grow anxious.

"'Hadn't you better stop, dear?' said one of the women, 'You'll make yourself so tired.'

"But Annette did not answer.

"'I believe she's fainted,' cried out a girl who had caught sight of her face as it was swept by.

"One of the men sprang forward and clutched at the figure, but its impetus threw him down on to the floor, where its steel-cased feet laid bare his cheek. The thing evidently did not intend to part with its prize easily.

"Had anyone retained a cool head, the figure, one cannot help thinking, might easily have been stopped. Two or three men acting in concert might have lifted it bodily off the floor, or have jabbed it into a corner. But few human heads are capable of remaining cool under excitement. Those who are not present think how stupid must have been those who were; those who are reflect afterwards how simple it would have been to do this, that, or the other, if only they had thought of it at the time.

"The women grew hysterical. The men shouted contradictory directions to one another. Two of them made a bungling rush at the figure, which had the result of forcing it out of its orbit in the centre of the room, and sending it crashing against the walls and furniture. A stream of blood showed itself down the girl's white frock, and followed her along the floor. The affair was becoming horrible. The women rushed screaming from the room. The men followed them.

"One sensible suggestion was made: 'Find Geibel—fetch Geibel.'

"No one had noticed him leave the room, no one knew where he was. A party went in search of him. The others, too unnerved to go back into the ball-room, crowded outside the door and listened. They could hear the steady whir of the wheels upon the polished floor as the thing spun round and

round; the dull thud as every now and again it dashed itself and its burden against some opposing object and ricocheted off in a new direction.

"And everlastingly it talked in that thin ghostly voice, repeating over and over the same formula: 'How charming you are looking tonight. What a lovely day it has been. Oh, don't be so cruel. I could go on dancing for ever—with you. Have you had supper?'"

"Of course they sought for Geibel everywhere but where he was. They looked in every room in the house, then they rushed off in a body to his own place, and spent precious minutes in waking up his deaf old housekeeper. At last it occurred to one of the party that Wenzel was missing also, and then the idea of the counting-house across the yard presented itself to them, and there they found him.

"He rose up, very pale, and followed them; and he and old Wenzel forced their way through the crowd of guests gathered outside, and entered the room, and locked the door behind them.

"From within there came the muffled sound of low voices and quick steps, followed by a confused scuffling noise, then silence, then the low voices again.

"After a time the door opened, and those near it pressed forward to enter, but old Wenzel's broad shoulders barred the way.

"'I want you—and you, Bekler,' he said, addressing a couple of the older men. His voice was calm, but his face was deadly white. 'The rest of you, please go—get the women away as quickly as you can.'

"From that day old Nicholau Geibel confined himself to the making of mechanical rabbits, and cats that mewed and washed their faces."

## THE SWORDS

Robert Aickman

Corazón malherido

Por cinco espadas—FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

My first experience?

My first experience was far more of a test than anything that has ever happened to me since in that line. Not more agreeable, but certainly more testing. I have noticed several times that it is to beginners that strange things happen, and often, I think, to beginners only. When you know about a thing, there's just nothing to it. This kind of thing included—anyway, in most cases. After the first six women, say, or seven, or eight, the rest come much of a muchness.

I was a beginner all right; raw as a spring onion. What's more, I was a real mother's boy; scared stiff of life, and crass ignorant. Not that I want to sound disrespectful to my old mother. She's as good as they come, and I still hit it off better with her than with most other females.

She had a brother, my uncle Elias. I should have said that we're all supposed to be descended from one of the big pottery families, but I don't know how true it is. My gran had little bits of pot to prove it, but it's always hard to be sure. After my dad was killed in an accident, my mother asked my Uncle Elias to take me into his business. He was a grocery wholesaler in a moderate way—and nothing but cheap lines. He said I must first learn the ropes by going out on the road. My mother was thoroughly upset because of my dad having died in a smash, and because she thought I was bound to be in moral danger, but there was nothing she could do about it, and on the road I went.

It was true enough about the moral danger, but I was too simple and too scared to involve myself. As far as I could, I steered clear even of the other chaps I met who were on the road with me. I was pretty certain they would be bad

influences, and I was always bound to be the baby of the party anyway. I was dead rotten at selling and I was utterly lonely—not just in a manner of speaking, but truly lonely. I hated the life but Uncle Elias had promised to see me all right and I couldn't think of what else to do. I stuck it on the road for more than two years, and then I heard of my present job with the building society—read about it, actually, in the local paper—so that I was able to tell Uncle Elias what he could do with his cheap groceries.

For most of the time we stopped in small hotels—some of them weren't bad either, both the room and the grub—but in a few towns there were special lodgings known to Uncle Elias, where I and Uncle Elias's regular traveller, a sad chap called Bantock, were ordered by Uncle Elias to go. To this day I don't know exactly why. At the time I was quite sure that there was some kick-back for my uncle in it, which was the obvious thing to suppose, but I've come since to wonder if the old girls who kept the lodgings might not have been my uncle's fancy women in the more or less distant past. At least once, I got as far as asking Bantock about it, but he merely said he didn't know what the answer was. There was very little that Bantock admitted to knowing about anything beyond the current prices of soapflakes and Scotch. He had been forty-two years on the road for my uncle when one day he dropped dead of a thrombosis in Rochdale. Mrs. Bantock, at least, had been one of my uncle's women off and on for years. That was something everyone knew.

These women who kept the lodgings certainly behaved as if what I've said was true. You've never seen or heard such dives. Noises all night so that it was impossible to sleep properly, and often half-dressed tarts beating on your door and screaming that they'd been swindled or strangled. Some of the travellers even brought in boys, which is something I have never been able to understand. You read about it and hear about it, and I've often seen it happen, as I say, but I still don't understand it. And there was I in the middle of it all, pure and unspotted. The woman who kept the place often cheeked me for it. I don't know how old Bantock got on. I never found myself in one of these places at the same time as he was there. But the funny part was that my mother thought I was extra safe in one of these special lodgings, because they



were all particularly guaranteed by her brother, who made Bantock and me go to them for our own good.

Of course it was only on *some* of the nights on the road. But always it was when I was quite alone. I noticed that at the time when Bantock was providing me with a few introductions and openings, they were always in towns where we could stay in commercial hotels. All the same, Bantock had to go to these special places when the need arose, just as much as I did, even though he never would talk about them.

One of the towns where there was a place on Uncle Elias's list, was Wolverhampton. I fetched up there for the first time, after I had been on the job for perhaps four or five months. It was by no means my first of these lodgings, but for that very reason my heart sank all the more as I set eyes on the place and was let in by the usual bleary-eyed cow in curlers and a dirty overall.

There was absolutely nothing to do. Nowhere even to sit and watch the telly. All you could think of was to go out and get drunk, or bring someone in with you from the pictures. Neither idea appealed very much to me, and I found myself just wandering about the town. It must have been late spring or early summer, because it was pleasantly warm, though not too hot, and still only dusk when I had finished my tea, which I had to find in a café, because the lodging did not even provide tea.

I was strolling about the streets of Wolverhampton, with all the girls giggling at me, or so it seemed, when I came upon a sort of small fair. Not knowing the town at all, I had drifted into the run-down area up by the old canal. The main streets were quite wide, but they had been laid out for daytime traffic to the different works and railway yards, and were now quiet and empty, except for the occasional lorry and the boys and girls playing around at some of the corners. The narrow streets running off contained lines of small houses, but a lot of the houses were empty, with windows broken or boarded up, and holes in the roof. I should have turned back, but for the sound made by the fair; not pop songs on the amplifiers, and not the pounding of the old steam organs, but more a sort of high tinkling, which somehow fitted in with the warm evening and the rosy twilight. I couldn't at first make out what the noise was, but I had nothing else to do,

very much not, and I looked around the empty back streets, until I could find what was going on.

It proved to be a very small fair indeed; just half a dozen stalls, where a few kids were throwing rings or shooting off toy rifles, two or three covered booths, and, in the middle, one very small roundabout. It was this that made the tinkling music. The roundabout *looked* pretty too; with snow-queen and icing sugar effects in the centre, and different coloured sleighs going round, each just big enough for two, and each, as I remember, with a coloured light high up at the peak. And in the middle was a very pretty, blonde girl dressed as some kind of pierrette. Anyway she seemed very pretty at that time to me. Her job was to collect the money from the people riding in the sleighs, but the trouble was that there weren't any. Not a single one. There weren't many people about at all, and inevitably the girl caught my eye. I felt I looked a charley as I had no one to ride with, and I just turned away, I shouldn't have dared to ask the girl herself to ride with me, and I imagine she wouldn't have been allowed to in any case. Unless, perhaps, it was her roundabout.

The fair had been set up on a plot of land which was empty simply because the houses which had stood on it had been demolished or just fallen down. Tall, blank factory walls towered up on two sides of it, and the ground was so rough and uneven that it was like walking on lumpy rocks at the seaside. There was nothing in the least permanent about the fair. It was very much here today and gone tomorrow. I should not have wondered if it had had no real business to have set up there at all. I doubted very much if it had come to any kind of agreement for the use of the land. I thought at once that the life must be a hard one for those who owned the fair. You could see why fairs like that have so largely died out from what things used to be in my gran's day, who was always talking about the wonderful fairs and circuses when she was a girl. Such customers as there were, were almost all mere kids, even though kids do nowadays have most of the money. These kids were doing a lot of their spending at a tiny stall where a drab-looking woman was selling ice-cream and toffee-apples. I thought it would have been much simpler and more profitable to concentrate on that, and enter the catering business rather than trying to provide

entertainment for people who prefer to get it in their houses. But very probably I was in a gloomy frame of mind that evening. The fair was pretty and old-fashioned, but no one could say it cheered you up.

The girl on the roundabout could still see me, and I was sure was looking at me reproachfully—and probably contemptuously as well. With that layout, she was in the middle of things and impossible to get away from. I should just have mooched off, especially since the people running the different stalls were all beginning to shout at me, as pretty well the only full adult in sight, when, going round, I saw a booth in more or less the farthest corner, where the high factory walls made an angle. It was a square tent of very dirty red and white striped canvas, and over the crumpled entrance flap was a rough-edged, dark painted, horizontal board, with written on it in faint gold capital letters THE SWORDS. That was all there was. Night was coming on fast, but there was no light outside the tent and none shining through from inside. You might have thought it was a store of some kind.

For some reason, I put out my hand and touched the hanging flap. I am sure I should never have dared actually to draw it aside and peep in. But a touch was enough. The flap was pulled back at once, and a young man stood there, sloping his head to one side so as to draw me in. I could see at once that some kind of show was going on. I did not really want to watch it, but felt that I should look a complete imbecile if I just ran away across the fairground, small though it was.

"Two bob," said the young man, dropping the dirty flap, and sticking out his other hand, which was equally dirty. He wore a green sweater, mended but still with holes, grimy grey trousers, and grimier sandshoes. Sheer dirt was so much my first impression of the place that I might well have fled after all, had I felt it possible. I had not noticed this kind of griminess about the rest of the fair.

Running away, however, wasn't on. There were so few people inside. Dotted about the bare, bumpy ground, with bricks and broken glass sticking out from the hard earth, were twenty or thirty wooden chairs, none of them seeming to match, most of them broken or defective in one way or another, all of them chipped and off-colour. Scattered among these hard chairs was an audience of seven. I know it was seven,

because I had no difficulty in counting, and because soon it mattered. I made the eighth. All of them were in single units and all were men: this time men and not boys. I think that I was the youngest among them, by quite a long way.

And the show was something I have never seen or heard of since. Nor even read of. Not exactly.

There was a sort of low platform of dark and discoloured wood up against the back of the tent—probably right on to the factory walls outside. There was a burly chap standing on it, giving the spiel, in a pretty rough delivery. He had tight yellow curls, the colour of cheap lemonade but turning grey, and a big red face, with a splay nose, and very dark red lips. He also had small eyes and ears. The ears didn't seem exactly opposite one another, if you know what I mean. He wasn't much to look at, though I felt he was very strong, and could probably have taken on all of us in the tent single-handed and come out well on top. I couldn't decide how old he was—either then or later. (Yes, I did see him again—twice.) I should imagine he was nearing fifty, and he didn't look in particularly good condition, but it seemed as though he had just been made with more *thew* and muscle than most people are. He was dressed like the youth at the door, except that the sweater of the chap on the platform was not green but dark blue, as if he were a seaman, or perhaps acting one. He wore the same dirty grey trousers and sandshoes as the other man. You might almost have thought the place was some kind of boxing booth.

But it wasn't. On the chap's left (and straight ahead of where I sat at the edge of things and in the back row) a girl lay sprawled out facing us in an upright canvas chair, as faded and battered as everything else in the outfit. She was dressed up like a French chorus, in a tight and shiny black thing, cut low, and black fishnet stockings, and those shiny black shoes with super high heels that many men go for in such a big way. But the total effect was not particularly sexy, all the same. The different bits of costume had all seen better days, like everything else, and the girl herself looked more sick than spicy. Under other conditions, I thought to begin with, she might have been pretty enough, but she had made herself up with green powder, actually choosing it apparently, or having it chosen for her, and her hair, done in

a tight bun, like a ballet dancer's, was not so much mousy as plain colourless. On top of all this, she was lying over the chair, rather than sitting in it, just as if she was feeling faint or about to be ill. Certainly she was doing nothing at all to lead the chaps on. Not that I myself should have wanted to be led. Or so I thought at the start.

And in front of her, at the angle of the platform, was this pile of swords. They were stacked criss-cross, like cheese-straws, on top of a low stool, square and black, the sort of thing they make in Sedgeley and Wednesfield and sell as Japanese, though this specimen was quite plain and undecorated, even though more than a bit chipped. There must have been thirty or forty swords, as the pile had four corners to it, where the hilts of the swords were set diagonally above one another. It struck me later that perhaps there was one sword for each seat, in case there was ever a full house in the tent.

If I had not seen the notice outside, I might not have realised they *were* swords, or not at first. There was nothing gleaming about them, and nothing decorative. The blades were a dull grey, and the hilts were made of some black stuff, possibly even plastic. They looked thoroughly mass-produced and industrial, and I could not think where they might have been got. They were not fencing foils but something much solidier, and the demand for real swords nowadays must be mainly ceremonial, and less and less even of that. Possibly these swords came from suppliers for the stage, though I doubt that too. Anyway, they were thoroughly dingy swords, not a credit at all to the regiment.

I do not know how long the show had been going on before I arrived, or if the man in the seaman's sweater had offered any explanations. Almost the first thing I heard was him saying "And now, gentlemen, which of you is going to be the first?"

There was no movement or response of any kind. Of course there never is.

"Come on," said the seaman, not very politely. I felt that he was so accustomed to the backwardness of his audiences that he was no longer prepared to pander to it. He did not strike me as a man of many words, even though speaking appeared to be his job. He had a strong accent, which I took to be Black Country, though I wasn't in a position properly

to be sure at that time of my life, and being myself a Londoner.

Nothing happened.

"What you think you've paid your money for?" cried the seaman, more truculent, I thought, than sarcastic.

"You tell us," said one of the men on the chairs. He happened to be the man nearest to me, though in front of me.

It was not a very clever thing to say, and the seaman turned it to account.

"You," he shouted, sticking out his thick, red forefinger at the man who had cheeked him, "Come along up. We've got to start somewhere."

The man did not move. I became frightened by my own nearness to him. I might be picked on next, and I did not even know what was expected of me, if I responded.

The situation was saved by the appearance of a volunteer. At the other side of the tent, a man stood up and said, "I'll do it."

The only light in the tent came from a single Tilley lamp hissing away (none too safely, I thought) from the crosspiece of the roof, but the volunteer looked to me exactly like everyone else.

"At last," said the seaman, still rather rudely, "Come on then."

The volunteer stumbled across the rough ground, stepped on to my side of the small platform, and stood right in front of the girl. The girl seemed to make no movement. Her head was thrown so far back that, as she was some distance in front of me, I could not see her eyes at all clearly. I could not even be certain whether they were open or closed.

"Pick up a sword," said the seaman sharply.

The volunteer did so, in a rather gingerly way. It looked like the first time he had ever had his hand on such a thing, and, of course, I never had either. The volunteer stood there with the sword in his hand, looking an utter fool. His skin looked grey by the light of the Tilley, he was very thin, and his hair was falling badly.

The seaman seemed to let him stand there for quite a while, as if out of devilry, or perhaps resentment at the way he had to make a living. To me the atmosphere in the dirty tent seemed full of tension and unpleasantness, but the other

men in the audience were still lying about on their hard chairs looking merely bored.

After quite a while, the seaman, who had been facing the audience, and speaking to the volunteer out of the corner of his mouth, half-turned on his heel, and still not looking right at the volunteer, snapped out: "What are you waiting for? There are others to come, though we could do with more."

At this, another member of the audience began to whistle "Why are we waiting?" I felt he was getting at the seaman or showman, or whatever he should be called, rather than at the volunteer.

"Go on," shouted the seaman, almost in the tone of a drill instructor. "Stick it in."

And then it happened, this extraordinary thing.

The volunteer seemed to me to tremble for a moment, and then plunged the sword right into the girl on the chair. As he was standing between me and her, I could not see where the sword entered, but I could see that the man seemed to press it right in, because almost the whole length of it seemed to disappear. What I could have no doubt about at all was the noise the sword made. A curious thing was that we are so used to at least the idea of people being stuck through with swords, that, even though, naturally, I had never before seen anything of the kind, I had no doubt at all of what the man had done. The noise of the sword tearing through the flesh was only what I should have expected. But it was quite distinct even above the hissing of the Tilley. And quite long drawn out too. And horrible.

I could sense the other men in the audience gathering themselves together on the instant and suddenly coming to life. I could still see little of what precisely had happened.

"Pull it out," said the seaman, quite casually, but as if speaking to a moron. He was still only half-turned towards the volunteer, and still looking straight in front of him. He was not looking at anything; just holding himself in control while getting through a familiar routine.

The volunteer pulled out the sword. I could again hear that unmistakable sound.

The volunteer still stood facing the girl, but with the tip of the sword resting on the platform. I could see no blood.

Of course I thought I had made some complete misinterpretation, been fooled like a kid. Obviously it was some kind of conjuring.

"Kiss her if you want to," said the seaman. "It's included in what you've paid."

And the man did, even though I could only see his back. With the sword drooping from his hand, he leaned forwards and downwards. I think it was a slow and loving kiss, not a smacking and public kiss, because this time I could hear nothing.

The seaman gave the volunteer all the time in the world for it, and, for some odd reason, there was no whistling or catcalling from the rest of us; but, in the end, the volunteer slowly straightened up.

"Please put back the sword," said the seaman, sarcastically polite.

The volunteer carefully returned it to the heap, going to some trouble to make it lie as before.

I could now see the girl. She was sitting up. Her hands were pressed together against her left side, where, presumably, the sword had gone in. But there was still no sign of blood, though it was hard to be certain in the bad light. And the strangest thing was that she now looked not only happy, with her eyes very wide open and a little smile on her lips, but, in spite of that green powder, beautiful too, which I was far from having thought in the first place.

The volunteer passed between the girl and me in order to get back to his seat. Even though the tent was almost empty, he returned to his original place religiously. I got a slightly better look at him. He still looked just like everyone else.

"Next," said the seaman, again like a sergeant numbering off.

This time there was no hanging back. Three men rose to their feet immediately, and the seaman had to make a choice.

"You then," he said, jabbing out his thick finger towards the centre of the tent.

The man picked was elderly, bald, plump, respectable-looking, and wearing a dark suit. He might have been a retired railway foreman or electricity inspector. He had a slight limp, probably taken in the way of his work,



The course of events was very much the same, but the second comer was readier and in less need of prompting, including about the kiss. His kiss was as slow and quiet as the first man's had been: paternal perhaps. When the elderly man stepped away, I saw that the girl was holding her two hands against the centre of her stomach. It made me squirm to look.

And then came the third man. When he went back to his seat, the girl's hands were to her throat.

The fourth man, on the face of it a rougher type, with a cloth cap (which, while on the platform, he never took off) and a sports jacket as filthy and worn out as the tent, apparently drove the sword into the girl's left thigh, straight through the fishnet stocking. When he stepped off the platform, she was clasping her leg, but looking so pleased that you'd have thought a great favour had been done her. And still I could see no blood.

I did not really know whether or not I wanted to see more of the details. Raw as I was, it would have been difficult for me to decide.

I didn't have to decide, because I dared not shift in any case to a seat with a better view. I considered that a move like that would quite probably result in my being the next man the seaman called up. And one thing I knew for certain was that whatever exactly was being done, I was not going to be one who did it. Whether it was conjuring, or something different that I knew nothing about, I was not going to get involved.

And, of course, if I stayed, my turn must be coming close in any case.

Still, the fifth man called was not me. He was a tall, lanky, perfectly black Negro. I had not especially spotted him as such before. He appeared to drive the sword in with all the force you might expect of a black man, even though he was so slight, then threw it on the floor of the platform with a clatter, which no one else had done before him, and actually drew the girl to her feet when kissing her. When he stepped back, his foot struck the sword. He paused for a second, gazing at the girl, then carefully put the sword back on the heap.

The girl was still standing, and it passed across my mind

that the Negro might try to kiss her again. But he didn't. He went quietly back to his place. Behind the scenes of it all, there appeared to be some rules, which all the other men knew about. They behaved almost as though they came quite often to the show, if a show was what it was.

Sinking down once more into her dilapidated canvas chair, the girl kept her eyes fixed on mine. I could not even tell what colour her eyes were, but the fact of the matter is that they turned my heart right over. I was so simple and inexperienced that nothing like that had ever happened to me before in my whole life. The incredible green powder made no difference. Nothing that had just been happening made any difference. I wanted that girl more than I had ever wanted anything. And I don't mean I just wanted her body. That comes later in life. I wanted to love her and tousle her and all the other, better things we want before the time comes when we know that however much we want them, we're not going to get them.

But, in justice to myself, I must say that I did *not* want to take my place in a queue for her.

That was about the last thing I wanted. And it was one chance in three that I should be next to be called. I drew a deep breath and managed to scuttle out. I can't pretend it was difficult. I was sitting near the back of the tent, as I've said, and no one tried to stop me. The lad at the entrance merely gaped at me like a fish. No doubt he was quite accustomed to the occasional patron leaving early. I fancied that the bruiser on the platform was in the act of turning to me at the very instant I got up, but I knew it was probably imagination on my part. I don't think he spoke, nor did any of the other men react. Most men at shows of that kind prefer to behave as if they were invisible. I did get mixed up in the greasy tent flap, and the lad in the green sweater did nothing to help, but that was all. I streaked across the fairground, still almost deserted, and still with the roundabout tinkling away, all for nothing, but very prettily. I tore back to my nasty bedroom, and locked myself in.

On and off, there was the usual fuss and schemozzle in the house, and right through the hours of darkness. I know, because I couldn't sleep. I couldn't have slept that night if I'd been lying between damask sheets in the Hilton Hotel.

The girl on the platform had got deep under my skin, green face and all: the girl and the show too, of course. I think I can truly say that what I experienced that night altered my whole angle on life, and it had nothing to do with the rows that broke out in the other bedrooms, or the cackling and bashing on the staircase, or the constant pulling the plug, which must have been the noisiest in the Midlands, especially as it took six or seven pulls or more for each flush. That night I really grasped the fact that most of the time we have no notion of what we really want, or we lose sight of it. And the even more important fact that what we really want, just doesn't fit in with life as a whole, or very seldom. Most folk learn slowly, and never altogether learn at all. I seemed to learn all at once.

Or perhaps not quite, because there was very much more to come.

The next morning I had calls to make, but well before the time arrived for the first of them I had sneaked back to that tiny, battered, little fairground. I even skipped breakfast, but breakfast in Uncle Elias's special lodging was very poor anyway, though a surprising number turned up for it each day. You wondered where so many had been hiding away all night. I don't know what I expected to find at the fair. Perhaps I wasn't sure I should find the fair there at all.

But I did. In full daylight, it looked smaller, sadder, and more utterly hopeless for making a living even than the night before. The weather was absolutely beautiful, and so many of the houses in the immediate area were empty, to say nothing of the factories, that there were very few people around. The fair itself was completely empty, which took me by surprise. I had expected some sort of gypsy scene and had failed to realise that there was nowhere on the lot for even gypsies to sleep. The people who worked the fair must have gone to bed at home, like the rest of the world. The plot of land was surrounded by a wire-mesh fence, put up by the owner to keep out tramps and meth-drinkers, but by now the fence wasn't up to much, as you would expect, and, after looking round, I had no difficulty in scrambling through a hole in it, which the lads of the village had carved out for fun and from having nothing better to do. I walked over to

the dingy booth in the far corner, and tried to lift the flap.

It proved to have been tied up at several places and apparently from the inside. I could not see how the person doing the tying had got out of the tent when he had finished, but that was the sort of trick of the trade you would expect of fairground folk. I found it impossible to see inside the tent at all without using my pocket-knife, which I should have hesitated to do at the best of times, but while I was fiddling around, I heard a voice just behind me.

"What's up with *you*?"

There was a very small, old man standing at my back. I had certainly not heard him come up, even though the ground was so rough and lumpy. He was hardly more than a dwarf, he was as brown as a horse-chestnut or very nearly, and there was not a hair on his head.

"I wondered what was inside," I said feebly.

"A great big python, two miles long, that don't even pay its rent," said the little man.

"How's that?" I asked. "Hasn't it a following?"

"Old-fashioned," said the little man. "Old-fashioned and out of date. Doesn't appeal to the women. The women don't like the big snakes. But the women have the money these times, *and* the power and the glory too." He changed his tone. "You're trespassing."

"Sorry, old man," I said. "I couldn't hold myself back on a lovely morning like this."

"I'm the watchman," said the little man. "I used to have snakes too. Little ones, dozens and dozens of them. All over me, and every one more poisonous than the next. Eyes darting, tongues flicking, scales shimmering: then *in*, right home, then back, then in again, then back. Still in the end, it wasn't a go. There's a time and a span for all things. But I like to keep around. So now I'm the watchman. While the job lasts. While anything lasts. Move on then. Move on."

I hesitated.

"This big snake you talk of," I began, "this python——"  
But he interrupted quite shrilly.

"There's no more to be said. Not to the likes of you, any road. Off the ground you go, and sharply. Or I'll call the police constable. He and I work hand in glove. I take care

to keep it that way. You may not have heard that trespass is a breach of the peace. Stay here and you'll be sorry for the rest of your life."

The little man was actually squaring up to me, even though the top of his brown skull (not shiny, by the way, but matt and patchy, as if he had some trouble with it) rose hardly above my waist. Clearly, he was daft.

As I had every kind of reason for going, I went. I did not even ask the little man about the times of performances that evening, or if there were any. Inside myself, I had no idea whether I should be back, even if there were performances, as there probably were.

I set about my calls. I'd had no sleep, and, since last night's tea, no food, and my head was spinning like a top, but I won't say I did my business any worse than usual. I probably felt at the time that I did, but now I doubt it. Private troubles, I have since noticed, make very little difference to the way most of us meet the outside world, and as for food and sleep, they don't matter at all until weeks and months have passed.

I pushed on then, more or less in the customary way (though, in my case, the customary way, at that job, wasn't up to very much at the best of times), and all the while mulling over and around what had happened to me, until the time came for dinner. I had planned to eat in the café where I had eaten the night before, but I found myself in a different part of the city, which, of course, I didn't know at all, and, feeling rather faint and queer, fell instead into the first place there was.

And there, in the middle of the floor, believe it or not, sitting at a Formica-topped table, was my girl with the green powder, and, beside her, the seaman or showman, looking more than ever like a run-down boxer.

I had not seriously expected ever to set eyes on the girl again. It was not, I thought, the kind of thing that happens. At the very most, I might have gone again to the queer show, but I don't think I really would have done, when I came to think out what it involved.

The girl had wiped off the green powder, and was wearing a black coat and skirt and a white blouse, a costume you might perhaps have thought rather too old for her, and the

same fishnet stockings. The man was dressed exactly as he had been the night before, except that he wore heavy boots instead of dirty sandshoes, heavy and mud-caked, as if he had been walking through fields.

Although it was the dinner-hour, the place was almost empty, with a dozen unoccupied tables, and these two sitting in the centre. I must almost have passed out.

But I wasn't really given time. The man in the jersey recognised me at once. He stood up and beckoned to me with his thick arm. "Come and join us," The girl had stood up too.

There was nothing else I could do but what he said.

The man actually drew back a chair for me (they were all painted in different, bright colours, and had been reseatd in new leatherette), and even the girl waited until I had sat down before sitting down herself.

"Sorry you missed the end of last night's show," said the man.

"I had to get back to my lodgings. I suddenly realised." I made it up quite swiftly. "I'm new to the town," I added.

"It can be difficult when you're new," said the man. "What'll you have?"

He spoke as if we were on licensed premises, but it was pretty obvious we weren't, and I hesitated.

"Tea or coffee?"

"Tea, please," I said.

"Another tea, Berth," called out the man. I saw that the two of them were both drinking coffee, but I didn't like the look of it, any more than I usually do.

"I'd like something to eat as well," I said, when the waitress brought the tea. "Thank you very much," I said to the man.

"Sandwiches: York ham, salt beef, or luncheon meat. Pies, Sausage rolls," said the waitress. She had a very bad sty on her left lower eyelid.

"I'll have a pie," I said, and, in due course, she brought one, with some salad on the plate, and the bottle of sauce; I really required something hot, but there it was.

"Come again tonight," said the man.

"I'm not sure I'll be able to."

I was finding it difficult even to drink my tea properly, as

my hands were shaking so badly, and I couldn't think how I should cope with a cold pie.

"Come on the house, if you like. As you missed your turn last night."

The girl, who had so far left the talking to the other, smiled at me very sweetly and personally, as if there was something quite particular between us. Her white blouse was open very low, so that I saw more than I really should, even though things are quite different today from what they once were. Even without the green powder, she was a very pale girl, and her body looked as if it might be even whiter than her face, almost as white as her blouse. Also I could now see the colour of her eyes. They were green. Somehow I had known it all along.

"In any case," went on the man, "it won't make much difference with business like it is now."

The girl glanced at him as if she was surprised at his letting out something private, then looked at me again and said, "Do come." She said it in the friendliest, meltingest way, as if she really cared. What's more, she seemed to have some kind of a foreign accent, which made her even more fascinating, if that was possible. She took a small sip of coffee.

"It's only that I might have another engagement that I couldn't get out of. I don't know right now."

"We mustn't make you break another engagement," said the girl, in her foreign accent, but sounding as if she meant just the opposite.

I managed a bit more candour. "I might get out of my engagement," I said, "but the truth is, if you don't mind my saying so, that I didn't greatly care for some of the others in the audience last night."

"I don't blame you," said the man very dryly, and rather to my relief, as you can imagine. "What would you say to a private show? A show just for you?" He spoke quite quietly, suggesting it as if it had been the most normal thing in the world, or as if I had been Charles Clore.

I was so taken by surprise that I blurted out, "What! Just me in the tent?"

"In your own home, I meant," said the man, still absolutely casually, and taking a noisy pull on his pink earthenware cup. As the man spoke, the girl shot a quick, devastating

glance. It was exactly as if she softened everything inside me to water. And, absurdly enough, it was then that my silly pie arrived, with the bit of green salad, and the sauce. I had been a fool to ask for anything at all to eat, however much I might have needed it in theory.

"With or without the swords," continued the man, lighting a cheap looking cigarette. "Madonna has been trained to do anything else you want. Anything you may happen to think of." The girl was gazing into her teacup.

I dared to speak directly to her. "Is your name really Madonna? It's nice."

"No," she said, speaking rather low. "Not really. It's my working name." She turned her head for a moment, and again our eyes met.

"There's no harm in it. We're not Catholics," said the man, "though Madonna was once."

"I like it," I said. I was wondering what to do about the pie I could not possibly eat.

"Of course a private show would cost a bit more than two bob," said the man. "But it would be all to yourself, and, under those conditions, Madonna will do anything you feel like." I noticed that he was speaking just as he had spoken in the tent: looking not at me or at anyone else, but straight ahead into the distance, and as if he were repeating words he had used again and again and was fed up with but compelled to make use of.

I was about to tell him that I had no money, which was more or less the case, but didn't.

"When could it be?" I said.

"Tonight, if you like," said the man. "Immediately after the regular show, and that won't be very late, as we don't do a ten or eleven o'clock house at a date like this. Madonna could be with you at a quarter to ten, easy. And she wouldn't necessarily have to hurry away either, not when there's no late-night matinée. There'd be time for her to do a lot of her novelties if you'd care to see them. Items from her repertoire, as we call them. Got a good place for it, by the way? Madonna doesn't need much. Just a room with a lock on the door to keep out the non-paying patrons, and somewhere to wash her hands."

"Yes," I said. "As a matter of fact, the place I'm stopping



at should be quite suitable, though I wish it was brighter, and a bit quieter too."

Madonna flashed another of her indescribably sweet glances at me. "I shan't mind," she said softly.

I wrote down the address on the corner of a paper I had found on my seat, and tore it off.

"Shall we call it ten pounds?" said the man, turning to look at me with his small eyes. "I usually ask twenty and sometimes fifty, but this is Wolverhampton not the Costa Brava, and you belong to the refined type."

"What makes you say that?" I asked; mainly in order to gain time for thinking what I could do about the money.

"I could tell by where you sat last night. At pretty well every show there's someone who picks that seat. It's a special seat for the refined types. I've learnt better now than to call them up, because it's not what they want. They're too refined to be called up, and I respect them for it. They often leave before the end, as you did. But I'm glad to have them in at any time. They raise the standard. Besides, they're the ones who are often interested in a private show, as you are, and willing to pay for it. I have to watch the business of the thing too."

"I haven't got ten pounds ready in spare cash," I said, "but I expect I can find it, even if I have to fiddle it."

"It's what you often have to do in this world," said the man. "Leastways if you like nice things."

"You've still got most of the day," said the girl, smiling encouragingly.

"Have another cup of tea?" said the man.

"No thanks very much."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"Then we must move. We've an afternoon show, though it'll probably be only for a few kids. I'll tell Madonna to save herself as much as she can until the private affair to-night."

As they were going through the door on to the street, the girl looked back to throw me a glance over her shoulder, warm and secret. But when she was moving about, her clothes looked much too big for her, the skirt too long, the jacket and blouse too loose and droopy, as if they were not

really her clothes at all. On top of everything else, I felt sorry for her. Whatever the explanation of last night, her life could not be an easy one.

They'd both been too polite to mention my pie. I stuffed it into my attaché case, of course without the salad, paid for it, and dragged off to my next call, which proved to be right across the town once more.

I didn't have to do anything dishonest to get the money.

It was hardly to be expected that my mind would be much on my work that afternoon, but I stuck to it as best I could, feeling that my life was getting into deep waters and that I had better keep land of some kind within sight, while it was still possible. It was as well that I did continue on my proper round of calls, because at one of the shops my immediate problem was solved for me without my having to lift a finger. The owner of the shop was a nice old gentleman with white hair, named Mr. Edis, who seemed to take to me immediately I went through the door. He said at one point that I made a change from old Bantock with his attacks of asthma (I don't think I've so far mentioned Bantock's asthma, but I knew all about it), and that I seemed a good lad, with a light in my eyes. Those were his words, and I'm not likely to make a mistake about them just yet, seeing what he went on to. He asked me if I had anything to do that evening. Rather pleased with myself, because it was not an answer I should have been able to make often before, not if I had been speaking the truth, I told him that Yes, I had a date with a girl.

"Do you mean with a Wolverhampton girl?" asked Mr. Edis.

"Yes. I've only met her since I've been in the town." I shouldn't have admitted that to most people, but there was something about Mr. Edis that led me on and made me want to justify his good opinion of me.

"What's she like?" asked Mr. Edis, half-closing his eyes, so that I could see the red all round the edges of them.

"Gorgeous." It was the sort of thing people said, and my real feelings couldn't possibly have been put into words.

"Got enough small change to treat her properly?"

I had to think quickly, being taken so much by surprise, but Mr. Edis went on before I had time to speak,

"So that you can cuddle her as you want?"

I could see that he was getting more and more excited.

"Well, Mr. Edis," I said, "as a matter of fact, not quite enough. I'm still a beginner in my job, as you know."

I thought I might get a pound out of him, and quite likely only as a loan, the Midlands people being what we all know they are.

But on the instant he produced a whole fiver. He flapped it in front of my nose like a kipper.

"It's yours on one condition."

"I'll fit in if I can, Mr. Edis."

"Come back tomorrow morning after my wife's gone out—she works as a traffic warden, and can't hardly get enough of it—come back here and tell me all about what happens."

I didn't care for the idea at all, but I supposed that I could make up some lies, or even break my word and not go back at all, and I didn't seem to have much alternative.

"Why, of course, Mr. Edis. Nothing to it."

He handed over the fiver at once.

"Good boy," he said. "Get what you're paying for out of her, and think of me while you're doing it, though I don't expect you will."

As for the other five pounds, I could probably manage to wangle it out of what I had, by scraping a bit over the next week or two, and cooking the cash book a trifle if necessary, as we all do. Anyway, and being the age I was, I hated all this talk about money. I hated the talk about it much more than I hated the job of having to find it. I did not see Madonna in that sort of way at all, and I should have despised myself if I had. Nor, to judge by how she spoke, did it seem the way in which she saw me. I could not really think of any other way in which she would be likely to see me, but I settled that one by trying not to think about the question at all.

My Uncle Elias's special lodging in Wolverhampton was not the kind of place where visitors just rang the bell and waited to be admitted by the footman. You had to know the form a bit, if you were to get in at all, not being a resident, and still more if, once inside, you were going to find the exact person you were looking for. At about half past nine, I thought it best to start lounging around in the street outside. Not right on top of the house door, because that might have led to misunderstanding and trouble of some kind, but moving

up and down the street, keeping both eyes open and an ear cocked for the patter of tiny feet on the pavement. It was almost dark, of course, but not quite. There weren't many people about but that was partly because it was raining gently, as it does in the Midlands: a soft, slow rain that you can hardly see, but extra wetting, or so it always feels. I am quite sure I should have taken up my position earlier if it hadn't been for the rain. Needless to say, I was like a cat on hot bricks. I had managed to get the pie inside me between calls during the afternoon. I struggled through it on a bench just as the rain was beginning. And at about half past six I'd had a cup of tea and some beans in the café I'd been to the night before. I didn't want any of it. I just felt that I ought to eat something in view of what lay ahead of me. Though, of course, I had precious little idea of what that was. When it's truly your first experience, you haven't; no matter how much you've been told and managed to pick up. I'd have been in a bad state if it had been any woman that was supposed to be coming, let alone my lovely Madonna.

And there she was, on the dot, or even a little early. She was dressed in the same clothes as she had worn that morning. Too big for her and too old for her; and she had no umbrella and no raincoat and no hat.

"You'll be wet," I said.

She didn't speak, but her eyes looked, I fancied, as if she was glad to see me. If she had set out in that green powder of hers, it had all washed off.

I thought she might be carrying something, but she wasn't, not even a handbag.

"Come in," I said.

Those staying in the house were lent a key (with a deposit to pay on it), and, thank God, we got through the hall and up the stairs without meeting anyone, or hearing anything out of the way, even though my room was at the top of the building.

She sat down on my bed and looked at the door. After what had been said, I knew what to do and turned the key. It came quite naturally. It was the sort of place where you turned the key as a matter of course. I took off my raincoat and let it lie in a corner. I had not turned on the light. I was not proud of my room.

"You must be soaked through," I said. The distance from the fairground was not all that great, but the rain was of the specially wetting kind, as I've remarked.

She got up and took off her outsize black jacket. She stood there holding it until I took it and hung it on the door. I can't say it actually dripped, but it was saturated, and I could see a wet patch on the eiderdown where she had been sitting. She had still not spoken a word. I had to admit that there seemed to have been no call for her to do so.

The rain had soaked through to her white blouse. Even with almost no light in the room I could see that. The shoulders were sodden and clinging to her, one more than the other. Without the jacket, the blouse looked quainter than ever. Not only was it loose and shapeless, but it had sleeves that were so long as to droop down beyond her hands when her jacket was off. In my mind I had a glimpse of the sort of woman the blouse was made for, big and stout, not my type at all.

"Better take that off too," I said, though I don't now know how I got the words out. I imagine that instinct looks after you even the first time, provided it is given a chance. Madonna did give me a chance, or I felt that she did. Life was sweeter for a minute or two than I had ever thought possible.

Without a word, she took off her blouse and I hung it over the back of the single bedroom chair.

I had seen in the café that under it she had been wearing something black, but I had not realised until now that it was the same tight, shiny sheath that she wore in the show, and that made her look so French.

She took off her wet skirt. The best I could do was to drape it over the seat of the chair. And there she was, super high heels and all. She looked ready to go on stage right away, but that I found rather disappointing.

She stood waiting, as if for me to tell her what to do.

I could see that the black sheath was soaking wet, anyway in patches, but this time I didn't dare to suggest that she took it off.

At last Madonna opened her mouth, "What would you like me to begin with?"

Her voice was so beautiful, and the question she asked so

tempting, that something got hold of me and, before I could stop myself, I had put my arms round her. I had never done anything like it before in my whole life, whatever I might have felt.

She made no movement, so that I supposed at once I had done the wrong thing. After all, it was scarcely surprising, considering how inexperienced I was.

But I thought too that something else was wrong. As I say, I wasn't exactly accustomed to the feel of a half-naked woman, and I myself was still more or less fully dressed, but all the same I thought at once that the feel of her was disappointing. It came as a bit of a shock. Quite a bad one, in fact. As often, when facts replace fancies. Suddenly it had all become rather like a nightmare.

I stepped back.

"I'm sorry," I said.

She smiled in her same sweet way. "I don't mind," she said.

It was nice of her, but I no longer felt quite the same about her. You know how, at the best, a tiny thing can make all the difference in your feeling about a woman, and I was far from sure that this thing was tiny at all. What I was wondering was whether I wasn't proving not to be properly equipped for life. I had been called backward before now, and perhaps here was the reason.

Then I realised that it might all be something to do with the act she put on, the swords. She might be some kind of freak, or possibly the man in the blue jersey did something funny to her, hypnotised her, in some way.

"Tell me what you'd like," she said, looking down at the scruffy bit of rug on the floor.

I was a fool, I thought, and merely showing my ignorance.

"Take that thing off," I replied. "It's wet. Get into bed. You'll be warmer there."

I began taking off my own clothes.

She did what I said, squirmed out of the black sheath, took her feet gently out of the sexy shoes, rolled off her long stockings. Before me for a moment was my first woman, even though I could hardly see her. I was still unable to face the idea of love by that single, dim electric light, which only made the dragged room look more dragged.

Obediently, Madonna climbed into my bed and I joined here there as quickly as I could.

Obediently, she did everything I asked, just as the man in the blue sweater had promised. To me she still felt queer and disappointing—flabby might almost be the word—and certainly quite different from what I had always fancied a woman's body would feel like if ever I found myself close enough to it. But she gave me my first experience none the less, the thing we're concerned with now. I will say one thing for her: from first to last she never spoke an unnecessary word. It's not always like that, of course.

But everything had gone wrong. For example, we had not even started by kissing. I had been cram full of romantic ideas about Madonna, but I felt that she was not being much help in that direction, for all her sweet and beautiful smiles and her soft voice and the gentle things she said. She was making herself almost too available, and not bringing out the best in me. It was as if I had simply acquired new information, however important, but without any exertion of my feelings. You often feel like that, of course, about one thing or another, but it seemed dreadful to feel it about this particular thing, especially when I had felt so differently about it only a little while before.

"Come on," I said to her. "Wake up."

It wasn't fair, but I was bitterly disappointed, and all the more because I couldn't properly make out why. I only felt that everything in my life might be at stake.

She moaned a little.

I heaved up from on top of her in the bed and threw back the bedclothes behind me. She lay there flat in front of me, all grey—anyway in the dim twilight. Even her hair was colourless, in fact pretty well invisible.

I did what I suppose was rather a wretched thing. I caught hold of her left arm by putting both my hands round her wrist, and tried to lug her up towards me, so that I could feel her thrown against me, and could cover her neck and front with kisses, if only she would make me want to. I suppose I might under any circumstances have hurt her by dragging at her like that, and that I shouldn't have done it. Still no one could have said it was very terrible. It was quite a usual sort of thing to do, I should say,

But what actually happened was very terrible indeed. So simple and so terrible that people won't always believe me. I gave this great, bad-tempered, disappointed pull at Madonna. She came up towards me and then fell back again with a sort of wail. I was still holding on to her hand and wrist with my two hands, and it took me quite some time to realise what had happened. What had happened was that I had pulled her left hand and wrist right off.

On the instant, she twisted out of the bed and began to wriggle back into her clothes. I was aware that even in the almost non-existent light she was somehow managing to move very swiftly. I had a frightful sensation of her beating round in my room with only one hand, and wondered in terror how she could possibly manage. All the time, she was weeping to herself, or wailing might be the word. The noise she made was very soft, so soft that but for what was happening, I might have thought it was inside my own head.

I got my feet on to the floor with the notion of turning on the light. The only switch was of course by the door. I had the idea that with some light on the scene, there might be certain explanations. But I found that I couldn't get to the switch. In the first place, I couldn't bear the thought of touching Madonna, even accidentally. In the second place, I discovered that my legs would go no farther. I was too utterly scared to move at all. Scared, repelled, and that mixed-up something else connected with disappointed sex for which there is no exact word.

So I just sat there, on the edge of the bed, while Madonna got back into her things, crying all the while, in that awful, heart-breaking way which I shall never forget. Not that it went on for long. As I've said, Madonna was amazingly quick. I couldn't think of anything to say or do. Especially with so little time for it.

When she had put on her clothes, she made a single appallingly significant snatch in my direction, caught something up, almost as if she, at least, could see in the dark. Then she had unlocked the door and bolted.

She had left the door flapping open off the dark landing (we had time-switches, of course), and I could hear her pat-patting down the staircase, and so easily and quietly through the front door that you might have thought she lived in the



place. It was still a little too early for the regulars to be much in evidence.

What I felt now was physically sick. But I had the use of my legs once more. I got off the bed, shut and locked the door, and turned on the light.

There was nothing in particular to be seen. Nothing but my own clothes lying about, my sodden-looking raincoat in the corner, and the upheaved bed. The bed looked as if some huge monster had risen through it, but nowhere in the room was there blood. It was all just like the swords.

As I thought about it, and about what I had done, I suddenly vomited. They were not rooms with hot and cold running water, and I half-filled the old-fashioned wash-bowl, with its faded flowers at the bottom and big thumbnail chippings round the rim, before I had finished.

I lay down on the crumpled bed, too fagged to empty the basin, to put out the light, even to draw something over me, though I was still naked and the night getting colder.

I heard the usual sounds beginning on the stairs and in the other rooms. Then, there was an unexpected, businesslike rapping at my own door.

It was not the sort of house where it was much use first asking who was there. I got to my feet again, this time frozen stiff, and, not having a dressing-gown with me, put on my wet raincoat, as I had to put on something and get the door open, or there would be more knocking, and then complaints, which could be most unpleasant.

It was the chap in the blue sweater; the seaman or showman or whatever he was. Somehow I had known it might be.

I can't have looked up to much, as I stood there shaking, in only the wet raincoat, especially as all the time you could hear people yelling and beating it up generally in the other rooms. And of course I hadn't the slightest idea what line the chap might choose to take.

I needn't have worried. Not at least about that.

"Show pass off all right?" was all he asked; and looking straight into the distance as if he were on his platform, not at anyone or anything in particular, but sounding quite friendly notwithstanding, provided everyone responded in the right kind of way.

"I think so," I replied.

I daresay I didn't appear very cordial, but he seemed not to mind much.

"In that case, could I have the fee? I'm sorry to disturb your beauty sleep, but we're moving on early."

I had not known in what way I should be expected to pay, so had carefully got the ten pounds into a pile, Mr. Edis's fiver and five single pounds of my own, and put it into the corner of a drawer, before I had gone out into the rain to meet Madonna.

I gave it to him.

"Thanks," he said, counting it, and putting it into his trousers pocket. I noticed that even his trousers seemed to be seaman's trousers, now that I could see them close to, with him standing just in front of me. "Everything all right then?"

"I think so," I said again. I was taking care not to commit myself too far in any direction I could think of.

I saw that now he was looking at me, his small eyes deep-sunk.

At that exact moment, there was a wild shriek from one of the floors below. It was about the loudest human cry I had heard until then, even in one of those lodgings,

But the man took no notice.

"All right then," he said.

For some reason, he hesitated a moment, then he held out his hand. I took it. He was very strong, but there was nothing else remarkable about his hand.

"We'll meet again," he said. "Don't worry."

Then he turned away and pressed the black time-switch for the staircase light. I did not stop to watch him go. I was sick and freezing.

And so far, despite what he said, our paths have not recrossed.

## THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

*Anonymous*

"To die, to sleep—

To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub : : :"

HAMLET

Boreas, that fearful north-west wind, which in the spring and autumn stirs up the lowest depths of the wild Adriatic, and is then so dangerous to vessels, was howling through the woods, and tossing the branches of the old knotty oaks in the Carpathian Mountains, when a party of five riders, who surrounded a litter drawn by a pair of mules, turned into a forest-path, which offered some protection from the April weather, and allowed the travellers in some degree to recover their breath. It was already evening, and bitterly cold; the snow fell every now and then in large flakes. A tall old gentleman, of aristocratic appearance, rode at the head of the troop. This was the Knight of Fahrenberg, in Austria. He had inherited from a childless brother a considerable property, situated in the Carpathian Mountains; and he had set out to take possession of it, accompanied by his daughter Franziska, and a niece about twenty years of age, who had been brought up with her. Next to the knight rode a fine young man of some twenty and odd years—the Baron Franz von Kronstein; he wore, like the former, the broad-brimmed hat with hanging feathers, the leather collar, the wide riding-boots—in short, the travelling dress which was in fashion at the commencement of the seventeenth century. The features of the young man had much about them that was open and friendly, as well as some mind; but the expression was more that of dreamy and sensitive softness than of youthful daring, although no one could deny that he possessed much of youthful beauty. As the cavalcade turned into the oak wood the young man rode up to the litter, and chatted with the ladies who were seated therein. One of these—and to her his conversation was principally addressed—was of dazzling beauty. Her hair flowed

in natural curls round the fine oval of her face, out of which beamed a pair of star-like eyes, full of genius, lively fancy, and a certain degree of archness. Franziska von Fahnenberg seemed to attend but carelessly to the speeches of her admirer, who made many kind inquiries as to how she felt herself during the journey, which had been attended with many difficulties: she always answered him very shortly, almost contemptuously; and at length remarked, that if it had not been for her father's objections, she would long ago have requested the baron to take her place in their horrid cage of a litter, for, to judge by his remarks, he seemed incommoded by the weather; and she would so much rather be mounted on the spirited horse, and face wind and storm, than be mewed up there, dragged up the hills by those long-eared animals, and mope herself to death with ennui. The young lady's words, and, still more, the half-contemptuous tone in which they were uttered, appeared to make the most painful impression on the young man: he made her no reply at the moment, but the absent air with which he attended to the kindly-intended remarks of the other young lady, showed how much he was disconcerted.

"It appears, dear Franziska," said he at length in a kindly tone, "that the hardships of the road have affected you more than you will acknowledge. Generally so kind to others, you have been very often out of humour during the journey, and particularly with regard to your humble servant and cousin, who would gladly bear a double or triple share of the discomforts, if he could thereby save you from the smallest of them."

Franziska showed by her look that she was about to reply with some bitter jibe, when the voice of the knight was heard calling for his nephew, who galloped off at the sound.

"I should like to scold you well, Franziska," said her companion somewhat sharply, "for always plaguing your poor Cousin Franz in this shameful way; he who loves you so truly, and who, whatever you may say, will one day be your husband."

"My husband!" replied the other angrily. "I must either completely alter my ideas, or he his whole self, before that takes place. No, Bertha! I know that this is my father's darling wish, and I do not deny the good qualities Cousin Franz

may have, or really has, since I see you are making a face; but to marry an effeminate man—never!”

“Effeminate! You do him great injustice,” replied her friend quickly. “Just because instead of going off to the Turkish war, where little honour was to be gained, he attended to your father’s advice, and stayed at home, to bring his neglected estate into order, which he accomplished with care and prudence; and because he does not represent this howling wind as a mild zephyr—for reasons such as these you are pleased to call him effeminate.”

“Say what you will, it is so,” cried Franziska obstinately, “Bold, aspiring, even despotic, must be the man who is to gain my heart; these soft, patient, and thoughtful natures are utterly distasteful to me. Is Franz capable of deep sympathy, either in joy or sorrow? He is always the same—always quiet, soft and tiresome.”

“He has a warm heart, and is not without genius,” said Bertha.

“A warm heart! that may be,” replied the other, “but I would rather be tyrannised over, and kept under a little by my future husband, than be loved in such a wearisome manner. You say he has genius, too. I will not exactly contradict you, since that would be impolite, but it is not easily discovered. But even allowing you are right in both statements, still the man who does not bring these qualities into action is a despicable creature. A man may do many foolish things, he may even be a little wicked now and then, provided it is in nothing dishonourable; and one can forgive him, if he is only acting on some fixed theory for some special object. There is, for instance, your own faithful admirer the Castellan of Glogau, Knight of Woislaw; he loves you most truly, and is now quite in a position to enable you to marry comfortably. The brave man has lost his right hand—reason enough for remaining seated behind the stove, or near the spinning-wheel of his Bertha; but what does he do?—He goes off to the war in Turkey; he fights for a noble thought——”

“And runs the chance of getting his other hand chopped off, and another great scar across his face,” put in her friend.

“Leaves his lady-love to weep and pine a little,” pursued Franziska, “but returns with fame, marries, and is all the more honoured and admired! This is done by a man of forty, a

rough warrior, not bred at court, a soldier who has nothing but his cloak and sword. And Franz—rich, noble—but I will not go on. Not a word more on this detested point, if you love me, Bertha."

Franziska leaned back in the corner of the litter with a dissatisfied air, and shut her eyes as though, overcome by fatigue, she wished to sleep.

"This awful wind is so powerful, you say, that we must make a detour to avoid its full force," said the knight to an old man dressed in a fur-cap and a cloak of rough skin, who seemed to be the guide of the party.

"Those who have never personally felt the Boreas storming over the country between Sessano and Trieste, can have no conception of the reality," replied the other. "As soon as it commences, the snow is blown in thick long columns along the ground. That is nothing to what follows. These columns become higher and higher, as the wind rises, and continue to do so until you see nothing but snow above, below, and on every side—unless, indeed, sometimes, when sand and gravel are mixed with the snow, and at length it is impossible to open your eyes at all. Your only plan for safety is to wrap your cloak around you, and lie down flat on the ground. If your home were but a few hundred yards off, you might lose your life in the attempt to reach it."

"Well, then, we owe you thanks, old Kumpan," said the knight, though it was with difficulty he made his words heard above the roaring of the storm; "we owe you thanks for taking us this round as we shall thus be enabled to reach our destination without danger."

"You may feel sure of that, noble sir," said the old man, "By midnight we shall have arrived, and that without any danger by the way, if——" Suddenly the old man stopped, he drew his horse sharply up, and remained in an attitude of attentive listening.

"It appears to me we must be in the neighbourhood of some village," said Franz von Kronstein; "for between the gusts of the storm I hear a dog howling."

"It is no dog, it is no dog!" said the old man uneasily, and urged his horse to a rapid pace. "For miles around there is no human dwelling; and except in the castle of Klatka, which indeed lies in the neighbourhood, but has been deserted for

more than a century, probably no one has lived here since the creation. But there again," he continued; "well, if I wasn't sure of it from the first."

"That howling seems to bother you, old Kumpan," said the knight, listening to a long-drawn fierce sound, which appeared nearer than before, and seemed to be answered from a distance.

"That howling comes from no dogs," replied the old guide uneasily. "Those are reed-wolves; they may be on our track; and it would be as well if the gentlemen looked to their firearms."

"Reed-wolves? What do you mean?" inquired Franz in surprise.

"At the edge of this wood," said Kumpan, "there lies a lake about a mile long, whose banks are covered with reeds. In these a number of wolves have taken up their quarters, and feed on wild birds, fish, and such like. They are shy in the summer-time, and a boy of twelve might scare them; but when the birds migrate, and the fish are frozen up, they prowl about at night, and then they are dangerous. They are worst, however, when the Boreas rages, for then it is just as if the fiend himself possessed them: they are so mad and fierce that man and beast become alike their victims; and a party of them have been known even to attack the ferocious bears of these mountains, and, what is more, to come off victorious."

The howl was again repeated more distinctly, and from two opposite directions. The riders in alarm felt for their pistols and the old man grasped the spear which hung at his saddle.

"We must keep close to the litter; the wolves are very near us," whispered the guide. The riders turned their horses, surrounded the litter, and the knight informed the ladies, in a few quieting words, of the cause of this movement.

"Then we *shall* have an adventure—some little variety!" cried Franziska with sparkling eyes.

"How can you talk so foolishly?" said Bertha in alarm.

"Are we not under manly protection? Is not Cousin Franz on our side?" said the other mockingly.

"See, there is a light gleaming among the twigs; and there is another," cried Bertha. "There must be people close to us."

"No, no," cried the guide quickly. "Shut up the door, ladies. Keep close together, gentlemen. It is the eyes of wolves you

see sparkling there." The gentlemen looked towards the thick underwood, in which every now and then little bright spots appeared, such as in summer would have been taken for glow-worms; it was just the same greenish-yellow light, but less unsteady, and there were always two flames together. The horses began to be restive, they kicked and dragged at the rein; but the mules behaved tolerably well.

"I will fire on the beasts, and teach them to keep their distance," said Franz, pointing to the spot where the lights were thickest.

"Hold, hold, Sir Baron!" cried Kumpan quickly, and seized the young man's arm. "You would bring such a host together by the report, that, encouraged by numbers, they would be sure to make the first assault. However, keep your arms in readiness and if an old she-wolf springs out—for these always lead the attack—take good aim and kill her, for then there must be no further hesitation." By this time the horses were almost unmanageable, and terror had also infected the mules. Just as Franz was turning towards the litter to say a word to his cousin, an animal about the size of a large hound, sprang from the thicket and seized the foremost mule.

"Fire, Baron! A wolf!" shouted the guide.

The young man fired, and the wolf fell to the ground. A fearful howl rang through the wood.

"Now, forward! Forward without a moment's delay!" cried Kumpan. "We have not above five minutes' time. The beasts will tear their wounded comrade to pieces, and, if they are very hungry, partially devour her. We shall, in the meantime, gain a little start, and it is not more than an hour's ride to the end of the forest. There—do you see—there are the towers of Klatka between the trees—out there where the moon is rising, and from that point the wood becomes less dense."

The travellers endeavoured to increase their pace to the utmost, but the litter retarded their progress. Bertha was weeping with fear, and even Franziska's courage had diminished, for she sat very still. Franz endeavoured to reassure them. They had not proceeded many moments when the howling recommenced, and approached nearer and nearer.

"There they are again and fiercer and more numerous than before," cried the guide in alarm.



The lights were soon visible again, and certainly in greater numbers. The wood had already become less thick, and the snow-storm having ceased, the moonbeams discovered many a dusky form amongst the trees, keeping together like a pack of hounds and advancing nearer and nearer till they were within twenty paces, and on the very path of the travellers. From time to time a fierce howl arose from their centre which was answered by the whole pack, and was at length taken up by single voices in the distance.

The party now found themselves some few hundred yards from the ruined castle of which Kumpan had spoken. It was, or seemed by moonlight to be, of some magnitude. Near the tolerably preserved principal building lay the ruins of a church which must have once been beautiful, placed on a little hillock dotted with single oak-trees and bramble-bushes. Both castle and church were still partially roofed in, and a path led from the castle gate to an old oak-tree, where it joined at right angles the one along which the travellers were advancing.

The old guide seemed in much perplexity.

"We are in great danger, noble sir," said he. "The wolves will very soon make a general attack. There will then be only one way of escape; leaving the mules to their fate, and taking the young ladies on your horses."

"That would be all very well, if I had not thought of a better plan," replied the knight. "Here is the ruined castle; we can surely reach that, and then, blocking up the gates, we must just await the morning."

"Here? In the ruins of Klatka?—Not for all the wolves in the world!" cried the old man. "Even by daylight no one likes to approach the place, and, now, by night!—The castle, Sir Knight, has a bad name."

"On account of robbers?" asked Franz,

"No; it is haunted," replied the other.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the baron. "Forward to the ruins; there is not a moment to be lost."

And this was indeed the case. The ferocious beasts were but a few steps behind the travellers. Every now and then they retired, and set up a ferocious howl. The party had just arrived at the old oak before mentioned and were about to

turn into the path to the ruins, when the animals, as though perceiving the risk they ran of losing their prey, came so near that a lance could easily have struck them. The knight and Franz faced sharply about, spurring their horses amidst the advancing crowds, when suddenly from the shadow of the oak stepped forth a man who in a few strides placed himself between the travellers and their pursuers. As far as one could see in the dusky light the stranger was a man of a tall and well-built frame; he wore a sword by his side and a broad-brimmed hat was on his head. If the party were astonished by his sudden appearance, they were still more so at what followed. As soon as the stranger appeared the wolves gave over their pursuit, tumbled over each other, and set up a fearful howl. The stranger now raised his hand, appeared to wave it, and the wild animals crawled back into the thickets like a pack of beaten hounds.

Without casting a glance at the travellers, who were too much overcome by astonishment to speak, the stranger went up the path which led to the castle and soon disappeared beneath the gateway.

"Heaven have mercy on us!" murmured old Kumpan in his beard, as he made the sign of the cross.

"Who was that strange man?" asked the knight with surprise, when he had watched the stranger as long as he was visible, and the party had resumed their way.

The old guide pretended not to understand, and riding up to the mules, busied himself with arranging the harness, which had become disordered in their haste; more than a quarter of an hour elapsed before he rejoined them.

"Did you know the man who met us near the ruins and who freed us from our four-footed pursuers in such a miraculous way?" asked Franz of the guide.

"Do I know him? No, noble sir; I never saw him before," replied the guide hesitatingly.

"He looked like a soldier, and was armed," said the baron, "Is the castle, then, inhabited?"

"Not for the last hundred years," replied the other. "It was dismantled because the possessor in those days had iniquitous dealings with some Turkish-Sclavonian hordes, who had advanced as far as this; or rather"—he corrected himself

hastily—"he is said to have had such, for he might have been as upright and good a man as ever ate cheese fried in butter."

"And who is now the possessor of the ruins and of these woods?" inquired the knight.

"Who but yourself, noble sir?" replied Kumpan. "For more than two hours we have been on your estate, and we shall soon reach the end of the wood."

"We hear and see nothing more of the wolves," said the baron after a pause. "Even their howling has ceased. The adventure with the stranger still remains to me inexplicable, even if one were to suppose him a huntsman——"

"Yes, yes; that is most likely what he is," interrupted the guide hastily, whilst he looked uneasily round him. "The brave good man, who came so opportunely to our assistance, must have been a huntsman. Oh, there are many powerful woodsmen in this neighbourhood! Heaven be praised!" he continued, taking a deep breath, "there is the end of the wood, and in a short hour we shall be safely housed."

And so it happened. Before an hour had elapsed the party passed through a well-built village, the principal spot on the estate, towards the venerable castle, the windows of which were brightly illuminated, and at the door stood the steward and other dependants, who, having received their new lord with every expression of respect, conducted the party to the splendidly furnished apartments.

Nearly four weeks passed before the travelling adventure again came on the *tapis*. The knight and Franz found such constant employment in looking over all the particulars of the large estate, and endeavouring to introduce various German improvements, that they were very little at home. At first Franziska was charmed with everything in a neighbourhood so entirely new and unknown. It appeared to her so romantic, so very different from her German Fatherland, that she took the greatest interest in everything, and often drew comparisons between the countries, which generally ended unfavourably for Germany. Bertha was of exactly the contrary opinion: she laughed at her cousin, and said that her liking for novelty and strange sights must indeed have come to a pass when she preferred hovels in which the smoke went out

of the doors and windows instead of the chimney, walls covered with soot, and inhabitants not much cleaner, and of unmannerly habits, to the comfortable dwellings and polite people of Germany. However, Franziska persisted in her notions, and replied that everything in Austria was flat, *ennuyant*, and common; and that a wild peasant here, with his rough coat of skin, had ten times more interest for her than a quiet Austrian in his holiday suit, the mere sight of whom was enough to make one yawn.

As soon as the knight had got the first arrangements into some degree of order the party found themselves more together again. Franz continued to show great attention to his cousin, which, however, she received with little gratitude, for she made him the butt of all her fanciful humours, that soon returned when after a longer sojourn she had become more accustomed to her new life. Many excursions into the neighbourhood were undertaken but there was little variety in the scenery, and these soon ceased to amuse.

The party were one day assembled in the old-fashioned hall, dinner had just been removed, and they were arranging in which direction they should ride. "I have it," cried Franziska suddenly, "I wonder we never thought before of going to view by day the spot where we fell in with our night-adventure with wolves and the Mysterious Stranger."

"You mean a visit to the ruins—what were they called?" said the knight.

"Castle Klatka," cried Franziska gaily. "Oh, we really must ride there! It will be so charming to go over again by daylight, and in safety, the ground where we had such a dreadful fright."

"Bring round the horses," said the knight to a servant; "and tell the steward to come to me immediately." The latter, an old man, soon after entered the room.

"We intend taking a ride to Klatka," said the knight; "we had an adventure there on our road——"

"So old Kumpan told me," interrupted the steward.

"And what do you say about it?" asked the knight.

"I really don't know what to say," replied the old man, shaking his head. "I was a youth of twenty when I first came to this castle, and now my hair is grey; half a century has

elapsed during that time. Hundreds of times my duty has called me into the neighbourhood of those ruins, but never have I seen the Fiend of Klatka."

"What do you say? Whom do you call by that name?" inquired Franziska, whose love of adventure and romance was strongly awakened.

"Why, people call by that name the ghost or spirit who is supposed to haunt the ruins," replied the steward. "They say he only shows himself on moon-light nights——"

"That is quite natural," interrupted Franz smiling. "Ghosts can never bear the light of day; and if the moon did not shine, how could the ghost be seen, for it is not supposed that anyone for a mere freak would visit the ruins by torch-light."

"There are some credulous people who pretend to have seen this ghost," continued the steward. "Huntsmen and woodcutters say they have met him by the large oak on the cross-path. That, noble sir, is supposed to be the spot he inclines most to haunt, for the tree was planted in remembrance of the man who fell there."

"And who was he?" asked Franziska with increasing curiosity.

"The last owner of the castle, which at that time was a sort of robbers' den, and the headquarters of all depredators in the neighbourhood," answered the old man. "They say this man was of superhuman strength, and was feared not only on account of his passionate temper, but of his treaties with the Turkish hordes. Any young woman, too, in the neighbourhood to whom he took a fancy, was carried off to his tower and never heard of more. When the measure of his iniquity was full, the whole neighbourhood rose in a mass, besieged his stronghold, and at length he was slain on the spot where the huge oak tree now stands."

"I wonder they did not burn the whole castle, so as to erase the very memory of it," said the knight.

"It was a dependency of the church, and that saved it," replied the other. "Your great-grandfather afterwards took possession of it, for it had fine lands attached. As the Knight of Klatka was of good family, a monument was erected to him in the church, which now lies as much in ruin as the castle itself."

"Oh, let us set off at once! Nothing shall prevent my

visiting so interesting a spot," said Franziska eagerly. "The imprisoned damsels who never reappeared, the storming of the tower, the death of the knight, the nightly wanderings of his spirit round the old oak, and lastly, our own adventure, all draw me thither with an indescribable curiosity."

When a servant announced that the horses were at the door, the young girls tripped laughingly down the steps which led to the coachyard. Franz, the knight, and a servant well acquainted with the country followed; and in a few minutes the party was on the road to the forest.

The sun was still high in the heavens when they saw the towers of Klatka rising above the trees. Everything in the wood was still except the cheerful twitterings of the birds as they hopped about amongst the bursting buds and leaves and announced that spring had arrived.

The party soon found themselves near the old oak at the bottom of the hill on which stood the towers, still imposing in their ruin. Ivy and bramble bushes had wound themselves over the walls, and forced their deep roots so firmly between the stones that they in a great measure held these together. On the top of the highest spot a small bush in its young fresh verdure swayed lightly in the breeze.

The gentlemen assisted their companions to alight, and leaving the horses to the care of the servant, ascended the hill to the castle. After having explored this in every nook and cranny, and spent much time in a vain search for some trace of the extraordinary stranger whom Franziska declared she was determined to discover, they proceeded to an inspection of the adjoining church. This they found to have better withstood the ravages of time and weather; the nave, indeed, was in complete dilapidation, but the chancel and altar were still under roof, as well as a sort of chapel which appeared to have been a place of honour for the families of the old knights of the castle. Few traces remained, however, of the magnificent painted glass which must once have adorned the windows, and the wind entered at pleasure through the open spaces.

The party were occupied for some time in deciphering the inscriptions on a number of tombstones, and on the walls principally within the chancel. They were generally memorials of the ancient lords, with figures of men in armour, and

women and children of all ages. A flying raven and various other devices were placed at the corners. One gravestone, which stood close to the entrance of the chancel, differed widely from the others: there was no figure sculptured on it, and the inscription, which on all besides was a mere mass of flattering eulogies, was here simple and unadorned; it contained only these words: "Ezzelin von Klatka fell like a knight at the storming of the castle"—on such a day and year.

"That must be the monument of the knight whose ghost is said to haunt these ruins," cried Franziska eagerly. "What a pity he is not represented in the same way as the others—I should so like to have known what he was like!"

"Oh, there is the family vault, with steps leading down to it, and the sun is lighting it up through a crevice," said Franz, stepping from the adjoining vestry.

The whole party followed him down the eight or nine steps which led to a tolerably airy chamber, where were placed a number of coffins of all sizes, some of them crumbling into dust. Here, again, one close to the door was distinguished from the others by the simplicity of its design, the freshness of its appearance, and the brief inscription "Ezzelinus de Klatka, Eques."

As not the slightest effluvium was perceptible, they lingered some time in the vault; and when they reascended to the church, they had a long talk over the old possessors of whom the knight now remembered he had heard his parents speak. The sun had disappeared, and the moon was just rising as the explorers turned to leave the ruins. Bertha had made a step into the nave, when she uttered a slight exclamation of fear and surprise. Her eyes fell on a man who wore a hat with drooping feathers, a sword at his side, and a short cloak of somewhat old-fashioned cut over his shoulders. The stranger leaned carelessly on a broken column at the entrance; he did not appear to take any notice of the party; and the moon shone full on his pale face.

The party advanced towards the stranger.

"If I am not mistaken," commenced the knight; "we have met before."

Not a word from the unknown.

"You released us in an almost miraculous manner," said Franziska, "from the power of those dreadful wolves. Am I

wrong in supposing it is to you we are indebted for that great service?"

"The beasts are afraid of me," replied the stranger in a deep fierce voice, while he fastened his sunken eyes on the girl, without taking any notice of the others.

"Then you are probably a huntsman," said Franz, "and wage war against the fierce brutes."

"Who is not either the pursuer or the pursued? All persecute or are persecuted, and Fate persecutes all," replied the stranger without looking at him.

"Do you live in these ruins?" asked the knight hesitatingly.

"Yes; but not to the destruction of your game, as you may fear, Knight of Fahrenberg," said the unknown contemptuously. "Be quite assured of this; your property shall remain untouched——"

"Oh! my father did not mean that," interrupted Franziska, who appeared to take the liveliest interest in the stranger. "Unfortunate events and sad experiences have, no doubt, induced you to take up your abode in these ruins, of which my father would by no means dispossess you."

"Your father is very good, if that is what he meant," said the stranger in his former tone; and it seemed as though his dark features were drawn into a slight smile; "but people of my sort are rather difficult to turn out."

"You must live very uncomfortably here," said Franziska, half-vexed, for she thought her polite speech had deserved a better reply.

"My dwelling is not exactly uncomfortable, only somewhat small—still quite suitable for quiet people," said the unknown with a kind of sneer. "I am not, however, always quiet; I sometimes pine to quit the narrow space, and then I dash away through forest and field, over hill and dale; and the time when I must return to my little dwelling always comes too soon for me."

"As you now and then leave your dwelling," said the knight, "I would invite you to visit us, if I knew——"

"That I was in a station to admit of your doing so," interrupted the other; and the knight started slightly, for the stranger had exactly expressed the half-formed thought. "I lament," he continued coldly, "that I am not able to give you particulars on this point—some difficulties stand in the way;



be assured, however, that I am a knight, and of at least as ancient a family as yourself."

"Then you must not refuse our request," cried Franziska, highly interested in the strange manners of the unknown, "You must come and visit us."

"I am no boon-companion, and on that account few have invited me of late," replied the other with his peculiar smile; "besides, I generally remain at home during the day; that is my time for rest. I belong, you must know, to that class of persons who turn day into night, and night into day, and who love everything uncommon and peculiar."

"Really? So do I! And for that reason, you must visit us," cried Franziska. "Now," she continued smiling, "I suppose you have just risen, and are taking your morning airing. Well, since the moon is your sun, pray pay a frequent visit to our castle by the light of its rays. I think we shall agree very well, and that it will be very nice for us to be acquainted."

"You wish it?—You press the invitation?" asked the stranger earnestly and decidedly.

"To be sure, for otherwise you will not come," replied the young lady shortly.

"Well, then, come I will!" said the other, again fixing his gaze on her. "If my company does not please you at any time, you will have yourself to blame for an acquaintance with one who seldom forces himself, but is difficult to shake off."

When the unknown had concluded these words he made a slight motion with his hand, as though to take leave of them, and passing under the doorway, disappeared among the ruins. The party soon after mounted their horses and took the road home.

It was evening of the following day, and all were again seated in the hall of the castle. Bertha had that day received good news. The knight Woislav had written from Hungary that the war with the Turks would soon be brought to a conclusion during the year, and that although he had intended returning to Silesia, hearing of the Knight of Fahnenberg having gone to take possession of his new estates, he should follow the family there, not doubting that Bertha accompanied her friend. He hinted that he stood so high in the opinion of his duke on account of his valuable services, that in future his duties would be even more important and extensive;

but before settling down to them, he should come and claim Bertha's promise to become his wife. He had been much enriched by his master, as well as by booty taken from the Turks. Having formerly lost his right hand in the duke's service, he had essayed to fight with his left; but this did not succeed very admirably and so he had an iron one made by a very clever artist. This hand performed many of the functions of a natural one, but there had been still much wanting; now, however, his master had presented him with one of gold, an extraordinary work of art, produced by a celebrated Italian mechanic. The knight described it as something marvellous, especially as to the superhuman strength with which it enabled him to use the sword and lance. Franziska naturally rejoiced in the happiness of her friend, who had had no news of her betrothed for a long time before. She launched out every now and then, partly to plague Franz, and partly to express her own feelings, in the highest praise and admiration of the bravery and enterprise of the knight, whose adventurous qualities she lauded to the skies. Even the scar on his face and his want of a right hand were reckoned as virtues; and Franziska at last saucily declared that a rather ugly man was infinitely more attractive to her than a handsome one, for as a general rule handsome men were conceited and effeminate. Thus, she added, no one could term their acquaintance of the night before handsome, but attractive and interesting he certainly was. Franz and Bertha simultaneously denied this. His gloomy appearance, the deadly hue of his complexion, the tone of his voice, were each in turn depreciated by Bertha, while Franz found fault with the contempt and arrogance obvious in his speech. The knight stood between the two parties. He thought there was something in his bearing that spoke of good family, though much could not be said for his politeness; however, the man might have had trials enough in his life to make him misanthropical. Whilst they were conversing in this way, the door suddenly opened and the subject of their remarks himself walked in.

"Pardon me, Sir Knight," he said coldly, "that I come, if not uninvited, at least unannounced; there was no one in the ante-chamber to do me that service."

The brilliantly lighted chamber gave a full view of the stranger. He was a man of about forty, tall, and extremely

thin. His features could not be termed uninteresting—there lay in them something bold and daring—but the expression was on the whole anything but benevolent. There were contempt and sarcasm in the cold grey eyes, whose glance, however, was at times so piercing that no one could endure it long. His complexion was even more peculiar than the features: it could neither be called pale nor yellow; it was a sort of grey, or, so to speak, dirty white, like that of an Indian who has been suffering long from fever; and was rendered still more remarkable by the intense blackness of his beard and short cropped hair. The dress of the unknown was knightly but old-fashioned and neglected; there were great spots of rust on the collar and breastplate of his armour, and his dagger and the hilt of his finely worked sword were marked in some places with mildew. As the party were just going to supper, it was only natural to invite the stranger to partake of it; he complied, however, only in so far that he seated himself at the table, for he ate no morsel. The knight, with some surprise, inquired the reason.

“For a long time past I have accustomed myself never to eat at night,” he replied with a strange smile. “My digestion is quite unused to solids, and indeed would scarcely confront them. I live entirely on liquids.”

“Oh, then we can empty a bumper of Rhine-wine together,” cried the host.

“Thanks; but I neither drink wine nor any cold beverage,” replied the other; and his tone was full of mockery. It appeared as if there was some amusing association connected with the idea.

“Then I will order you a cup of hippocras”—a warm drink composed of herbs—“it shall be ready immediately,” said Franziska.

“Many thanks, fair lady, not at present,” replied the other. “But if I refuse the beverage you offer me now, you may be assured that as soon as I require it—perhaps very soon—I will request that, or some other of you.”

Bertha and Franz thought the man had something inexpressibly repulsive in his whole manner, and they had no inclination to engage him in conversation; but the baron, thinking that perhaps politeness required him to say something, turned towards the guest, and commenced in a friendly

tone: "It is now many weeks since we first became acquainted with you; we then had to thank you for a singular service——"

"And I have not yet told you my name, although you would gladly know it," interrupted the other dryly. "I am called Azzo; and as"—this he said again with his ironical smile—"with the permission of the Knight of Fahrenberg, I live at the Castle of Klatka, you can in future call me Azzo von Klatka."

"I only wonder you do not feel lonely and uncomfortable amongst those old walls," began Bertha. "I cannot understand——"

"Why my business is there? Oh, about that I will willingly give you some information since you and the young gentleman there take such a kindly interest in my person," replied the unknown in his tone of sarcasm.

Franz and Bertha both stared, for he had revealed their thoughts as though he could read their souls. "You see, my lady," he continued, "there are a variety of strange whims in the world. As I have already said, I love what is peculiar and uncommon, at least what would appear so to you. It is wrong in the main to be astonished at anything, for, viewed in one light, all things are alike; even life and death, this side of the grave and the other, have more resemblance than you would imagine. You perhaps consider me rather touched a little in my mind, for taking up my abode with the bat and the owl; but if so, why not consider every hermit and recluse insane? You will tell me that those are holy men. I certainly have no pretension that way; but as they find pleasure in praying and singing psalms, so I amuse myself with hunting. Oh, away in the pale moonlight, on a horse that never tires, over hill and dale, through forest and woodland! I rush among the wolves, which fly at my approach, as you yourself perceived, as though they were puppies fearful of the lash."

"But still it must be lonely, very lonely for you," remarked Bertha.

"So it would by day; but I am then asleep," replied the stranger dryly; "at night I am merry enough."

"You hunt in an extraordinary way," remarked Franz hesitatingly,

"Yes, but, nevertheless, I have no communication with robbers, as you seem to imagine," replied Azzo coldly.

Franz again started—that very thought had just crossed his mind. "Oh, I beg your pardon; I do not know——" he stammered.

"What to make of me," interrupted the other. "You would therefore do well to believe just what I tell you, or at least to avoid making conjectures of your own, which will lead to nothing."

"I understand you. I know how to value your ideas, if no one else does," cried Franziska eagerly. "The humdrum, everyday life of the generality of men is repulsive to you; you have tasted the joys and pleasures of life, at least what are so called, and you have found them tame and hollow. How soon one tires of the things one sees all around! Life consists in change. Only in what is new, uncommon, and peculiar, do the flowers of the spirit bloom and give forth scent. Even pain may become a pleasure if it saves one from the shallow monotony of everyday life—a thing I shall hate till the hour of my death."

"Right, fair lady—quite right! Remain in this mind: this was always my opinion, and the one from which I have derived the highest reward," cried Azzo; and his fierce eyes sparkled more intensely than ever. "I am doubly pleased to have found in you a person who shares my ideas. Oh, if you were a man, you would make me a splendid companion; but even a woman may have fine experiences when once these opinions take root in her, and bring forth action!"

As Azzo spoke these words in a cold tone of politeness, he turned from the subject, and for the rest of his visit only gave the knight monosyllabic replies to his inquiries, taking leave before the table was cleared. To an invitation from the knight, backed by a still more pressing one from Franziska to repeat his visit, he replied that he would take advantage of their kindness, and come sometimes.

When the stranger had departed, many were the remarks made on his appearance and general deportment. Franz declared his most decided dislike of him. Whether it was as usual to vex her cousin, or whether Azzo had really made an impression on her, Franziska took his part vehemently. As Franz contradicted her more eagerly than usual, the young

lady launched out into still stronger expressions; and there is no knowing what hard words her cousin might have received had not a servant entered the room.

The following morning Franziska lay longer than usual in bed. When her friend went to her room, fearful lest she should be ill, she found her pale and exhausted. Franziska complained she had passed a very bad night; she thought the dispute with Franz about the stranger must have excited her greatly, for she felt quite feverish and exhausted, and a strange dream, too, had worried her, which was evidently a consequence of the evening's conversation. Bertha, as usual, took the young man's part, and added that a common dispute about a man whom no one knew, and about whom anyone might form his own opinion, could not possibly have thrown her into her present state. "At least," she continued, "you can let me hear this wonderful dream."

To her surprise, Franziska for a length of time refused to do so.

"Come, tell me," inquired Bertha, "what can possibly prevent you from relating a dream—a mere dream? I might almost think it credible, if the idea were not too horrid, that poor Franz is not very far wrong when he says that the thin, corpse-like, dried-up, old-fashioned stranger has made a greater impression on you than you will allow."

"Did Franz say so?" asked Franziska. "Then you can tell him he is not mistaken. Yes, the thin, corpse-like, dried-up, whimsical stranger is far more interesting to me than the rosy-cheeked, well-dressed, polite, and prosy cousin."

"Strange," cried Bertha, "I cannot at all comprehend the almost magic influence which this man, so repulsive, exercises over you."

"Perhaps the very reason I take his part, may be that you are all so prejudiced against him," remarked Franziska pettishly. "Yes, it must be so; for that his appearance should please my eyes is what no one in his senses could imagine. But," she continued, smiling and holding out her hand to Bertha, "is it not laughable that I should get out of temper even with you about this stranger?—I can more easily understand it with Franz—and that this unknown should spoil my morning, as he has already spoiled my evening and my night's rest?"

"By that dream, you mean?" said Bertha, easily appeased, as she put her arm round her cousin's neck and kissed her. "Now, do tell it to me. You know how I delight in hearing anything of the kind."

"Well, I will, as a sort of compensation for my peevishness towards you," said the other, clasping her friend's hands. "Now, listen! I had walked up and down my room for a long time; I was excited—out of spirits—I do not know exactly what. It was almost midnight ere I lay down, but I could not sleep. I tossed about, and at length it was only from sheer exhaustion that I dropped off. But what a sleep it was! An inward fear ran through me perpetually. I saw a number of pictures before me, as I used to do in childish sicknesses. I do not know whether I was asleep or half awake. Then I dreamed, but as clearly as if I had been wide awake, that a sort of mist filled the room, and out of it stepped the knight Azzo. He gazed at me for a time, and then letting himself slowly down on one knee, imprinted a kiss on my throat. Long did his lips rest there; and I felt a slight pain, which always increased until I could bear it no more. With all my strength I tried to force the vision from me, but succeeded only after a long struggle. No doubt I uttered a scream, for that awoke me from my trance. When I came a little to my senses I felt a sort of superstitious fear creeping over me—how great you may imagine when I tell you that, with my eyes open and awake, it appeared to me as if Azzo's figure were still by my bed, and then disappearing gradually into the mist, vanished at the door!"

"You must have dreamed very heavily, my poor friend," began Bertha, but suddenly paused. She gazed with surprise at Franziska's throat. "Why, what is that?" she cried. "Just look: how extraordinary—a red streak on your throat!"

Franziska raised herself, and went to a little glass that stood in the window. She really saw a small red line about an inch long on her neck, which began to smart when she touched it with her finger.

"I must have hurt myself by some means in my sleep," she said after a pause; "and that in some measure will account for my dream."

The friends continued chatting for some time about this

singular coincidence—the dream and the stranger; and at length it was all turned into a joke by Bertha.

Several weeks passed. The knight had found the estate and affairs in greater disorder than he at first imagined; and instead of remaining three or four weeks, as was originally intended, their departure was deferred to an indefinite period. This postponement was likewise in some measure occasioned by Franziska's continued indisposition. She who had formerly bloomed like a rose in its young fresh beauty was becoming daily thinner, more sickly and exhausted, and at the same time so pale, that in the space of a month not a tinge of red was perceptible on the once glowing cheek. The knight's anxiety about her was extreme, and the best advice was procured which the age and country afforded; but all to no purpose. Franziska complained from time to time that the horrible dream with which her illness commenced was repeated, and that always on the day following she felt an increased and indescribable weakness. Bertha naturally set this down to the effects of fever, but the ravages of that fever on the usually clear reason of her friend filled her with alarm.

The knight Azzo repeated his visits every now and then. He always came in the evening, and when the moon shone brightly. His manner was always the same. He spoke in monosyllables, and was coldly polite to the knight; to Franz and Bertha, particularly to the former, contemptuous and haughty; but to Franziska, friendliness itself. Often when, after a short visit, he again left the house, his peculiarities became the subject of conversation. Besides his odd way of speaking, in which Bertha said there lay a deep hatred, a cold detestation of all mankind with the exception of Franziska, two other singularities were observable. During none of his visits, which often took place at supper-time, had he been prevailed upon to eat or drink anything, and that without giving any good reason for his abstinence. A remarkable alteration, too, had taken place in his appearance: he seemed an entirely different creature. The skin, before so shrivelled and stretched, seemed smooth and soft, while a slight tinge of red appeared in his cheeks, which began to look round and plump. Bertha, who could not at all conceal her ill-will towards him, said often, that much as she hated his face before, when it was more like



a death's-head than a human being's, it was now more than ever repulsive; she always felt a shudder run through her veins whenever his sharp piercing eyes rested on her. Perhaps it was owing to Franziska's partiality, or to the knight Azzo's own contemptuous way of replying to Franz, or to his haughty way of treating him in general, that made the young man dislike him more and more. It was quite observable that whenever Franz made a remark to his cousin in the presence of Azzo, the latter would immediately throw some ill-natured light on it or distort it to a totally different meaning. This increased from day to day, and at last Franz declared to Bertha that he would stand such conduct no longer, and that it was only out of consideration for Franziska that he had not already called him to account.

At this time the party at the castle was increased by the arrival of Bertha's long-expected guest. He came just as they were sitting down to supper one evening, and all jumped up to greet their old friend. The knight Woislav was a true model of the soldier, hardened and strengthened by war with men and elements. His face would not have been termed ugly, if a Turkish sabre had not left a mark running from the right eye to the left cheek, and standing out bright red from the sun-burned skin. The frame of the Castellan of Glogau might almost be termed colossal. Few would have been able to carry his armour, and still fewer move with his lightness and ease under its weight. He did not think little of this same armour for it had been a present from the palatine of Hungary on his leaving the camp. The blue wrought-steel was ornamented all over with patterns in gold; and he had put it on to do honour to his bride-elect, together with the wonderful gold hand, the gift of the duke.

Woislav was questioned by the knight and Franz on all the concerns of the campaign; and he entered into the most minute particulars relating to the battles, which, with regard to plunder, had been more successful than ever. He spoke much of the strength of the Turks in a hand-to-hand fight, and remarked that he owed the duke many thanks for his splendid gift, for in consequence of its strength many of the enemy regarded him as something superhuman. The sickliness and deathlike paleness of Franziska was too perceptible not to be immediately noticed by Woislav; accustomed to see her

so fresh and cheerful, he hastened to inquire into the cause of the change. Bertha related all that had happened, and Woislaw listened with the greatest interest. This increased to the utmost at the account of the often-repeated dream, and Franziska had to give him the most minute particulars of it; it appeared he had met with a similar case before, or at least had heard of one. When the young lady added that it was very remarkable that the wound on her throat which she had at first felt, had never healed, and still pained her, the knight Woislaw looked at Bertha as much as to say that this last fact had greatly strengthened his idea as to the cause of Franziska's illness.

It was only natural that the discourse should next turn to the knight Azzo, about whom everyone began to talk eagerly. Woislaw inquired as minutely as he had done with regard to Franziska's illness about what concerned this stranger, from the first evening of their acquaintance down to his last visit, without, however, giving any opinion on the subject. The party were still in earnest conversation, when the door opened, and Azzo entered. Woislaw's eyes remained fixed on him, as he, without taking any particular notice of the new arrival, walked up to the table, and seating himself, directed most of the conversation to Franziska and her father, and now and then made some sarcastic remark when Franz began to speak. The Turkish war again came on the *tapis*, and though Azzo only put in an occasional remark, Woislaw had much to say on the subject. Thus they had advanced late into the night, and Franz said, smiling, to Woislaw: "I should not wonder if day had surprised us, whilst listening to your entertaining adventures."

"I admire the young gentleman's taste," said Azzo, with an ironical curl of the lip. "Stories of storm and shipwreck are, indeed, best heard on terra firma, and those of battle and death at a hospitable table or in the chimney-corner. One has then the comfortable feeling of keeping a whole skin, and being in no danger, not even of taking cold." With the last words, he gave a hoarse laugh, and turning his back on Franz rose, bowed to the rest of the company, and left the room. The knight, who always accompanied Azzo to the door, now expressed himself fatigued, and bade his friends good night.

"That Azzo's impertinence is unbearable," cried Bertha,

when he was gone. "He becomes daily more rough, unpolite, and presuming. If only on account of Franziska's dreams, though of course he cannot help that, I detest him. Now, tonight, not one civil word has he spoken to anyone but Franziska, except, perhaps, some casual remark to my uncle."

"I cannot deny that you are right, Bertha," said her cousin. "One may forgive much to a man whom fate had probably made somewhat misanthropical; but he should not overstep the bounds of common politeness. But where on earth is Franz?" added Franziska, as she looked uneasily round. The young man had quietly left the room whilst Bertha was speaking.

"He cannot have followed the knight Azzo to challenge him?" cried Bertha in alarm.

"It were better he entered a lion's den to pull his mane!" said Woislav vehemently. "I must follow him instantly," he added, as he rushed from the room.

He hastened over the threshold, out of the castle, and through the court before he came up to them. Here a narrow bridge with a slight balustrade passed over the moat by which the castle was surrounded. It appeared that Franz had only just addressed Azzo in a few hot words, for as Woislav, unperceived by either, advanced under the shadow of the wall, Azzo said gloomily: "Leave me, foolish boy—leave me; for by that sun"—and he pointed to the full moon above them—"you will see those rays no more if you linger another moment on my path."

"And I tell you, wretch, that you either give me satisfaction for your repeated insolence, or you die," cried Franz, drawing his sword.

Azzo stretched forth his hand, and grasping the sword in the middle, it snapped like a broken reed. "I warn you for the last time," he said in a voice of thunder as he threw the pieces into the moat. "Now, away—away, boy, from my path, or, by those below us, you are lost!"

"You or I! You or I!" cried Franz madly as he made a rush at the sword of his antagonist and strove to draw it from his side. Azzo replied not; only a bitter laugh half-escaped from his lips; then seizing Franz by the chest, he lifted him up like an infant, and was in the act of throwing

him over the bridge when Woislav stepped to his side. With a grasp of his wonderful hand, into the springs of which he threw all his strength, he seized Azzo's arm, pulled it down, and obliged him to drop his victim. Azzo seemed in the highest degree astonished. Without concerning himself further about Franz, he gazed in amazement on Woislav.

"Who art thou who darest to rob me of my prey?" he asked hesitatingly. "Is it possible? Can you be——"

"Ask not, thou bloody one! Go, and seek thy nourishment! Soon comes thy hour!" replied Woislav in a calm but firm tone.

"Ha, now I know!" cried Azzo eagerly. "Welcome, blood-brother! I give up to you this worm, and for your sake will not crush him. Farewell; our paths will soon meet again."

"Soon, very soon; farewell!" cried Woislav, drawing Franz towards him. Azzo rushed away and disappeared.

Franz had remained for some moments in a state of stupefaction, but suddenly started as from a dream. "I am dishonoured, dishonoured forever!" he cried, as he pressed his clenched hands to his forehead.

"Calm yourself; you could not have conquered," said Woislav.

"But I will conquer, or perish," cried Franz incensed. "I will seek this adventurer in his den, and he or I must fall."

"You could not hurt him," said Woislav. "You would infallibly be the victim."

"Then show me a way to bring the wretch to judgment," cried Franz, seizing Woislav's hands, while tears of anger sprang to his eyes. "Disgraced as I am, I cannot live."

"You shall be revenged, and that within twenty-four hours, I hope; but only on two conditions——"

"I agree to them! I will do anything——" began the young man eagerly.

"The first is, that you do nothing, but leave everything in my hands," interrupted Woislav. "The second, that you will assist me in persuading Franziska to do what I shall represent to her as absolutely necessary. That young lady's life is in more danger from Azzo than your own."

"How? What?" cried Franz fiercely. "Franziska's life in danger! And from that man? Tell me, Woislav, who is this fiend?"

"Not a word shall I tell either the young lady or you, until the danger is passed," said Woislaw firmly. "The smallest indiscretion would ruin everything. No one can act here but Franziska herself, and if she refuses to do so she is irretrievably lost."

"Speak, and I will help you, I will do all you wish, but I must know——"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," replied Woislaw. "I must have both you and Franziska yield to me unconditionally. Come now, come to her. You are to be mute on what has passed, and use every effort to induce her to accede to my proposal."

Woislaw spoke firmly, and it was impossible for Franz to make any further objection; in a few moments they both entered the hall, where they found the young girls still anxiously awaiting them.

"Oh, I have been so frightened," said Franziska, even paler than usual, as she held out her hand to Franz. "I trust all has ended peaceably."

"Everything is arranged; a couple of words were sufficient to settle the whole affair," said Woislaw cheerfully. "But Master Franz was less concerned in it than yourself, fair lady."

"I! How do you mean?" said Franziska in surprise.

"I allude to your illness," replied the other.

"And you spoke of that to Azzo? Does he, then, know a remedy which he could not tell me himself?" she inquired smiling painfully.

"The knight Azzo must take part in your cure; but speak to you about it he cannot, unless the remedy is to lose all its efficacy," replied Woislaw quietly.

"So, it is some secret elixir, as the learned doctors who have so long attended me say, and through whose means I only grow worse," said Franziska mournfully.

"It is certainly a secret, but is as certainly a cure," replied Woislaw.

"So said all, but none has succeeded," said the young lady peevishly.

"You might at least try," began Bertha.

"Because your friend proposes it," said the other smiling.

"I have no doubt that you, with nothing ailing you, would

take all manner of drugs to please your knight, but with me the inducement is wanting, and therefore also the faith."

"I did not speak of any medicine," said Woislaw.

"Oh! a magical remedy! I am to be cured—what was it the quack who was here the other day called it?—'by sympathy'! Yes, that was it."

"I do not object to your calling it so, if you like," said Woislaw smiling; "but you must know, dear lady, that the measures I shall propose must be attended to literally, and according to the strictest directions."

"And you trust this to me?" asked Franziska.

"Certainly," said Woislaw, hesitating; "but——"

"Well, why do you not proceed? Can you think that I shall fail in courage?" she asked.

"Courage is certainly necessary for the success of my plan," said Woislaw gravely; "and it is because I give you credit for a large share of that virtue, I venture to propose it at all, although for the real harmlessness of the remedy I will answer with my life, provided you follow my directions exactly."

"Well, tell me the plan, and then I can decide," said the young lady.

"I can only tell you that when we commence our operations," replied Woislaw.

"Do you think I am a child to be sent here, there, and everywhere, without a reason?" asked Franziska, with something of her old pettishness.

"You did me great injustice, dear lady, if you thought for a moment I would propose anything disagreeable to you, unless demanded by the sternest necessity," said Woislaw, "and yet I can only repeat my former words."

"Then I will not do it," cried Franziska. "I have already tried so much—and all ineffectually."

"I give you my honour as a knight, that your cure is certain, but you must pledge yourself solemnly and unconditionally to do implicitly what I shall direct," said Woislaw earnestly.

"Oh, I implore you to consent, Franziska. Our friend would not propose anything unnecessary," said Bertha, taking both her cousin's hands.

"And let me join my entreaties to Bertha's," said Franz.

"How strange you all are!" exclaimed Franziska, shaking her head. "You make such a secret of that which I must know if I am to accomplish it, and then you declare so positively that I shall recover, when my own feelings tell me it is quite hopeless."

"I repeat that I will answer for the result," said Woislaw, "on the condition I mentioned before, and that you have courage to carry out what you commence."

"Ha! now I understand; this, after all, is the only thing which appears doubtful to you," cried Franziska, "Well, to show you that our sex are neither wanting in the will nor the power to accomplish deeds of daring, I give my consent."

With the last words, she offered Woislaw her hand.

"Our compact is thus sealed," she pursued smiling. "Now say, Sir Knight, how am I to commence this mysterious cure?"

"It commenced when you gave your consent," said Woislaw gravely. "Now I have only to request that you will ask no more questions, but hold yourself in readiness to take a ride with me tomorrow an hour before sunset. I also request that you will not mention to your father a word of what has passed."

"Strange!" said Franziska.

"You have made the compact; you are not wanting in resolution; and I will answer for everything else," said Woislaw encouragingly.

"Well, so let it be. I will follow your directions," said the lady, although she still looked incredulous.

"On our return, you shall know everything; before that, it is quite impossible," said Woislaw in conclusion. "Now go, dear lady, and take some rest; you will need strength for tomorrow."

It was on the morning of the following day; the sun had not risen above an hour, and the dew still lay like a veil of pearls on the grass or dripped from the petals of the flowers swaying in the early breeze, when the knight Woislaw hastened over the fields towards the forest, and turned into a gloomy path, which by the direction one could perceive led towards the towers of Klatka. When he arrived at the old oak tree we have before had occasion to mention, he sought carefully

along the road for traces of human footsteps, but only a deer had passed that way. Seemingly satisfied with his search, he proceeded on his way, though not before he had half drawn his dagger from its sheath, as though to assure himself that it was ready for service in time of need.

Slowly he ascended the path; it was evident he carried something beneath his cloak. Arrived in the court, he left the ruins of the castle to the left, and entered the old chapel. In the chancel he looked eagerly and earnestly around. A deathlike stillness reigned in the deserted sanctuary, only broken by the whispering of the wind in an old thorn-tree which grew outside. Woislaw had looked round him ere he perceived the door leading down to the vault; he hurried towards it and descended. The sun's position enabled its rays to penetrate the crevices, and made the subterranean chamber so light that one could read easily the inscriptions at the head and foot of the coffins. The knight first laid on the ground the packet he had hitherto carried under his cloak, and then going from coffin to coffin, at last remained stationary before the oldest of them. He read the inscription carefully, drew his dagger thoughtfully from its case, and endeavoured to raise the lid with its point. This was no difficult matter, for the rusty iron nails kept but a slight hold of the rotten wood. On looking in, only a heap of ashes, some remnants of dress, and a skull were the contents. He quickly closed it again, and went on to the next, passing over those of a woman and two children. Here things had much the same appearance, except that the corpse held together till the lid was raised, and then fell into dust, a few linen rags and bones being alone perceptible. In the third, fourth, and nearly the next half-dozen, the bodies were in better preservation: in some, they looked a sort of yellow-brown mummy; whilst in others a skinless skull covered with hair grinned from the coverings of velvet, silk, or mildewed embroideries; all, however, were touched with the loathsome marks of decay. Only one more coffin now remained to be inspected; Woislaw approached it, and read the inscription. It was the same that had before attracted the Knight of Fahnenberg: Ezzelin von Klatka, the last possessor of the tower, was described as lying therein. Woislaw found it more difficult to raise the



lid here; and it was only by the exertion of much strength that he at length succeeded in extracting the nails. He did all, however, as quietly as if afraid of rousing some sleeper within; he then raised the cover, and cast a glance on the corpse. An involuntary "Ha!" burst from his lips as he stepped back a pace. If he had less expected the sight that met his eyes, he would have been far more overcome. In the coffin lay Azzo as he lived and breathed, and as Woislav had seen him at the supper table only the evening before. His appearance, dress, and all were the same; besides, he had more the semblance of sleep than of death—no trace of decay was visible—there was even a rosy tint on his cheeks. Only the circumstance that the breast did not heave distinguished him from one who slept. For a few moments Woislav did not move; he could only stare into the coffin. With a hastiness in his movements not usual with him, he suddenly seized the lid, which had fallen from his hands, and laying it on the coffin, knocked the nails into their places. As soon as he had completed this work, he fetched the packet he had left at the entrance, and laying it on the top of the coffin, hastily ascended the steps, and quitted the church and the ruins.

The day passed. Before evening, Franziska requested her father to allow her to take a ride with Woislav, under pretence of showing him the country. He, only too happy to think this a sign of amendment in his daughter, readily gave his consent; so, followed by a single servant, they mounted and left the castle. Woislav was unusually silent and serious. When Franziska began to rally him about his gravity and the approaching sympathetic cure, he replied that what was before her was no laughing matter; and that although the result would be certainly a cure, still it would leave an impression on her whole future life. In such discourse they reached the wood, and at length the oak, where they left their horses. Woislav gave Franziska his arm, and they ascended the hill slowly and silently. They had just reached one of the half-dilapidated outworks where they could catch a glimpse of open country, when Woislav, speaking more to himself than to his companion, said: "In a quarter of an hour the sun will set, and in another hour the moon will have risen; then all must be accomplished. It will soon be time to commence the work."

"Then, I should think it was time to entrust me with some idea of what it is," said Franziska, looking at him.

"Well, my lady," he replied, turning towards her, and his voice was very solemn, "I entreat you, Franziska von Fahrenberg, for your own good, and as you love the father who clings to you with his whole soul, that you will weigh well my words, and that you will not interrupt me with questions which I cannot answer until the work is completed. Your life is in the greatest danger from the illness under which you are labouring; indeed, you are irrecoverably lost if you do not fully carry out what I shall now impart to you. Now promise me to do implicitly as I shall tell you; I pledge you my knightly word it is nothing against Heaven, or the honour of your house; and, besides, it is the sole means for saving you." With these words, he held out his right hand to his companion, while he raised the other to heaven in confirmation of his oath.

"I promise you," said Franziska, visibly moved by Woislav's solemn tone, as she laid her little white and wasted hand in his.

"Then, come; it is time," was his reply, as he led her towards the church. The last rays of the sun were just pouring through the broken windows. They entered the chancel, the best preserved part of the whole buildings; here there were still some old kneeling-stools, placed before the high altar, although nothing remained of that but the stonework and a few steps; the pictures and decorations had all vanished.

"Say an Ave; you will have need of it," said Woislav, as he himself fell on his knees.

Franziska fell beside him, and repeated a short prayer. After a few moments, both rose.

"The moment has arrived! The sun sinks, and before the moon rises, all must be over," said Woislav quickly.

"What am I to do?" asked Franziska cheerfully.

"You see there that open vault!" replied the knight Woislav, pointing to the door and flight of steps. "You must descend. You must go alone; I may not accompany you. When you have reached the vault you will find, close to the entrance, a coffin, on which is placed a small packet. Open this packet, and you will find three long iron nails and a hammer. Then pause for a moment; but when I begin to repeat the Credo

in a loud voice, knock with all your might, first one nail, then a second, and then a third, into the lid of the coffin, right up to their heads."

Franziska stood thunderstruck; her whole body trembled, and she could not utter a word. Woislav perceived it.

"Take courage, dear lady!" said he, "Think that you are in the hands of Heaven, and that, without the will of your Creator, not a hair can fall from your head. Besides, I repeat, there is no danger."

"Well then, I will do it," cried Franziska, in some measure regaining courage.

"Whatever you may hear, whatever takes place inside the coffin," continued Woislav, "must have no effect upon you. Drive the nails well in, without flinching; your work must be finished before my prayer comes to an end."

Franziska shuddered, but again recovered herself. "I will do it; Heaven will send me strength," she murmured softly.

"There is one thing more," said Woislav hesitatingly; "perhaps it is the hardest of all I have proposed, but without it your cure will not be complete. When you have done as I have told you, a sort of"—he hesitated—"a sort of liquid will flow from the coffin; in this dip your finger, and besmear the scratch on your throat."

"Horrible!" cried Franziska. "This liquid is blood. A human being lies in the coffin."

"An *unearthly one* lies therein! That blood is your own, but it flows in other veins," said Woislav gloomily. "Ask no more; the sand is running out."

Franziska summoned up all her powers of mind and body, went towards the steps which led to the vault, and Woislav sank on his knees before the altar in quiet prayer. When the lady had descended, she found herself before the coffin on which lay the packet before mentioned. A sort of twilight reigned in the vault, and everything around was so still and peaceful, that she felt more calm, and going up to the coffin, opened the packet. She had hardly seen that a hammer and three long nails were its contents when suddenly Woislav's voice rang through the church, and broke the stillness of the aisles. Franziska started, but recognised the appointed prayer. She seized one of the nails, and with one stroke of the hammer drove it at least an inch into the cover. All was still; nothing

was heard but the echo of the stroke. Taking heart, the maiden grasped the hammer with both hands, and struck the nail twice with all her might, right up to the head into the wood. At this moment commenced a rustling noise; it seemed as though something in the interior began to move and to struggle. Franziska drew back in alarm. She was already on the point of throwing away the hammer and flying up the steps, when Woislav raised his voice so powerfully, and so entreatingly, that in a sort of excitement, such as would induce one to rush into a lion's den, she returned to the coffin, determined to bring things to a conclusion. Hardly knowing what she did, she placed a second nail in the centre of the lid, and after some strokes this was likewise buried to its head. The struggle now increased fearfully, as if some living creature were striving to burst the coffin. This was so shaken by it, that it cracked and split on all sides. Half-distracted, Franziska seized the third nail; she thought no more of her ailments, she only knew herself to be in terrible danger, of what kind she could not guess; in an agony that threatened to rob her of her senses, and in the midst of the turning and cracking of the coffin, in which low groans were now heard, she struck the third nail in equally tight. At this moment, she began to lose consciousness. She wished to hasten away, but staggered; and mechanically grasping at something to save herself by, seized the corner of the coffin, and sank fainting beside it on the ground.

A quarter of an hour might have elapsed when she again opened her eyes. She looked around her. Above was the starry sky, and the moon, which shed her cold light on the ruins and on the tops of the old oak-trees. Franziska was lying outside the church walls, Woislav was on his knees beside her, holding her hand in his.

"Heaven be praised that you live!" he cried, with a sigh of relief. "I was beginning to doubt whether the remedy had not been too severe, and yet it was the only thing to save you."

Franziska recovered her full consciousness very gradually. The past seemed to her like a dreadful dream. Only a few moments before, that dreadful scene; and now this quiet all around her. She hardly dared at first to raise her eyes, and shuddered when she found herself only a few paces re-

moved from the spot where she had undergone such terrible agony. She listened half-unconsciously, now to the pacifying words Woislav addressed to her, now to the whistling of the servant, who stood by the horses, and who, to while away his time, was imitating the evening-song of a belated cowherd.

"Let us go," whispered Franziska, as she strove to raise herself. "But what is this? My shoulder is wet, my throat, my hand——"

"It is probably the evening dew on the grass," said Woislav gently.

"No; it is blood!" she cried, springing up with horror in her tone. "See, my hand is full of blood!"

"Oh, you are mistaken—surely mistaken," said Woislav, stammering. "Or perhaps the wound on your neck may have opened! Pray, feel whether this is the case." He seized her hand and directed it to the spot.

"I do not perceive anything; I feel no pain," she said at length, somewhat angrily.

"Then, perhaps, when you fainted you may have struck a corner of the coffin, or have torn yourself with the point of one of the nails," suggested Woislav.

"Oh, of what do you remind me!" cried Franziska. "Let us away—away! I entreat you, come! I will not remain a moment longer near this dreadful, dreadful place."

They descended the path much quicker than they came. Woislav placed his companion on her horse, and they were soon on their way home.

When they approached the castle, Franziska began to inundate her protector with questions about the preceding adventure; but he declared that her present state of excitement must make him defer all explanations till the morning, when her curiosity should be satisfied. On their arrival, he conducted her at once to her room, and told the knight his daughter was too much fatigued with her ride to appear at the supper table. On the following morning, Franziska rose earlier than she had done for a long time. She assured her friend it was the first time since her illness commenced that she had been really refreshed by her sleep, and, what was still more remarkable, she had not been troubled by her old terrible dream. Her improved looks were not only remarked by Bertha, but by Franz and the knight; and with Woislav's

permission, she related the adventures of the previous evening. No sooner had she concluded them, than Woislaw was completely stormed with questions about such a strange occurrence.

"Have you," said the latter, turning towards his host, "ever heard of Vampires?"

"Often," replied he, "but I have never believed in them."

"Nor did I," said Woislaw; "but I have been assured of their existence by experience."

"Oh, tell us what occurred," cried Bertha eagerly, as a light seemed to dawn on her.

"It was during my first campaign in Hungary," began Woislaw, "when I was rendered helpless for some time by this sword-cut of a janizary across my face, and another on my shoulder. I had been taken into the house of a respectable family in a small town. It consisted of the father and mother, and a daughter about twenty years of age. They obtained their living by selling the very good wine of the country, and the taproom was always full of visitors. Although the family were well-to-do in the world, there seemed to brood over them a continual melancholy, caused by the constant illness of the only daughter, a very pretty and excellent girl. She had always bloomed like a rose, but for some months she had been getting so thin and wasted, and that without any satisfactory reason: they tried every means to restore her, but in vain. As the army had encamped quite in the neighbourhood, of course a number of people of all countries assembled in the tavern. Amongst these there was one man who came every evening, when the moon shone, who struck everybody by the peculiarity of his manners and appearance; he looked dried up and deathlike, and hardly spoke at all; but what he did say was bitter and sarcastic. Most attention was excited towards him by the circumstance, that although he always ordered a cup of the best wine, and now and then raised it to his lips, the cup was always as full after his departure as at first."

"This all agrees wonderfully with the appearance of Azzo," said Bertha, deeply interested.

"The daughter of the house," continued Woislaw, "became daily worse, despite the aid not only of Christian doctors, but of many amongst the heathen prisoners, who were consulted in the hope that they might have some magical remedy

to propose. It was singular that the girl always complained of a dream, in which the unknown guest worried and plagued her."

"Just the same as your dream, Franziska," cried Bertha.

"One evening," resumed Woislav, "an old Slavonian—who had made many voyages to Turkey and Greece, and had even seen the New World—and I were sitting over our wine, when the stranger entered, and sat down at the table. The bottle passed quickly between my friend and me, whilst we talked of all manner of things, of our adventures, and of passages in our lives, both horrible and amusing. We went on chatting thus for about an hour, and drank a tolerable quantity of wine. The unknown had remained perfectly silent the whole time, only smiling contemptuously every now and then. He quietly worried me—perhaps the wine had gotten a little into my head—so I said to the stranger: 'Hold, you stony stranger; you have hitherto done nothing but listen, and have not even emptied your cup. Now you shall take your turn in telling us something amusing, and if you do not drink up your wine, it shall produce a quarrel between us.' 'Yes,' said the Slavonian, 'you must remain; you shall chat and drink, too,' and he grasped—for although no longer young, he was big and very strong—the stranger by the shoulder, to pull him down to his seat again: the latter, however, although as thin as a skeleton, with one movement of his hand flung the Slavonian to the middle of the room, and half-stunned him for a moment. I now approached to hold the stranger back. I caught him by the arm; and although the springs of my iron hand were less powerful than those I have at present, I must have gripped him rather hard in my anger, for after looking grimly at me for a moment, he bent towards me and whispered in my ear: 'Let me go: from the grip of your fist, I see you are my brother, therefore do not hinder me from seeking my bloody nourishment. I am hungry!' Surprised by such words, I let him loose, and almost before I was aware of it, he had left the room. As soon as I had in some degree recovered from my astonishment, I told the Slavonian what I had heard. He started, evidently alarmed. I asked him to tell me the cause of his fears, and pressed him for an explanation of those extra-

ordinary words. On our way to his lodging, he complied with my request. 'The stranger,' he said, 'is a Vampire!'

"How?" cried the knight, Franziska, and Bertha simultaneously, in a voice of horror, "So this Azzo was——"

"Nothing less. He also was a Vampire!" replied Woislaw. "But at all events his hellish thirst is quenched for ever, he will never return. But I have not finished. As in my country Vampires had never been heard of, I questioned the Slavonian minutely. He said that in Hungary, Croatia, Dalmatia, and Bosnia, these hellish guests were not uncommon. They were deceased persons, who had either once served as nourishment to Vampires, or who had died in deadly sin, or under excommunication; and that whenever the moon shone, they rose from their graves, and sucked the blood of the living."

"Horrible!" cried Franziska. "If you had told me all this beforehand, I should never have accomplished the work."

"So I thought; and yet it must be executed by the sufferers themselves, while someone else performs the devotions," replied Woislaw. "The Slavonian," he continued after a short pause, "added many facts with regard to these unearthly visitants. He said that whilst their victim wasted they themselves improved in appearance, and that a Vampire possessed enormous strength——"

"Now I can understand the change your false hand produced on Azzo," interrupted Franz.

"Yes, that was it," replied Woislaw. "Azzo, as well as the other Vampire, mistook its great power for that of a natural one, and concluded I was one of his own species. You may now imagine, dear lady," he continued, turning to Franziska, "how alarmed I was at your appearance when I arrived; all you and Bertha told me increased my anxiety; and when I saw Azzo, I could doubt no longer that he was a Vampire. As I learned from your account that a grave with the name Ezzelin von Klatka lay in the neighbourhood, I had no doubt that you might be saved if I could only induce you to assist me. It did not appear to me advisable to impart the whole facts of the case, for your bodily powers were so impaired that an idea of the horrors before you might have quite unfitted you for the exertion; for this reason, I arranged everything in the manner in which it has taken place,"



"You did wisely," replied Franziska shuddering. "I can never be grateful enough to you. Had I known what was required of me, I never could have undertaken the deed."

"That was what I feared," said Woislav, "but fortune has favoured us all through."

"And what became of the unfortunate girl in Hungary?" inquired Bertha.

"I know not," replied Woislav, "That very evening there was an alarm of Turks, and we were ordered off, I never heard anything more of her."

The conversation upon these strange occurrences continued for some time longer. The knight determined to have the vault at Klatka walled up for ever. This took place on the following day; the knight alleging as a reason that he did not wish the dead to be disturbed by irreverent hands.

Franziska recovered gradually. Her health had been so severely shaken, that it was long ere her strength was so much restored as to allow of her being considered out of danger. The young lady's character underwent a great change in the interval. Its former strength was, perhaps, in some degree diminished, but in place of that, she had acquired a benevolent softness, which brought out all her best qualities. Franz continued his attentions to his cousin; but, perhaps owing to a hint from Bertha, he was less assiduous in his exhibition of them. His inclinations did not lead him to the battle, the camp, or the attainment of honours; his great aim was to increase the good condition and happiness of his tenants, and to this he contributed the whole energy of his mind. Franziska could not withstand the unobtrusive signs of the young man's continued attachment; and it was not long ere the credit she was obliged to yield to his noble efforts for the welfare of his fellow-creatures, changed into a liking, which went on increasing, until at length it assumed the character of love. As Woislav insisted on making Bertha his wife before he returned to Silesia, it was arranged that the marriage should take place at their present abode. How joyful was the surprise of the Knight of Fahrenberg, when his daughter and Franz likewise entreated his blessing, and expressed their desire of being united on the same day! That day soon came round, and it saw the bright looks of two happy couples.

## A QUESTION OF TIME

*Elizabeth Walter*

It was Tim who noticed the picture—not because he is interested in pictures but because he is bored with conversation. While it is going on his mind wanders; so do his eyes. So also do his hands, but I wasn't sitting next to him. That pleasure was reserved for Babs.

There were six of us in Barney's flat, and it was already later than it should be. By which I mean it was later than our parents liked us to be out. But we weren't doing any harm, and we'd all left school, or nearly. As I told mine often enough, we'd got to be allowed to grow up.

Barney was actually the oldest of the lot of us. He must have been twenty at least. He only left art school last summer, but he struck it lucky almost at once. He designs textiles for one of the big makers of furnishing fabrics; hence the picture-collecting and the flat. Of course the flat's tiny and the picture-collecting pretty haphazard, but Barney says he learns as he goes along. He's always got pictures stacked against the walls, to say nothing of those that are hanging on them, and the pictures seem to change from week to week. I don't take much notice of them as a rule—I'm more interested in Barney. I certainly didn't remember the one Tim pointed out.

It was one of the framed ones, though the frame was battered. It was quite small and it wasn't hanging on the wall. Instead, it was standing on a spare coffee table, the way some people have wedding photographs. But there was nothing bridal about it; in fact it was a drawing of a monk, sort of greyish, with long pink fingers. I didn't think it was anything much.

Tim, however, had reached out and picked it up. "Hey, where d'you get this from?" (It was like Tim to interrupt.)

"Bought it," Barney said briefly.

"Whatever for?"

"Because I liked it." He seemed to be challenging Tim to go on.

"Is it valuable?" Babs asked. (She is interested in money.)

Barney smiled. "Not so far as I know."

"But you think it might be?" asked Leo, who is much less stupid than he looks.

Barney spread his hands. "I just don't know, I tell you."

"Who drew it?" I asked.

"I don't know that either. I bought it in a junkshop the other day."

"Didn't they know anything about it?"

"It wasn't that sort of shop."

"So you don't know who it is?" asked Leo.

Tessa spoke for the first time. "It's a friar, a Franciscan. I know the habit."

"Isn't he handsome!" Babs said.

He was, too, now that I looked at him, in an ugly-attractive sort of way, like that film-star whose name I can never remember but who plays parts where he's always looking his opponents up and down with a measured, measuring look. If they're women he's deciding whether to bed them; if they're men he's deciding whether to fight. It struck me suddenly that it wasn't quite the expression you expect on the face of a religious. I craned over Tessa's shoulder to get a better look.

The friar was sitting down, though you couldn't see the chair because his habit hid it. There was something familiar about the way he sat. Then I remembered where I'd seen that attitude, with the right hand posed on the chair arm: there was a picture of a pope who sat like that. It was in a history-book at school; he wore red and his robe was trimmed with ermine. If he'd had a beard he would have looked like Santa Claus. But he didn't have a beard; he was clean-shaven. And our friar wasn't even that.

The artist had drawn his head in great detail. You could see the stubble on his cheeks and under his chin. He looked as if he hadn't shaved for days. His hair too was untidy; it was dark and curly like Tim's and like Tim's too, it was rather long and matted, as if he'd had to do without a comb.

"I call it a waste for a man like that to be a monk," Babs said, pouting.

"He may have made a lot of converts," Leo pointed out.

"I should think he did. He could have converted me in twenty minutes."

"If you hadn't seduced him in fifteen."

Babs gave Tim a playful slap, and he caught her hand and held it, and began biting the back of her neck.

I looked at Barney; he showed no interest. Sometimes I wondered if he'd ever do it to me. I'd been in love with him the whole of that summer, and he just hadn't noticed me yet. Of course he hadn't noticed Babs and Tessa either, but Babs was always necking with Tim, and Tessa had a succession of young men (it was she who had brought Leo). I wondered if Barney was jealous, and while I wondered I caught his eyes.

I could feel my face blushing even though there was nothing to be ashamed of, Barney affects me like that. I had an odd feeling that the friar in the drawing would also, if only he would turn his head.

I took another look at his face. He wasn't really handsome. He had the most enormous nose; and his face, when you looked close, was lined and his hair greying. He must have been all of forty-five. I wondered why Leo was examining the drawing with such attention, and if his thoughts about it were the same as mine.

They weren't, for he looked at Barney and said suddenly: "Whoever drew that could certainly draw. This may be quite a find." (I should have explained that Leo and Tessa are also art students.) "Have you had it valued?" Leo went on.

For some reason Barney looked uncomfortable. He slowly shook his head. "I can't believe that drawing of Father Furnivall has any value."

Tessa gave a little shriek. "So you do know who he is!"

"Oh yes," Barney said. "I recognised him the moment I saw him. You don't forget a face like that in a hurry." And he stared at the drawing in a puzzled, hungry way.

Babs drew herself away from Tim long enough to ask, "What did you say his name was?"

"Furnivall, Father Francis Furnivall," Barney said. "He died in 1612, in prison—probably of torture—after being betrayed as he hid in a priest's hole."

"In a what?"

"A priest's hole—a secret room where a Catholic priest could hide. Quite a lot of old houses have them, and they're often very cunningly contrived. The Catholic religion was suppressed in England in those days, but a few diehards kept it

up, and a handful of priests ministered to these faithful. They went round from house to house, in disguise and always in great danger. Father Furnivall was one of them."

I could believe it, looking at his portrait. He had a devil-may-care boldness in his face, as if he enjoyed and welcomed danger. I could imagine him in disguise.

Tim whistled. "The one that didn't get away. What happened?"

"There was a young painter staying in the house. He had been engaged to do a portrait of one of the daughters, and he must have given Father Furnivall away. One afternoon a troop of horse led by the local captain of militia surrounded and searched the house. *Someone* must have told them about Furnivall and where he was hiding, for they made a bee-line for the priest's hole, the entrance to which was behind a painting in the drawing-room. Father Furnivall was discovered and dragged out."

"What did they do to him?" Tessa asked in a whisper.

"They tried him and condemned him to death. It was irregular—as a rule captured priests conveniently died in prison before they could be brought to trial, but in a country district no one worried too much about the niceties. Father Furnivall's trial took place that very afternoon in the great hall, before a hastily summoned justice and justice's clerk."

"I thought you said he died in prison—of torture?"

"So he did. His gaolers wanted him to talk, but he wouldn't."

"Talk about what?"

"About other priests who were in hiding, and other houses with priests' holes. But he wouldn't speak although they promised him his freedom. So he was put to the question, to use the contemporary euphemistic phrase."

"How do you know he died under torture?"

"There is no record that he was ever executed. What else is one to suppose?"

"He might have talked after all," Tim suggested.

Barney shook his head. "It would be out of character with a face like that."

I agreed with him. Father Furnivall would never have done anything he didn't want to—and equally, he would have done anything he did. I could imagine him giving orders, but not

obeying them. He couldn't have found it easy to be a priest.

"Why are you so sure it was the painter who betrayed him?" Tessa asked suddenly.

"Who else could it have been? The rest of the household were family or old and trusted retainers, all of them Catholics to a man. Whereas the painter had no ties of loyalty to bind him and wasn't a Catholic."

"How do you know?"

Leo spoke so sharply that I was startled, but Barney went on as if he hadn't heard.

"Then there was that business of the entrance to the priest's hole being concealed behind the painting. Who but a painter would be likely to examine the picture so closely that he found the spring?"

"It's plausible, but not proven!" Leo objected.

"I tell you I know it's true!" Barney spoke with such vehemence he almost shouted. He brought his hand down flat on the table with a bang.

"All right, all right," Tessa said pacifically. "You two stop fighting."

Leo muttered something that might have been an apology, and asked instead: "What's the date of this drawing? Or don't you know?"

"I know very exactly," Barney answered. "It's dated September 28th, 1612."

"How do you know? You haven't had it out of the frame," Leo challenged.

"It was drawn the day of his arrest, and I know the date."

"You've certainly boned up on Father Furnivall," Babs said lazily. "He must mean a lot to you."

"Yes, he does."

"Why?"

Barney again side-stepped the question. "He was arrested just before midday, and arraigned that same afternoon. It was a golden early-autumn day. You can see how the light fell on his face as he sat there—a foretaste of the glory to come."

"He's getting quite carried away," Tim observed to no one in particular. He had regained possession of Babs, who said suddenly: "I don't believe Barney bought that drawing in a junk-shop. He knows too much about it for that."

"I did. Cross my heart. I can show you where the shop is."

"Of course he did," I cried. (Babs is always needling Barney.) "Do you think he stole it, or what?"

"Or what," she said succinctly; and Tim, before turning back to her, said indulgently to me: "Shut up, kid."

It's true I'm the youngest, but that doesn't make me the silliest. I discovered that long ago.

"Tim Phelps," I began, "if you don't leave off treating me like a baby——"

A hand fastened over my face. "That's enough, Emily," Barney ordered. I was so surprised I obeyed. Not that I was surprised at the rough-house; there's often a scuffle like that. No, what surprised me was that I could feel Barney's hand trembling, and when I looked at him there were drops of sweat on his face. I wondered whether the others had noticed it. I had a feeling Leo might have done.

A moment later I was sure of it. "There's something funny here," Leo said. He was looking very directly at Barney, who looked unhappily back. "You bought that drawing less than a week ago. You bought it in a junk-shop. I've no doubt you got it for a song. You said yourself that the people in the junk-shop could tell you nothing about it. Yet you've already found out a great deal. Or shall we say you've invented?"

"No," Barney said, "Not that."

"All right then. Suppose you tell us where you saw the portrait that enabled you to recognise this friar?"

"I don't know."

"Because there isn't a portrait," Leo's voice was hypnotically low. "Then what enabled you to date this drawing so precisely? You don't just give a year; you give a day."

"I've told you—it's the day he was captured," Barney whispered. "You can look it up in the *Dictionary of National Biography*."

"But how did you know the drawing was of Father Furnivall in the first place?"

Barney's hands were shaking as if his wrists had springs in them. "Because I drew him," he said.

"Aha! So much for the Old Master nonsense and the obligingly unhelpful junk-shop."

"I don't expect you to believe me," Barney said slowly (even Tim and Babs were sitting up by now), "but I drew

Father Furnivall in the great hall as he faced his accusers. I remember it. Don't ask me how."

"Are you trying to tell us now that you're not an imposter?"

"I didn't fake that drawing, if that's what you mean."

Tessa, who had been examining it, looked up quickly. "It looks pretty genuine to me."

Leo took it from her. "You're right. It doesn't look modern." He turned to Barney. "I never thought you had it in you to draw like that."

"I haven't—not the me you see. But I made that drawing. When I saw it, I recognised it at once. Just as I remembered Father Furnivall, and the scene in the hall, and how he looked and what he said . . ." He buried his face in his hands. "I can't stand it. It's all my fault that he's dead."

I wanted to take him in my arms, but I couldn't with the others looking. I had to content myself with stroking his trouser-leg.

Leo said: "Look here, I'm sorry if I made you out to be a forger, but you must admit it's pretty odd."

"Odd!" Barney's voice rose sharply. "I've been telling myself that all week. I must be going round the bend, or something."

"No, no," I took hold of his hand.

"Suppose you tell us what you remember," Leo suggested. "We might be able to clear things up."

He sounded doubtful. Tessa was looking frightened. Babs had hidden her face against Tim's coat. I continued to stroke Barney's hand as he bowed his head and began, hesitantly at first, but growing bolder, to recall the distant past:

"The windows in the great hall faced westwards. There was a low raised dais at one end. That was where they sat—the captain of militia, the local justice, the pursy-mouthed scribe who acted as the justice's clerk. I can see them now—not their clothes but their faces. Pleased but decorous, like businessmen who have done a good deal."

"Where were you?" Leo said gently.

"I was standing in the body of the hall, where all the household had been herded, I was leaning against the wall."

He stopped. "Now why was I leaning against the wall? The walls were reserved for soldiers, who stood all around like



sentinels, their pikes drawn. They were keeping an eye on the household—one false move and they'd have struck you down. Everyone else was huddled in the middle of the room, even the women. But I was privileged. I was allowed the wall.

"That was why I could sketch, of course. I had something to lean on. And I had my drawing materials with me—I don't know why. There was space around me, too. Neither the soldiers nor the household stood near me. I was isolated. No one would meet my eye. Or—no: that's not true. There were some who looked at me with loathing—some of the soldiers too. When I looked up from my drawing it was to catch their stares of hatred. What had I done that they should hate me so?"

"Go on," Leo commanded. "Describe how Father Furnivall was brought in."

"With his feet fettered, dragged between two soldiers," Barney said promptly. "Either because of the fetters or because he had already been tortured, he could not stand. That was why they gave him a chair."

"The justice's clerk read out the indictment. The forms of justice were to be observed. The priest was asked whether he had anything to say, but he kept silent. The captain of militia leaned forward and struck him with his glove across the cheek."

I looked at the drawing, and it was as though I saw the red mark spreading. I could picture how his head would jerk up and his eyes flash. Was that when he placed his right hand on the chair arm and gripped it, to help him control himself? It would have been so easy to strike back, so natural for the man in the picture, for there must have been an athletic body underneath that friar's gown. And no one ever held his head more proudly, or kept his lips more firmly shut.

"Didn't he speak at all?" asked Tessa.

"Yes. He said—I think I've remembered his words—that a greater judge than he had set an example of silence before unjust judges, and he would follow where his Master led."

"Oh, good for him!" I cried. I hadn't meant to say it, but Father Furnivall's words were so exactly right—right for him, I mean, because I could just imagine him saying them and then for ever afterwards closing his mouth. Such a wide, strong, sensitive mouth—but cynical. He knew exactly what

men's promises were worth. When his captors promised him freedom or threatened torture, the turned-down corners of his mouth would lift in a grim smile. But his lips stayed shut, and if he groaned under their tortures, they did not break his iron self-command.

"What happened next?" Leo asked, still probing.

"The justice cried out that he had blasphemed. The captain jumped to his feet and commanded the guards to drag the prisoner outside and hang him, but the justice's clerk intervened. He was a little, evil man who loved cruelty. He had a soft voice and a sneering laugh. He reminded the justice that the prisoner might be a useful source of information—if he could be 'persuaded' to talk. King James's Secretary of State might be sorry to lose so valuable an informant—he let Father Furnivall hear that word—and gave his hateful laugh as he began to gather up his papers. The justice nodded to the captain, who withdrew his order, Father Furnivall again sat down.

"All this time I had been sketching rapidly. The main lines were already drawn, though I had to put the finishing touches in later—that's why I drew him wearing his Franciscan habit, because I couldn't remember his clothes."

"It was lucky you had a sketch-block with you," Tessa said dryly, "to record this moment of history."

I felt Barney stiffen with anger. "I didn't have a sketch-block. I had a single sheet and that wasn't even a clean one. I'd been making drawings of hands—from boredom or for amusement—when we were all summoned to the great hall. I took the sheet of paper with me, together with some chalks and a book. I had no intention of drawing that portrait, I wish to God I never had."

"Why?" I exclaimed. "I think it's beautiful."

Babs looked at me. "You would!"

"No, honest, Barney. It's a wonderful drawing."

"The kid's right," Tessa said.

Barney shuddered so violently that I was frightened. "Put it away. In a moment he'll turn his head."

"Steady on!" Leo put a hand on Barney's shoulder. "This is all jolly queer, I admit, but there's no need to get worked up about it. A portrait is fixed; it can't move."

Barney shook off the hand. "Don't you understand?" he

shouted. "He's going to turn his head and look at me, just as he did that day in the hall, I couldn't stand it then and I can't now, I tell you."

"Why not?"

Barney took no notice and rushed on: "He must have known where I was standing. His eyes turned immediately to mine. And although his hands were bound, he half-lifted them as if in blessing. He knew exactly what I'd done."

Tim said: "Come off it, Barney. You've had your joke. No need to prolong it like this, I'm getting cold." He snuggled Babs closer to him. "Why are you so afraid of meeting the old monk's eye?"

"Because," Barney said, "I betrayed him."

There was a silence.

"What makes you think that?" Tessa asked.

Barney spread his hands helplessly. "Don't ask me, I just know it. That's why they looked at me with hate."

"You're imagining things," I said, though I did not believe it.

"Am I?" Barney looked down and absently stroked my hair: but impersonally, as if I were a dog he was fondling. I heard Babs begin to laugh.

As usual, Leo came to the rescue.

"Didn't you say an artist was suspected of betraying Father Furnivall? If so, wouldn't his name be known?"

"The *Dictionary of National Biography* doesn't give it."

"Well then, what other work of his survives?"

"What are you getting at?" Tim demanded.

"An expert could compare the drawing with it and see if the same hand did both. It would prove Barney's point."

"There's nothing known of him," Barney said. "Except this." He put out a hand and touched the drawing, which was lying in Leo's lap.

"Bunk!" Tim said with unnecessary vigour. "Come off it, Barney. You're only having us on."

"I am not."

"'Course you are. What you're saying is bloody impossible. Do you think anyone's going to believe you, except wide-eyed Emily here?"

"Let her alone." Barney sounded angry. "And don't call me a liar unless you want a fight."

Tim stood up, pushing Babs aside. "So it's like that, is it? All right then: I don't believe you. Do you want to settle it outside?"

"There's no need," Leo interposed smoothly. "We can settle Barney's *bona fides* in this room." He looked at him. "Can I take the frame of that picture to pieces?"

"If you want to. But what are you going to do?"

Leo didn't answer, merely turned over the drawing and began to fiddle with the back of the frame, while the rest of us gathered round to peer over his shoulder. Even Babs seemed interested at last.

Leo slit the brown paper which held in place the frame's wooden backing. The frame began to come apart. He laid the pieces on the table before him and turned to the picture itself. The paper was yellowed and brittle at the edges. Without the frame, it was obvious how rough and unfinished the drawing really was. It made its quality all the more striking; it would have stood out anywhere.

"There!" Leo sat back. "I rather think this will prove it."

Tim said: "You haven't proved anything so far. The drawing isn't signed or initialled. In any case, Barney can't remember his name."

"No, but he's remembered something more important."

Tim looked sceptical. "What do you mean?"

Leo turned the paper over very slowly. On the back were three drawings of hands.

## VENUS

*Maurice Baring*

John Fletcher was an overworked minor official in a Government office. He lived a lonely life, and had done so ever since he had been a boy. At school he had mixed little with his fellow schoolboys, and he took no interest in the things that interested them, that is to say, games. On the other hand, although he was what is called "good at work", and did his lessons with facility and ease, he was not a literary boy, and did not care for books. He was drawn towards machinery of all kinds, and spent his spare time in dabbling in scientific experiments or in watching trains go by on the Great Western line. Once he blew off his eyebrows while making some experiment with explosive chemicals; his hands were always smudged with dark, mysterious stains, and his room was like that of a medieval alchemist, littered with retorts, bottles, and test-glasses. Before leaving school he invented a flying machine (heavier than air), and an unsuccessful attempt to start it on the high road caused him to be the victim of much chaff and ridicule.

When he left school he went to Oxford. His life there was as lonely as it had been at school. The dirty, untidy, ink-stained, and chemical-stained little boy grew up into a tall, lank, slovenly-dressed man, who kept entirely to himself, not because he cherished any dislike or disdain for his fellow-creatures, but because he seemed to be entirely absorbed in his own thoughts and isolated from the world by a barrier of dreams.

He did well at Oxford, and when he went down he passed high into the Civil Service and became a clerk in a Government office. There he kept as much to himself as ever. He did his work rapidly and well, for this man, who seemed so slovenly in his person, had an accurate mind, and was what was called a good clerk, although his incurable absent-mindedness once or twice caused him to forget certain matters of importance,

His fellow clerks treated him as a crank and as a joke, but none of them, try as they would, could get to know him or win his confidence. They used to wonder what Fletcher did with his spare time, what were his pursuits, what were his hobbies, if he had any. They suspected that Fletcher had some hobby of an engrossing kind, since in everyday life he conveyed the impression of a man who is walking in his sleep, who acts mechanically and automatically. Somewhere else, they thought, in some other circumstances, he must surely wake up and take a living interest in somebody or in something. Yet had they followed him home to his small room in Canterbury-mansions they would have been astonished. For when he returned from the office after a hard day's work he would do nothing more engrossing than slowly to turn over the leaves of a book in which there were elaborate drawings and diagrams of locomotives and other kinds of engines. And on Sunday he would take a train to one of the large junctions and spend the whole day in watching express trains go past, and in the evening would return again to London.

One day after he had returned from the office somewhat earlier than usual, he was telephoned for. He had no telephone in his own room, but he could use a public telephone which was attached to the building. He went into the small box, but found on reaching the telephone that he had been cut off by the exchange. He imagined that he had been rung up by the office, so he asked to be given their number. As he did so his eye caught an advertisement which was hung just over the telephone. It was an elaborate design in black and white, pointing out the merits of a particular kind of soap called the Venus; a classical lady, holding a looking-glass in one hand and a cake of this invaluable soap in the other, was standing in a sphere surrounded by pointed rays, which was no doubt intended to represent the most brilliant of the planets.

Fletcher sat down on the stool and took the receiver in his hand. As he did so he had for one second the impression that the floor underneath him gave way and that he was falling down a precipice. But before he had time to realise what was happening the sensation of falling left him; he shook himself as though he had been asleep, and for one moment a faint recollection as though of the dreams of the night twinkled in

his mind, and vanished beyond all possibility of recall. He said to himself that he had had a long and curious dream, and he knew that it was too late to remember what it had been about. Then he opened his eyes wide and looked round him.

He was standing on the slope of a hill. At his feet there was a kind of green moss, very soft to tread on. It was sprinkled here and there with light red, wax-like flowers such as he had never seen before. He was standing in an open space; beneath him there was a plain covered with what seemed to be gigantic mushrooms, much taller than a man. Above him rose a mass of vegetation, and over all this was a dense, heavy, streaming cloud faintly glimmering with a white, silvery light which seemed to be beyond it.

He walked towards the vegetation, and soon found himself in the middle of a wood, or rather of a jungle. Tangled plants grew on every side; large hanging creepers with great blue flowers hung downwards. There was a profound stillness in this wood; there were no birds singing and he heard not the slightest rustle in the rich undergrowth. It was oppressively hot and the air was full of a pungent, aromatic sweetness. He felt as though he were in a hot-house full of gardenias and stephanotis. At the same time the atmosphere of the place was pleasant to him. It was neither strange nor disagreeable. He felt at home in this green, shimmering jungle and in this hot, aromatic twilight, as though he had lived there all his life.

He walked mechanically onwards as if he were going to a definite spot of which he knew. He walked fast, but in spite of the oppressive atmosphere and the thickness of the growth he grew neither hot nor out of breath; on the contrary, he took pleasure in the motion, and the stifling, sweet air seemed to invigorate him. He walked steadily on for over three hours, choosing his way nicely, avoiding certain places and seeking others, following a definite path and making for a definite goal. During all this time the stillness continued unbroken, nor did he meet a single living thing, either bird or beast.

After he had been walking for what seemed to him several hours, the vegetation grew thinner, the jungle less dense, and from a more or less open space in it he seemed to discern what might have been a mountain entirely submerged in a

multitude of heavy grey clouds. He sat down on the green stuff which was like grass and yet was not grass, at the edge of the open space whence he got this view, and quite naturally he picked from the boughs of an overhanging tree a large red, juicy fruit, and ate it. Then he said to himself, he knew not why, that he must not waste time, but must be moving on.

He took a path to the right of him and descended the sloping jungle with big, buoyant strides, almost running; he knew the way as though he had been down that path a thousand times. He knew that in a few moments he would reach a whole hanging garden of red flowers, and he knew that when he had reached this he must again turn to the right. It was as he thought: the red flowers soon came to view. He turned sharply, and then through the thinning greenery he caught sight of an open plain where more mushrooms grew. But the plain was as yet a great way off, and the mushrooms seemed quite small.

"I shall get there in time," he said to himself, and walked steadily on, looking neither to the right nor to the left. It was evening by the time he reached the edge of the plain: everything was growing dark. The endless vapours and the high banks of cloud in which the whole of this world was sunk grew dimmer and dimmer. In front of him was an empty level space, and about two miles farther on the huge mushrooms stood out, tall and wide like the monuments of some prehistoric age. And underneath them on the soft carpet there seemed to move a myriad vague and shadowy forms.

"I shall get there in time," he thought. He walked for another half hour, and by this time the tall mushrooms were quite close to him, and he could see moving underneath them, distinctly now, green, living creatures like huge caterpillars, with glowing eyes. They moved slowly and did not seem to interfere with each other in any way. Farther off, and beyond them, there was a broad and endless plain of high green stalks like ears of green wheat or millet, only taller and thinner.

He ran on, and now at his very feet, right in front of him, the green caterpillars were moving. They were as big as leopards. As he drew nearer they seemed to make way for him, and to gather themselves into groups under the thick stems of the mushrooms. He walked along the pathway they made



for him, under the shadow of the broad, sunshade-like roofs of these gigantic growths. It was almost dark now, yet he had no doubt or difficulty as to finding his way. He was making for the green plain beyond. The ground was dense with caterpillars; they were as plentiful as ants in an ant's nest, and yet they never seemed to interfere with each other or with him; they instinctively made way for him, nor did they appear to notice him in any way. He felt neither surprise nor wonder at their presence.

It grew quite dark; the only lights which were in this world came from the twinkling eyes of the moving figures, which shone like little stars. The night was no whit cooler than the day. The atmosphere was as steamy, as dense, and as aromatic as before. He walked on and on, feeling no trace of fatigue or hunger, and every now and then he said to himself: "I shall be there in time." The plain was flat and level, and covered the whole way with the mushrooms, whose roofs met and shut out from him the sight of the dark sky.

At last he came to the end of the plain of mushrooms and reached the high green stalks he had been making for. Beyond the dark clouds a silver glimmer had begun once more to show itself. "I am just in time," he said to himself, "the night is over, the sun is rising."

At that moment there was a great whirr in the air, and from out of the green stalks rose a flight of millions and millions of enormous broad-winged butterflies of every hue and description—silver, gold, purple, brown, and blue. Some with dark and velvety wings like the Purple Emperor, or the Red Admiral, others diaphanous and iridescent as dragonflies. Others again like vast soft and silvery moths. They rose from every part of that green plain of stalks, they filled the sky, and then soared upwards and disappeared into the silvery cloudland.

Fletcher was about to leap forward when he heard a voice in his ear saying—

"Are you 6493 Victoria? You are talking to the Home Office."

## II

As soon as Fletcher heard the voice of the office messenger through the telephone he instantly realised his surroundings, and the strange experience he had just gone through, which had seemed so long and which in reality had been so brief, left little more impression on him than that which remains with a man who has been immersed in a brown study or who has been staring at something, say a poster in the street, and has not noticed the passage of time.

The next day he returned to his work at the office, and his fellow-clerks, during the whole of the next week, noticed that he was more zealous and more painstaking than ever. On the other hand, his periodical fits of abstraction grew more frequent and more pronounced. On one occasion he took a paper to the head of the department for signature, and after it had been signed, instead of removing it from the table, he remained staring in front of him, and it was not until the head of the department had called him three times loudly by name that he took any notice and regained possession of his faculties. As these fits of absent-mindedness grew to be somewhat severely commented on, he consulted a doctor, who told him that what he needed was change of air, and advised him to spend his Sundays at Brighton or at some other bracing and exhilarating spot. Fletcher did not take the doctor's advice, but continued spending his spare time as he did before, that is to say, in going to some big junction and watching the express trains go by all day long.

One day while he was thus employed—it was Sunday, in August of 19—, when the Egyptian Exhibition was attracting great crowds of visitors—and sitting, as was his habit, on a bench on the centre platform of Slough station, he noticed an Indian pacing up and down the platform, who every now and then stopped and regarded him with peculiar interest, hesitating as though he wished to speak to him. Presently, the Indian came and sat down on the same bench, and after having sat there in silence for some minutes he at last made a remark about the heat.

"Yes," said Fletcher, "it is trying, especially for people

like myself, who have to remain in London during these months."

"You are in an office, no doubt," said the Indian,

"Yes," said Fletcher.

"And no doubt you are hard worked."

"Our hours are not long," Fletcher replied, "and I should not complain of overwork if I did not happen to suffer from—well, I don't know what it is, but I suppose they would call it nerves."

"Yes," said the Indian, "I could see that by your eyes."

"I am a prey to sudden fits of abstraction," said Fletcher, "they are growing upon me. Sometimes in the office I forget where I am altogether for a space of about two or three minutes; people are beginning to notice it and to talk about it. I have been to a doctor, and he said I needed change of air. I shall have my leave in about a month's time, and then perhaps I shall get some change of air, but I doubt if it will do me any good. But these fits are annoying, and once something quite uncanny seemed to happen to me."

The Indian showed great interest and asked for further details concerning this strange experience, and Fletcher told him all that he could recall—for the memory of it was already dimmed—of what had happened when he had telephoned that night.

The Indian was thoughtful for a while after hearing this tale. At last he said: "I am not a doctor, I am not even what you call a quack doctor—I am a mere conjurer, and I gain my living by conjuring tricks and fortune-telling at the Exhibition which is going on in London. But although I am a poor man and an ignorant one, I have an inkling, a few sparks in me of ancient knowledge, and I know what is the matter with you."

"What is it?" asked Fletcher.

"You have the power, or something has the power," said the Indian, "of detaching you from your actual body, and your astral body has been into another planet. By your description I think it must be the planet Venus. It may happen to you again, and for a longer period—for a very much longer period."

"Is there anything I can do to prevent it?" asked Fletcher.

"Nothing," said the Indian, "You can try change of air if

you like, but," he said with a smile, "I do not think it will do you much good."

At that moment a train came in, and the Indian said good-bye and jumped into it.

On the next day, which was Monday, when Fletcher got to the office it was necessary for him to use the telephone with regard to some business. No sooner had he taken the receiver off the telephone than he vividly recalled the minute details of the evening he had telephoned, when the strange experience had come to him. The advertisement of Venus Soap that had hung in the telephone box in his house appeared distinctly before him, and as he thought of that he once more experienced a falling sensation which lasted only a fraction of a second, and rubbing his eyes he awoke to find himself in the tepid atmosphere of a green and humid world.

This time he was not near the wood, but on the sea-shore. In front of him was a grey sea, smooth as oil and clouded with steaming vapours, and behind him the wide green plain stretched into a cloudy distance. He could discern, faint on the far-off horizon, the shadowy forms of the gigantic mushrooms which he knew, and on the level plain, which reached the sea beach, but not so far off as the mushrooms, he could plainly see the huge green caterpillars moving slowly and lazily in an endless herd. The sea was breaking on the sand with a faint moan. But almost at once he became aware of another sound, which came he knew not whence, and which was familiar to him. It was a low whistling noise, and it seemed to come from the sky.

At that moment Fletcher was seized by an unaccountable panic. He was afraid of something; he did not know what it was, but he knew, he felt absolutely certain, that some danger, no vague calamity, no distant misfortune, but some definite physical danger was hanging over him and quite close to him—something from which it would be necessary to run away, and to run fast in order to save his life. And yet there was no sign of danger visible, for in front of him was the motionless oily sea, and behind him was the empty and silent plain. It was then he noticed that the caterpillars were fast disappearing, as if into the earth: he was too far off to make out how.

He began to run along the coast. He ran as fast as he

could, but he dared not look round. He ran back from the coast along the plain, from which a white mist was rising. By this time every single caterpillar had disappeared. The whistling noise continued and grew louder.

At last he reached the wood and bounded on, trampling down long trailing grasses and tangled weeds through the thick, muggy gloom of those endless aisles of jungle. He came to a somewhat open space where there was the trunk of a tree larger than the others; it stood by itself and disappeared into the tangle of creepers above. He thought he would climb the tree, but the trunk was too wide, and his efforts failed. He stood by the tree trembling and panting with fear. He could not hear a sound, but he felt that the danger, whatever it was, was at hand.

It grew darker and darker. It was night in the forest. He stood paralysed with terror; he felt as though bound hand and foot, but there was nothing to be done except to wait until his invisible enemy should choose to inflict his will on him and achieve his doom. And yet the agony of this suspense was so terrible that he felt that if it lasted much longer something must inevitably break inside him . . . and just as he was thinking that eternity could not be so long as the moments he was passing through, a blessed unconsciousness came over him. He woke from this state to find himself face to face with one of the office messengers, who said to him that he had been given his number two or three times but had taken no notice of it.

Fletcher executed his commission and then went upstairs to his office. His fellow-clerks at once asked what had happened to him, for he was looking white. He said that he had a headache and was not feeling quite himself, but made no further explanation.

This last experience changed the whole tenor of his life. When fits of abstraction had occurred to him before he had not troubled about them, and after his first strange experience he had felt only vaguely interested; but now it was a different matter. He was consumed with dread lest the thing should occur again. He did not want to get back to that green world and that oily sea; he did not want to hear the whistling noise, and to be pursued by an invisible enemy. So much did the dread of this weigh on him that he refused to go to the

telephone lest the act of telephoning should set alight in his mind the train of associations and bring his thoughts back to his dreadful experience.

Shortly after this he went for leave, and following the doctor's advice, he spent it by the sea. During all this time he was perfectly well, and was not once troubled by his curious fits. He returned to London in the autumn refreshed and well.

On the first day that he went to the office a friend of his telephoned him. When he was told that the line was being held for him he hesitated, but at last he went down to the telephone office.

He remained away twenty minutes. Finally his prolonged absence was noticed, and he was sent for. He was found in the telephone room stiff and unconscious, having fallen forward on the telephone desk. His face was quite white, and his eyes wide open and glazed with an expression of piteous and harrowing horror. When they tried to revive him their efforts were in vain. A doctor was sent for, and he said that Fletcher had died of heart disease.

## *JERRY BUNDLER*

W. W. Jacobs

It wanted a few nights to Christmas, a festival for which the small market-town of Torchester was making extensive preparations. The narrow streets which had been thronged with people were now almost deserted; the cheap-jack from London, with the remnant of breath left him after his evening's exertions, was making feeble attempts to blow out his naphtha lamp, and the last shops open were rapidly closing for the night.

In the comfortable coffee-room of the old "Boar's Head", half a dozen guests, principally commercial travellers, sat talking by the light of the fire. The talk had drifted from trade to politics, from politics to religion and so by easy stages to the supernatural. Three ghost stories, never known to fail before, had fallen flat; there was too much noise outside, too much light within. The fourth story was told by an old hand with more success; the streets were quiet, and he had turned the gas out. In the flickering light of the fire, as it shone on the glasses and danced with the shadows on the walls, the story proved so enthralling that George, the waiter, whose presence had been forgotten, created a very disagreeable sensation by suddenly starting up from a dark corner and gliding silently from the room.

"That's what I call a good story," said one of the men, sipping his hot whisky. "Of course it's an old idea that spirits like to get into the company of human beings. A man told me once that he travelled down the Great Western with a ghost, and hadn't the slightest suspicion of it until the inspector came for tickets. My friend said the way that ghost tried to keep up appearances by feeling for it in all its pockets and looking on the floor was quite touching. Ultimately it gave it up and with a faint groan vanished through the ventilator."

"That'll do, Hirst," said another man.

"It's not a subject for jesting," said a little old gentleman who had been an attentive listener. "I've never seen an apparition."

tion myself, but I know people who have, and I consider that they form a very interesting link between us and the after-life. There's a ghost story connected with this house, you know."

"Never heard of it," said another speaker, "and I've been here some years now."

"It dates back a long time now," said the old gentleman. "You've heard about Jerry Bundler, George?"

"Well, I've just 'eard odds and ends, sir," said the old waiter, "but I never put much count to 'em. There was one chap 'ere what said 'e saw it, and the gov'ner sacked 'im prompt."

"My father was a native of this town," said the old gentleman, "and knew the story well. He was a truthful man and a steady churchgoer, but I've heard him declare that once in his life he saw the appearance of Jerry Bundler in this house."

"And who was this Bundler?" inquired a voice.

"A London thief, pickpocket, highwayman—anything he could turn his dishonest hand to," replied the old gentleman; "and he was run to earth in this house one Christmas week some eighty years ago. He took his last supper in this very room, and after he had gone up to bed a couple of Bow Street runners, who had followed him from London but lost the scent a bit, went upstairs with the landlord and tried the door. It was stout oak, and fast, so one went into the yard, and by means of a short ladder got on to the window-sill, while the other stayed outside the door. Those below in the yard saw the man crouching on the sill, and then there was a sudden smash of glass, and with a cry he fell in a heap on the stones at their feet. Then in the moonlight they saw the white face of the pickpocket peeping over the sill, and while some stayed in the yard, others ran into the house and helped the other man to break the door in. It was difficult to obtain an entrance even then, for it was barred with heavy furniture, but they got in at last, and the first thing that met their eyes was the body of Jerry dangling from the top of the bed by his own handkerchief."

"Which bedroom was it?" asked two or three voices together.

The narrator shook his head. "That I can't tell you; but the story goes that Jerry still haunts this house, and my



father used to declare positively that the last time he slept here the ghost of Jerry Bundler lowered itself from the top of his bed and tried to strangle him."

"That'll do," said an uneasy voice. "I wish you'd thought to ask your father which bedroom it was."

"What for?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Well, I should take care not to sleep in it, that's all," said the voice, shortly.

"There's nothing to fear," said the other. "I don't believe for a moment that ghosts could really hurt one. In fact my father used to confess that it was only the unpleasantness of the thing that upset him, and that for all practical purposes, Jerry's fingers might have been made of cotton-wool for all the harm they could do."

"That's all very fine," said the last speaker again; "a ghost story is a ghost story, sir; but when a gentleman tells a tale of a ghost in the house in which one is going to sleep, I call it most ungentlemanly!"

"Pooh! nonsense!" said the old gentleman, rising; "ghosts can't hurt you. For my own part, I should rather like to see one. Good night, gentlemen."

"Good night," said the others. "And I only hope Jerry'll pay you a visit," added the nervous man as the door closed.

"Bring some more whisky, George," said a stout commercial; "I want keeping up when the talk turns this way."

"Shall I light the gas, Mr. Malcolm?" said George.

"No; the fire's very comfortable," said the traveller. "Now, gentlemen, any of you know any more?"

"I think we've had enough," said the other man; "we shall be thinking we see spirits next, and we're not all like the old gentleman who's just gone."

"Old humbug!" said Hirst. "I should like to put him to the test. Suppose I dress up as Jerry Bundler and go and give him a chance of displaying his courage?"

"Bravo!" said Malcolm, huskily; drowning one or two faint "Noes." "Just for the joke, gentlemen."

"No, no! Drop it, Hirst," said another man.

"Only for the joke," said Hirst, somewhat eagerly. "I've got some things upstairs in which I am going to play in *The Rivals*—knee-breeches, buckles, and all that sort of thing. It's

a rare chance. If you'll wait a bit I'll give you a full dress rehearsal, entitled 'Jerry Bundler; or The Nocturnal Strangler'."

"You won't frighten us," said the commercial, with a husky laugh.

"I don't know that," said Hirst sharply; "it's a question of acting, that's all. I'm pretty good, ain't I, Somers?"

"Oh, you're alright—for an amateur," said his friend, with a laugh.

"I'll bet a level sov, you don't frighten me," said the stout traveller.

"Done!" said Hirst. "I'll take the bet to frighten you first and the old gentleman afterwards. These gentlemen shall be the judges."

"You won't frighten us, sir," said another man, "because we're prepared for you; but you'd better leave the old man alone. It's dangerous play."

"Well, I'll try you first," said Hirst, springing up. "No gas, mind."

He ran lightly upstairs to his room, leaving the others, most of whom had been drinking somewhat freely, to wrangle about his proceedings. It ended in two of them going to bed.

"He's crazy on acting," said Somers, lighting his pipe. "Thinks he's the equal of anybody almost. It doesn't matter with us, but I won't let him go to the old man. And he won't mind so long as he gets an opportunity of acting to us."

"Well, I hope he'll hurry up," said Malcolm yawning; "it's nearly twelve now."

Nearly half an hour passed. Malcolm drew his watch from his pocket and was busy winding it, when George the waiter, who had been sent on an errand to the bar, burst suddenly into the room and rushed towards them.

"E's comin', gentlemen," he said breathlessly.

"Why, you're frightened, George," said the stout commercial, with a chuckle.

"It was the suddenness of it," said George, sheepishly; "and besides, I didn't look for seein' 'im in the bar. There's only a glimmer of light there, and 'e was sitting on the floor behind the bar. I nearly trod on 'im."

"Oh, you'll never make a man, George," said Malcolm;

"Well, it took me unawares," said the waiter. "Not that I'd have gone to the bar by myself if I'd known 'e was there, and I don't believe you would, either, sir."

"Nonsense," said Malcolm. "I'll go and fetch him in."

"You don't know what it's like, sir," said George, catching him by the sleeve. "It ain't fit to look at by yourself, it ain't, indeed. It's got the—*What's that?*"

They all started at the sound of a smothered cry from the staircase and the sound of somebody running hurriedly along the passage. Before anybody could speak, the door flew open and a figure bursting into the room flung itself gasping and shivering upon them.

"What is it? What's the matter?" demanded Malcolm. "Why, it's Mr. Hirst." He shook him roughly and then held some spirit to his lips. Hirst drank it greedily and with a sharp intake of his breath gripped him by the arm.

"Light the gas, George," said Malcolm.

The waiter obeyed hastily. Hirst, a ludicrous but pitiable figure in knee-breeches and coat, a large wig all awry, and his face a mess of grease paint, clung to him, trembling.

"Now, what's the matter?" asked Malcolm.

"I've seen it," said Hirst, with a hysterical sob, "O Lord, I'll never play the fool again, never!"

"Seen what?" said the others.

"Him—it—the ghost—anything!" said Hirst, wildly.

"Rot!" said Malcolm, uneasily.

"I was coming down the stairs," said Hirst, "just capering down—as I thought—it ought to do. I felt a tap——"

He broke off suddenly and peered nervously through the open door into the passage.

"I thought I saw it again," he whispered. "Look—at the foot of the stairs. Can you see anything?"

"No, there's nothing there," said Malcolm, whose own voice shook a little. "Go on. You felt a tap on your shoulder——"

"I turned round and saw it—a little wicked head and a white dead face, Pahl!"

"That's what I saw in the bar," said George. "'Orrid it was—devilish!"

Hirst shuddered, and, still retaining his nervous grip of Malcolm's sleeve, dropped into a chair.

"Well, it's a most unaccountable thing," said the dumb-founded Malcolm, turning to the others. "It's the last time I come to this house."

"I leave tomorrow," said George. "I wouldn't go down to that bar again by myself, no, not for fifty pounds!"

"It's talking about the thing that's caused it, I expect," said one of the men; "we've all been talking about this and having it in our minds. Practically we've been forming a spiritualistic circle without knowing it."

"Hang the old gentleman!" said Malcolm, heartily. "Upon my soul, I'm half afraid to go to bed. It's odd they should both think they saw something."

"I saw it as plain as I see you, sir," said George, solemnly. "P'raps if you keep your eyes turned up the passage you'll see it for yourself."

They followed the direction of his finger, but saw nothing, although one of them fancied that a head peeped round the corner of the wall.

"Who'll come down to the bar?" said Malcolm, looking round.

"You can go, if you like," said one of the others, with a faint laugh; "we'll wait here for you."

The stout traveller walked towards the door and took a few steps up the passage. Then he stopped. All was quite silent, and he walked slowly to the end and looked down fearfully towards the glass partition which shut off the bar. Three times he made as though to go to it; then he turned back, and, glancing over his shoulder, came hurriedly back to the room.

"Did you see it, sir?" whispered George.

"Don't know," said Malcolm softly. "I fancied I saw something, but it might have been fancy. I'm in the mood to see anything just now. How are you feeling now, sir?"

"Oh, I feel a bit better now," said Hirst, somewhat brusquely, as all eyes were turned upon him. "I dare say you think I'm easily scared, but you didn't see it."

"Not at all," said Malcolm, smiling faintly despite himself.

"I'm going to bed," said Hirst, noticing the smile and resenting it. "Will you share my room with me, Somers?"

"I will with pleasure," said his friend, "provided you don't mind sleeping with the gas on full all night."

He rose from his seat, and bidding the company a friendly good-night, left the room with his crestfallen friend. The others saw them to the foot of the stairs, and having heard their door close, returned to the coffee-room.

"Well, I suppose the bet's off?" said the stout commercial, poking the fire and then standing with his legs apart on the hearthrug: "though, as far as I can see, I won it. I never saw a man so scared in all my life. Sort of poetic justice about it, isn't there?"

"Never mind about poetry or justice," said one of his listeners; "who's going to sleep with me?"

"I will," said Malcolm affably.

"And I suppose we share a room together, Mr. Leek?" said the third man, turning to the fourth.

"No, thank you," said the other, briskly; "I don't believe in ghosts. If anything comes into my room I shall shoot it."

"That won't hurt a spirit, Leek," said Malcolm, decisively.

"Well, the noise'll be like company to me," said Leek, "and it'll wake the house too. But if you're nervous, sir," he added, with a grin, to the man who had suggested sharing his room, "George'll be only too pleased to sleep on the door-mat inside your room, I know."

"That I will, sir," said George fervently; "and if you gentlemen would only come down with me to the bar to put the gas out, I could never be sufficiently grateful."

They went out in a body, with the exception of Leek, peering carefully before them as they went. George turned the light out in the bar and they returned unmolested to the coffee-room, and, avoiding the sardonic smile of Leek, prepared to separate for the night.

"Give me the candle while you put the gas out, George," said the traveller.

The waiter handed it to him and extinguished the gas, and at the same moment all distinctly heard a step in the passage outside. It stopped at the door, and as they watched with bated breath, the door creaked and slowly opened. Malcolm fell back, open-mouthed, as a white, leering face, with sunken eyeballs and close-cropped bullet head, appeared at the opening.

For a few seconds the creature stood regarding them, blinking in a strange fashion at the candle. Then, with a sidling

movement, it came a little way into the room and stood there as if bewildered.

Not a man spoke or moved, but all watched with a horrible fascination as the creature removed its dirty neckcloth and its head rolled on its shoulder. For a minute it paused, and then, holding the rag before it, moved towards Malcolm.

The candle went out suddenly with a flash and a bang. There was a smell of powder, and something writhing in the darkness on the floor. A faint, choking cough, and then silence. Malcolm was the first to speak. "Matches," he said, in a strange voice. George struck one. Then he leapt at the gas and a burner flamed from the match. Malcolm touched the thing on the floor with his foot and found it soft. He looked at his companions. They mouthed inquiries at him, but he shook his head. He lit the candle, and, kneeling down, examined the silent thing on the floor. Then he rose swiftly, and dipping his handkerchief in the water-jug, bent down again and grimly wiped the white face. Then he sprang back with a cry of incredulous horror, pointing at it. Leek's pistol fell to the floor and he shut out the sight with his hands, but the others crowding forward, gazed spellbound at the dead face of Hirst.

Before a word was spoken the door opened and Somers hastily entered the room. His eyes fell on the floor, "Good God!" he cried. "You didn't——"

Nobody spoke.

"I told him not to," he said, in a suffocating voice. "I told him not to. I told him——"

He leaned against the wall, deathly sick, put his arms out feebly, and fell fainting into the traveller's arms,

## THE GREAT RETURN

*Arthur Machen*

### I

#### The Rumour of the Marvellous

There are strange things lost and forgotten in obscure corners of the newspapers. I often think that the most extraordinary item of intelligence that I have read in print appeared a few years ago in the London Press. It came from a well-known and most respected news agency; I imagine it was in all the papers. It was astounding.

The circumstances necessary—not to the understanding of this paragraph, for that is out of the question—but, we will say, to the understanding of the events which made it possible, are these. We had invaded Thibet, and there had been trouble in the hierarchy of that country, and a personage known as the Tashai Lama had taken refuge with us in India. He went on pilgrimage from one Buddhist shrine to another, and came at last to a holy mountain of Buddhism, the name of which I have forgotten. And thus the morning paper:

His Holiness the Tashai Lama then ascended the Mountain and was transfigured,—*Reuter*.

That was all. And from that day to this I have never heard a word of explanation or comment on this amazing statement.

\*

There was no more, it seemed, to be said. “*Reuter*”, apparently, thought he had made his simple statement of the facts of the case, had thereby done his duty, and so it all ended. Nobody, so far as I know, ever wrote to any paper asking what *Reuter* meant by it, or what the Tashai Lama meant by it. I suppose the fact was that nobody cared twopence about the matter; and so this strange event—if there were any such

event—was exhibited to us for a moment, and the lantern show revolved to other spectacles.

This is an extreme instance of the manner in which the marvellous is flashed out to us and then withdrawn behind its black veils and concealments; but I have known of other cases. Now and again, at intervals of a few years, there appear in the newspapers strange stories of the strange doings of what are technically called *poltergeists*. Some house, often a lonely farm, is suddenly subjected to an infernal bombardment. Great stones crash through the windows, thunder down the chimneys, impelled by no visible hand. The plates and cups and saucers are whirled from the dresser into the middle of the kitchen, no one can say how or by what agency. Upstairs the big bedstead and an old chest or two are heard bounding on the floor as if in a mad ballet. Now and then such doings as these excite a whole neighbourhood; sometimes a London paper sends a man down to make an investigation. He writes half a column of description on the Monday, a couple of paragraphs on the Tuesday, and then returns to town. Nothing has been explained, the matter vanishes away; and nobody cares. The tale trickles for a day or two through the Press, and then instantly disappears, like an Australian stream, into the bowels of darkness. It is possible, I suppose, that this singular incuriousness as to marvellous events and reports is not wholly unaccountable. It may be that the events in question are, as it were, psychic accidents and misadventures. They are not meant to happen, or, rather, to be manifested. They belong to the world on the other side of the dark curtain; and it is only by some queer mischance that a corner of that curtain is twitched aside for an instant. Then—for an instant—we see; but the personages whom Mr. Kipling calls the Lords of Life and Death take care that we do not see too much. Our business is with things higher and things lower, with things different, anyhow; and on the whole we are not suffered to distract ourselves with that which does not really concern us. The transfiguration of the Lama and the tricks of the *poltergeist* are evidently no affairs of ours; we raise an uninterested eyebrow and pass on—to poetry or to statistics.

\*

Be it noted; I am not professing any fervent personal



belief in the reports to which I have alluded. For all I know, the Lama, in spite of Reuter, was not transfigured, and the *poltergeist*, in spite of the late Mr. Andrew Lang, may in reality be only mischievous Polly, the servant girl at the farm. And to go further: I do not know that I should be justified in putting either of these cases of the marvellous in line with a chance paragraph that caught my eye last summer; for this had not, on the face of it at all events, anything wildly out of the common. Indeed, I dare say that I should not have read it, should not have seen it, if it had not contained the name of a place which I had once visited, which had then moved me in an odd manner that I could not understand. Indeed, I am sure that this particular paragraph deserves to stand alone, for even if the *poltergeist* be a real *poltergeist*, it merely reveals the psychic whimsicality of some region that is not our region. There were better things and more relevant things behind the few lines dealing with Llantrisant, the little town by the sea in Arfonshire.

Not on the surface, I must say, for the cutting—I have preserved it—reads as follows:—

LLANTRISANT.—The season promises very favourably: temperature of the sea yesterday at noon, 65 deg. Remarkable occurrences are supposed to have taken place during the recent Revival. The lights have not been observed lately. "The Crown." "The Fishermen's Rest."

The style was odd certainly; knowing a little of newspapers, I could see that the figure called, I think, *imesis*, or cutting, had been generously employed; the exuberances of the local correspondent had been pruned by a Fleet Street expert. And these poor men are often hurried; but what did those "lights" mean? What strange matters had the vehement blue pencil blotted out and brought to naught?

That was my first thought, and then, thinking still of Llantrisant and how I had first discovered it and found it strange, I read the paragraph again, and was saddened almost to see, as I thought, the obvious explanation. I had forgotten for the moment that it was war-time, that scares and rumours and terrors about traitorous signals and flashing lights were current everywhere by land and sea; someone, no doubt, had been watching innocent farmhouse windows and thought-

less fanlights of lodging-houses; there were the "lights" that had not been observed lately.

I found out afterwards that the Llantrisant correspondent had no such treasonous lights in mind, but something very different. Still; what do we know? He may have been mistaken, "the great rose of fire" that came over the deep may have been the port light of a coasting-ship. Did it shine at last from the old chapel on the headlands? Possibly; or possibly it was the doctor's lamp at Sarnau, some miles away. I have had wonderful opportunities lately of analysing the marvels of lying, conscious and unconscious; and indeed almost incredible feats in this way can be performed. If I incline to the less likely explanation of the "lights" at Llantrisant, it is merely because this explanation seems to me to be altogether congruous with the "remarkable occurrences" of the newspaper paragraph.

After all, rumour and gossip and hearsay are crazy things to be utterly neglected and laid aside: on the other hand, evidence is evidence, and when a couple of reputable surgeons assert, as they do assert in the case of Olwen Phillips, Croeswen, Llantrisant, that there has been a "kind of resurrection of the body," it is merely foolish to say that these things don't happen. The girl was a mass of tuberculosis, she was within a few hours of death; she is now full of life. And so, I do not believe that the rose of fire was merely a ship's light, magnified and transformed by dreaming Welsh sailors,

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But now I am going forward too fast. I have not dated the paragraph, so I cannot give the exact day of its appearance, but I think it was somewhere between the second and third week of June. I cut it out partly because it was about Llantrisant, partly because of the "remarkable occurrences". I have an appetite for these matters, though I also have this misfortune, that I require evidence before I am ready to credit them, and I have a sort of lingering hope that some day I shall be able to elaborate some scheme or theory of such things.

But in the meantime, as a temporary measure, I hold what I call the doctrine of the jig-saw puzzle. That is: this remarkable occurrence, and that, and the other may be, and

usually are, of no significance. Coincidence and chance and unsearchable causes will now and again make clouds that are undeniable fiery dragons, and potatoes that resemble Eminent Statesmen exactly and minutely in every feature, and rocks that are like eagles and lions. All this is nothing; it is when you get your set of odd shapes and find that they fit into one another, and at last that they are but parts of a large design; it is then that research grows interesting and indeed amazing, it is then that one queer form confirms the other, that the whole plan displayed justifies, corroborates, explains each separate piece.

So; it was within a week or ten days after I had read the paragraph about Llantrisant and had cut it out that I got a letter from a friend who was taking an early holiday in those regions.

"You will be interested," he wrote, "to hear that they have taken to ritualistic practices at Llantrisant. I went into the church the other day, and instead of smelling like a damp vault as usual, it was positively reeking with incense."

I knew better than that. The old parson was a firm Evangelical; he would rather have burnt sulphur in his church than incense any day. So I could not make out this report at all; and went down to Arfon a few weeks later determined to investigate this and any other remarkable occurrence at Llantrisant.

## II

### Odours of Paradise

I went down to Arfon in the very heat and bloom and fragrance of the wonderful summer that they were enjoying there. In London there was no such weather; it rather seemed as if the horror and fury of the war had mounted to the very skies and were there reigning. In the mornings the sun burnt down upon the city with a heat that scorched and consumed; but then clouds heavy and horrible would roll together from all quarters of the heavens, and early in the afternoon the air would darken, and a storm of thunder and lightning, and furious, hissing rain would fall upon the

streets. Indeed, the torment of the world was in the London weather. The city wore a terrible vesture; within our hearts was dread; without we were clothed in black clouds and angry fire.

It is certain that I cannot show in any words the utter peace of that Welsh coast to which I came; one sees, I think, in such a change a figure of the passage from the disquiets and the fears of earth to the peace of paradise. A land that seemed to be in a holy, happy dream, a sea that changed all the while from olivine to emerald, from emerald to sapphire, from sapphire to amethyst, that washed in white foam at the bases of the firm, grey rocks, and about the huge crimson bastions that hid the western bays and inlets of the waters; to this land I came, and to hollows that were purple and odorous with wild thyme, wonderful with many tiny, exquisite flowers. There was benediction in centaury, pardon in eye-bright, joy in lady's slipper; and so the weary eyes were refreshed, looking now at the little flowers and now at the deep, changing from marvel to marvel with the passing of the great white clouds, with the brightening of the sun. And the ears, torn with jangle and racket and idle, empty noise, were soothed and comforted by the ineffable, unutterable, unceasing murmur, as the tides swam to and fro, uttering mighty, hollow voices in the caverns of the rocks.

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For three or four days I rested in the sun and smelt the savour of the blossoms and of the salt water, and then, refreshed, I remembered that there was something queer about Llantrisant that I might as well investigate. It was no great thing that I thought to find, for, it will be remembered, I had ruled out the apparent oddity of the reporter's—or commissioner's?—reference to lights, on the ground that he must have been referring to some local panic about signalling to the enemy; who had certainly torpedoed a ship or two off Lundy in the Bristol Channel. All that I had to go upon was the reference to the "remarkable occurrences" at some revival, and then that letter of Jackson's, which spoke of Llantrisant church as "reeking" with incense, a wholly incredible and impossible state of things. Why, old Mr. Evans, the rector, looked upon coloured stoles as the very robe of Satan and his angels, as things dear to the heart of the Pope of

Rome. But as to incense! As I have already familiarly observed, I knew better.

But as a hard matter of fact, this may be worth noting: when I went over to Llantrisant on Monday, August 9th, I visited the church, and it was still fragrant and exquisite with the odour of rare gums that had fumed there,

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Now I happened to have a slight acquaintance with the rector. He was a most courteous and delightful old man, and on my last visit he had come across me in the churchyard, as I was admiring the very fine Celtic cross that stands there. Besides the beauty of the interlaced ornament there is an inscription in Ogham on one of the edges, concerning which the learned dispute; it is altogether one of the more famous crosses of Celtdom. Mr. Evans, I say, seeing me looking at the cross, came up and began to give me, the stranger, a résumé—somewhat of a shaky and uncertain résumé, I found afterwards—of the various debates and questions that had arisen as to the exact meaning of the inscription, and I was amused to detect an evident but underlying belief of his own: that the supposed Ogham characters were, in fact, due to boys' mischief and weather and the passing of the ages. But then I happened to put a question as to the sort of stone of which the cross was made, and the rector brightened amazingly. He began to talk geology, and, I think, demonstrated that the cross or the material for it must have been brought to Llantrisant from the south-west coast of Ireland. This struck me as interesting, because it was curious evidence of the migrations of the Celtic saints, whom the rector, I was delighted to find, looked upon as good Protestants though shaky on the subject of crosses; and so, with concessions on my part, we got on very well. Thus, with all this to the good, I was emboldened to call upon him.

I found him altered. Not that he was aged; indeed, he was rather made young, with a singular brightening upon his face, and something of joy upon it that I had not seen before, that I have seen on very few faces of men. We talked of the war, of course, since that is not to be avoided; of the farming prospects of the county; of general things, till I ventured to remark that I had been in the church, and had been surprised to find it perfumed with incense,

"You have made some alterations in the service since I was here last? You use incense now?"

The old man looked at me strangely, and hesitated.

"No," he said, "there has been no change. I use no incense in the church. I should not venture to do so."

"But," I was beginning, "the whole church is as if High Mass had just been sung there, and——"

He cut me short, and there was a certain grave solemnity in his manner that struck me almost with awe.

"I know you are a railer," he said, and the phrase coming from this mild old gentleman astonished me unutterably. "You are a railer and a bitter railer; I have read articles that you have written, and I know your contempt and your hatred for those you call Protestants in your derision; though your grandfather, the vicar of Caerleon-on-Usk, called himself Protestant and was proud of it, and your great-grand-uncle Hezekiah, *ffairiad coch yr Castletown*—the Red Priest of Castletown—was a great man with the Methodists in his day, and the people flocked by their thousands when he administered the Sacrament. I was born and brought up in Glamorganshire, and old men have wept as they told me of the weeping and contrition that there was when the Red Priest broke the Bread and raised the Cup. But you are a railer, and see nothing but the outside and the show. You are not worthy of this mystery that has been done here."

I went out from his presence rebuked indeed, and justly rebuked; but rather amazed. It is curiously true that the Welsh are still one people, one family almost, in a manner that the English cannot understand, but I had never thought that this old clergyman would have known anything of my ancestry or their doings. And as for my articles and such-like, I knew that the country clergy sometimes read, but I had fancied my pronouncements sufficiently obscure, even in London, much more in Arfon.

But so it happened, and so I had no explanation from the rector of Llantrisant of the strange circumstance, that his church was full of incense and odours of paradise.

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I went up and down the ways of Llantrisant wondering, and came to the harbour, which is a little place, with little quays where some small coasting trade still lingers. A brigan-

tine was at anchor here, and very lazily in the sunshine they were loading it with anthracite; for it is one of the oddities of Llantrisant that there is a small colliery in the heart of the wood on the hillside. I crossed a causeway which parts the outer harbour from the inner harbour, and settled down on a rocky beach hidden under a leafy hill. The tide was going out, and some children were playing on the wet sand, while two ladies—their mothers, I suppose—talked together as they sat comfortably on their rugs at a little distance from me.

At first they talked of the war, and I made myself deaf, for of that talk one gets enough, and more than enough, in London. Then there was a period of silence, and the conversation had passed to quite a different topic when I caught the thread of it again. I was sitting on the further side of a big rock, and I do not think that the two ladies had noticed my approach. However, though they spoke of strange things, they spoke of nothing which made it necessary for me to announce my presence.

"And, after all," one of them was saying, "what is it all about! I can't make out what is come to the people."

This speaker was a Welshwoman; I recognised the clear, over-emphasised consonants, and a faint suggestion of an accent. Her friend came from the Midlands, and it turned out that they had only known each other for a few days. Theirs was a friendship of the beach and of bathing; such friendships are common at small seaside places.

"There is certainly something odd about the people here. I have never been to Llantrisant before, you know; indeed, this is the first time we've been to Wales for our holidays, and knowing nothing about the ways of the people and not being accustomed to hear Welsh spoken, I thought, perhaps, it must be my imagination. But you think there really is something a little queer?"

"I can tell you this: that I have been in two minds whether I should not write to my husband and ask him to take me and the children away. You know where I am at Mrs. Morgan's, and the Morgans' sitting-room is just the other side of the passage, and sometimes they leave the door open, so that I can hear what they say quite plainly. And you see I understand the Welsh, though they don't know it. And I hear them saying the most alarming things."

"What sort of things?"

"Well, indeed, it sounds like some kind of a religious service, but it's not Church of England, I know that. Old Morgan begins it, and the wife and children answer. Something like: 'Blessed be God for the messengers of Paradise.' 'Blessed be His Name for Paradise in the meat and in the drink.' 'Thanksgiving for the old offering.' 'Thanksgiving for the appearance of the old altar.' 'Praise for the joy of the ancient garden.' 'Praise for the return of those that have been long absent.' And all that sort of thing. It is nothing but madness."

"Depend upon it," said the lady from the Midlands, "there's no real harm in it. They're Dissenters; some new sect, I dare say. You know some Dissenters are very queer in their ways."

"All that is like no Dissenters that I have ever known in all my life whatever," replied the Welsh lady somewhat vehemently, with a very distinct intonation of the land. "And have you heard them speak of the bright light that shone at midnight from the church?"

### III

#### A Secret in a Secret Place

Now here was I altogether at a loss and quite bewildered. The children broke into the conversation of the two ladies and cut it all short, just as the midnight lights from the church came on the field, and when the little girls and boys went back again to the sands whooping, the tide of talk had turned, and Mrs. Harland and Mrs. Williams were quite safe and at home with Janey's measles, and a wonderful treatment for infantile earache, as exemplified in the case of Trevor. There was no more to be got out of them, evidently, so I left the beach, crossed the harbour causeway, and drank beer at the "Fishermen's Rest" till it was time to climb up two miles of deep lane and catch the train to Penvro, where I was staying. And I went up the lane, as I say, in a kind of amazement; and not so much, I think, because of evidences and hints of things strange to the senses, such as the savour of incense where no incense had smoked for three hundred and fifty



years and more, or the story of bright light shining from the dark, closed church at dead of night, as because of that sentence of thanksgiving "for paradise in meat and in drink".

For the sun went down and the evening fell as I climbed the long hill through the deep woods and the high meadows, and the scent of all the green things rose from the earth and from the heart of the wood, and at a turn of the lane far below was the misty glimmer of the still sea, and from far below its deep murmur sounded as it washed on the little hidden, enclosed bay where Llantrisant stands. And I thought, if there be paradise in meat and in drink, so much the more is there paradise in the scent of the green leaves at evening and in the appearance of the sea and in the redness of the sky; and there came to me a certain vision of a real world about us all the while, of a language that was only secret because we would not take the trouble to listen to it and discern it.

It was almost dark when I got to the station, and here were the few feeble oil lamps lit, glimmering in that lonely land, where the way is long from farm to farm. The train came on its way, and I got into it; and just as we moved from the station I noticed a group under one of those dim lamps. A woman and her child had got out, and they were being welcomed by a man who had been waiting for them. I had not noticed his face as I stood on the platform, but now I saw it as he pointed down the hill towards Llantrisant, and I think I was almost frightened.

He was a young man, a farmer's son, I would say, dressed in rough brown clothes, and as different from old Mr. Evans, the rector as one man might be from another. But on his face, as I saw it in the lamplight, there was the like brightening that I had seen on the face of the rector. It was an illuminated face, glowing with an ineffable joy, and I thought it rather gave light to the platform lamp than received light from it. The woman and her child, I inferred, were strangers to the place, and had come to pay a visit to the young man's family. They had looked about them in bewilderment, half-alarmed, before they saw him; and then his face was radiant in their sight, and it was easy to see that all their troubles were ended and over. A wayside station and a darkening

country; and it was as if they were welcomed by shining, immortal gladness—even into paradise.

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But though there seemed in a sense light all about my ways, I was myself still quite bewildered. I could see, indeed, that something strange had happened or was happening in the little town hidden under the hill, but there was so far no clue to the mystery, or rather, the clue had been offered to me, and I had not taken it, I had not even known that it was there; since we do not so much as see what we have determined, without judging, to be incredible, even though it be held up before our eyes. The dialogue that the Welsh Mrs. Williams had reported to her English friend might have set me on the right way; but the right way was outside all my limits of possibility, outside the circle of my thought. The palaeontologist might see monstrous, significant marks in the slime of a river bank, but he would never draw the conclusions that his own peculiar science would seem to suggest to him; he would choose any explanation rather than the obvious, since the obvious would also be the outrageous—according to our established habit of thought, which we deem final.

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The next day I took all these strange things with me for consideration to a certain place that I knew of not far from Penvro. I was now in the early stages of the jig-saw process, or rather I had only a few pieces before me, and—to continue the figure—my difficulty was this: that though the markings on each piece seemed to have design and significance, yet I could not make the wildest guess as to the nature of the whole picture, of which these were the parts. I had clearly seen that there was a great secret; I had seen that on the face of the young farmer on the platform of Llantrisant station; and in my mind there was all the while the picture of him going down the dark, steep, winding lane that led to the town and the sea, going down through the heart of the wood, with light about him.

But there was bewilderment in the thought of this, and in the endeavour to match it with the perfumed church and the scraps of talk that I had heard and the rumour of midnight brightness; and though Penvro is by no means populous, I thought I would go to a certain solitary place called the Old

Camp Head, which looks towards Cornwall and to the great deeps that roll beyond Cornwall to the far ends of the world; a place where fragments of dreams—they seemed such then—might, perhaps, be gathered into the clearness of vision.

It was some years since I had been to the Head, and I had gone on that last time and on a former visit by the cliffs, a rough and difficult path. Now I chose a landward way, which the country map seemed to justify, though doubtfully, as regarded the last part of the journey. So I went inland and climbed the hot summer by-roads, till I came, at last to a lane which gradually turned turfy and grass-grown, and then on high ground, ceased to be. It left me at a gate in a hedge of old thorns; and across the field beyond there seemed to be some faint indications of a track. One would judge that sometimes men did pass by that way, but not often.

It was high ground but not within sight of the sea. But the breath of the sea blew about the hedge of thorns, and came with a keen savour to the nostrils. The ground sloped gently from the gate and then rose again to a ridge, where a white farmhouse stood all alone. I passed by this farmhouse, threading an uncertain way, followed a hedgerow doubtfully; and saw suddenly before me the Old Camp, and beyond it the sapphire plain of waters and the mist where sea and sky met. Steep from my feet the hill fell away, a land of gorse-blossom, red-gold and mellow, of glorious purple heather. It fell into a hollow that went down, shining with rich green bracken, to the glimmering sea; and before me and beyond the hollow rose a height of turf, bastioned at the summit with the awful, age-old walls of the Old Camp; green, rounded circumvallations, wall within wall, tremendous, with their myriad years upon them.

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Within these smoothed, green mounds, looking across the shining and changing of the waters in the happy sunlight, I took out the bread and cheese and beer that I had carried in a bag, and ate and drank, and lit my pipe, and set myself to think over the enigmas of Llantrisant. And I had scarcely done so when, a good deal to my annoyance, a man came climbing up over the green ridges and took up his stand close by, and stared out to sea. He nodded to me, and began with "Fine weather for the harvest" in the approved manner,

and so sat down and engaged me in a net of talk. He was of Wales, it seemed, but from a different part of the country, and was staying for a few days with relations—at the white farmhouse which I had passed on my way. His tale of nothing flowed on to his pleasure and my pain, till he fell suddenly on Llantrisant and its doings. I listened then with wonder, and here is his tale condensed. Though it must be clearly understood that the man's evidence was only second-hand; he had heard it from his cousin, the farmer.

So, to be brief, it appeared that there had been a long feud at Llantrisant between a local solicitor, Lewis Prothero (we will say), and a farmer named James. There had been a quarrel about some trifle, which had grown more and more bitter as the two parties forgot the merits of the original dispute, and by some means or other, which I could not well understand, the lawyer had got the small freeholder "under his thumb". James, I think, had given a bill of sale in a bad season, and Prothero had bought it up; and the end was that the farmer was turned out of the old house, and was lodging in a cottage. People said he would have to take a place on his own farm as a labourer; he went about in dreadful misery, piteous to see. It was thought by some that he might very well murder the lawyer, if he met him.

They did meet, in the middle of the market place at Llantrisant one Saturday in June. The farmer was a little black man, and he gave a shout of rage, and the people were rushing at him to keep him off Prothero.

"And then," said my informant, "I will tell you what happened. This lawyer as they tell me, he is a great big brawny fellow, with a big jaw and a wide mouth, and a red face and red whiskers. And there he was in his black coat and his high hard hat, and all his money at his back, as you may say. And, indeed, he did fall down on his knees in the dust there in the street in front of Philip James, and every one could see that terror was upon him. And he did beg Philip James's pardon, and beg of him to have mercy, and he did implore him by God, and man and the saints of paradise. And my cousin, John Jenkins, Penmawr, he do tell me that the tears were falling from Lewis Prothero's eyes like the rain. And he put his hand into his pocket and drew out the deed of Pantyreos, Philip James's old farm that was, and

did give him the farm back and a hundred pounds for the stock that was on it, and two hundred pounds, all in notes of the bank, for amendment and consolation.

"And then, from what they do tell me, all the people did go mad, crying and weeping and calling out all manner of things at the top of their voices. And at last nothing would do but they must all go up to the churchyard, and there Philip James and Lewis Prothero they swear friendship to one another for a long age before the old cross, and everyone sings praises. And my cousin he do declare to me that there were men standing in that crowd that he did never see before in Llantrisant in all his life, and his heart was shaken within him as if it had been in a whirlwind."

I had listened to all this in silence. I said then:

"What does your cousin mean by that? Men that he had never seen in Llantrisant? What men?"

"The people," he said very slowly, "call them the Fishermen."

And suddenly there came into my mind the "Rich Fisherman" who in the old legend guards the holy mystery of the Graal,

## IV

### The Ringing of the Bell

So far I have not told the story of the things of Llantrisant, but rather the story of how I stumbled upon them and among them, perplexed and wholly astray, seeking, but yet not knowing at all what I sought; bewildered now and again by circumstances that seemed to me inexplicable; devoid, not so much of the key to the enigma, but of the key to the nature of the enigma. You cannot begin to solve a puzzle till you know what the puzzle is about. "Yards divided by minutes," said the mathematical master to me long ago, "will give neither pigs, sheep, nor oxen." He was right; though his manner on this and on all other occasions was highly offensive. This is enough of the personal process, as I may call it; and there follows the story of what happened at Llantrisant last summer, the story as I pieced it together at last,

It all began, it appears, on a hot day, early in last June; so far as I can make out, on the first Saturday in the month. There was a deaf old woman, a Mrs. Parry, who lived by herself in a lonely cottage a mile or so from the town. She came into the market-place early on the Saturday morning in a state of some excitement, and as soon as she had taken up her usual place on the pavement by the churchyard, with her ducks and eggs and a few very early potatoes, she began to tell her neighbours about her having heard the sound of a great bell. The good women on each side smiled at one another behind Mrs. Parry's back, for one had to bawl into her ear before she could make out what one meant; and Mrs. Williams, Penycloed, bent over and yelled: "What bell should that be, Mrs. Parry? There's no church near you up at Penrhiw. Do you hear what nonsense she talks?" said Mrs. Williams in a low voice to Mrs. Morgan, "As if she could hear any bell, whatever."

"What makes you talk nonsense yourself?" said Mrs. Parry, to the amazement of the two women. "I can hear a bell as well as you, Mrs. Williams, and as well as your whispers either."

And there is the fact, which is not to be disputed; though the deductions from it may be open to endless disputations; this old woman who had been all but stone deaf for twenty years—the defect had always been in her family—could suddenly hear on this June morning as well as anybody else. And her two old friends stared at her, and it was some time before they had appeased her indignation, and induced her to talk about the bell.

It had happened in the early morning, which was very misty. She had been gathering sage in her garden, high on a round hill looking over the sea. And there came in her ears a sort of throbbing and singing and trembling, "as if there were music coming out of the earth," and then something seemed to break in her head, and all the birds began to sing and make melody together, and the leaves of the poplars round the garden fluttered in the breeze that rose from the sea, and the cock crowed far off at Twyn, and the dog barked down in Kemeys Valley. But above all these sounds, unheard for so many years, there thrilled the deep and chanting note of the bell, "like a bell and a man's voice singing at once."

They stared again at her and at one another. "Where did it sound from?" asked one. "It came sailing across the sea," answered Mrs. Parry quite composedly, "and I did hear it coming nearer and nearer to the land."

"Well, indeed," said Mrs. Morgan, "it was a ship's bell then, though I can't make out why they would be ringing like that."

"It was not ringing on any ship, Mrs. Morgan," said Mrs. Parry.

"Then where do you think it was ringing?"

"Ym Mharadwys," replied Mrs. Parry. Now that means "in Paradise", and the two others changed the conversation quickly. They thought that Mrs. Parry had got back her hearing suddenly—such things did happen now and then—and that the shock had made her "a bit queer". And this explanation would no doubt have stood its ground, if it had not been for other experiences. Indeed, the local doctor who had treated Mrs. Parry for a dozen years, not for her deafness, which he took to be hopeless and beyond cure, but for a tiresome and recurrent winter cough, sent an account of the case to a colleague at Bristol, suppressing, naturally enough, the reference to Paradise. The Bristol physician gave it as his opinion that the symptoms were absolutely what might have been expected. "You have here, in all probability," he wrote, "the sudden breaking down of an old obstruction in the aural passage, and I should quite expect this process to be accompanied by tinnitus of a pronounced and even violent character."

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But for the other experiences? As the morning wore on and drew to noon, high market, and to the utmost brightness of that summer day, all the stalls and the streets were full of rumours and of awed faces. Now from one lonely farm, now from another, men and women came and told the story of how they had listened in the early morning with thrilling hearts to the thrilling music of a bell that was like no bell ever heard before. And it seemed that many people in the town had been roused, they knew not how, from sleep; waking up, as one of them said, as if bells were ringing and the organ playing, and a choir of sweet voices singing all

together: "There were such melodies and songs that my heart was full of joy."

And a little past noon some fishermen who had been out all night returned, and brought a wonderful story into the town of what they had heard in the mist; and one of them said he had seen something go by at a little distance from his boat. "It was all golden and bright," he said, "and there was glory about it." Another fisherman declared "there was a song upon the water that was like heaven."

And here I would say in parenthesis that on returning to town I sought out a very old friend of mine, a man who has devoted a lifetime to strange and esoteric studies. I thought that I had a tale that would interest him profoundly, but I found that he heard me with a good deal of indifference. And at this very point of the sailors' stories I remember saying: "Now what do you make of that? Don't you think it's extremely curious?" He replied: "I hardly think so. Possibly the sailors were lying; possibly it happened as they say. Well; that sort of thing has always been happening." I give my friend's opinion; I make no comment on it.

Let it be noted that there was something remarkable as to the manner in which the sound of the bell was heard—or supposed to be heard. There are, no doubt, mysteries in sound as in all else; indeed, I am informed that during one of the horrible outrages that have been perpetrated on London during this autumn there was an instance of a great block of workmen's dwellings in which the only person who heard the crash of a particular bomb falling was an old deaf woman, who had been fast asleep till the moment of the explosion. This is strange enough of a sound that was entirely in the natural (and horrible) order; and so it was at Llantrisant, where the sound was either a collective auditory hallucination or a manifestation of what is conveniently, if inaccurately, called the supernatural order.

For the thrill of the bell did not reach to all ears—or hearts. Deaf Mrs. Parry heard it in her lonely cottage garden, high above the misty sea; but then, in a farm on the other or western side of Llantrisant a little child, scarcely three years old, was the only one out of a household of ten people who heard anything. He called out in stammering baby Welsh



something that sounded like "*Clychau fawr, clychau fawr*"—the great bells, the great bells—and his mother wondered what he was talking about. Of the crews of half a dozen trawlers that were swinging from side to side in the mist, not more than four men had any tale to tell. And so it was that for an hour or two the man who had heard nothing suspected his neighbour who had heard marvels of lying; and it was some time before the mass of evidence coming from all manner of diverse and remote quarters convinced the people that there was a true story here. A might suspect B, his neighbour, of making up a tale; but when C, from some place on the hills five miles away, and D, the fisherman on the waters, each had a like report, then it was clear that something had happened,

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And even then, as they told me, the signs to be seen upon the people were stranger than the tales told by them and among them. It has struck me that many people in reading some of the phrases that I have reported will dismiss them with laughter as very poor and fantastic inventions; fishermen, they will say, do not speak of "a song like heaven" or of "glory about it". And I dare say this would be a just enough criticism if I were reporting English fishermen; but, odd though it may be, Wales has not yet lost the last shreds of the grand manner. And let it be remembered also that in most cases such phrases are translated from another language, that is, from the Welsh.

So, they come trailing, let us say, fragments of the cloud of glory in their common speech; and so, on this Saturday, they began to display, uneasily enough in many cases, their consciousness that the things that were reported were of their ancient right and former custom. The comparison is not quite fair; but conceive Hardy's old Durbeyfield suddenly waking from long slumber to find himself in a noble thirteenth-century hall, waited on by kneeling pages, smiled on by sweet ladies in silken cōtehardies.

So by evening time there had come to the old people the recollection of stories that their fathers had told them as they sat round the hearth of winter nights, fifty, sixty, seventy years ago; stories of the wonderful bell of Teilo Sant, that had sailed across the glassy seas from Syon, that was called a

portion of Paradise, "and the sound of its ringing was like the perpetual choir of the angels."

Such things were remembered by the old and told to the young that evening in the streets of the town and in the deep lanes that climbed far hills. The sun went down to the mountain red with fire like a burnt offering, the sky turned violet, the sea was purple, as one told another of the wonder that had returned to the land after long ages.

## V

### The Rose of Fire

It was during the next nine days, counting from that Saturday early in June—the first Saturday in June, as I believe—that Llantrisant and all the regions about became possessed either by an extraordinary set of hallucinations or by a visitation of great marvels.

This is not the place to strike the balance between the two possibilities. The evidence is, no doubt, readily available; the matter is open to systematic investigation.

But this may be said; the ordinary man, in the ordinary passages of his life, accepts in the main the evidence of his senses, and is entirely right in doing so. He says that he sees a cow, that he sees a stone wall, and that the cow and the stone wall are "there". This is very well for all the practical purposes of life, but I believe that the metaphysicians are by no means so easily satisfied as to the reality of the stone wall and the cow. Perhaps they might allow that both objects are "there" in the sense that one's reflection is in a glass; there is an actuality, but is there a reality external to oneself? In any event, it is solidly agreed that, supposing a real existence, this much is certain—it is not in the least like our conception of it. The ant and the microscope will quickly convince us that we do not see things as they really are, even supposing that we see them at all. If we could "see" the real cow she would appear utterly incredible, as incredible as the things I am to relate.

Now, there is nothing that I know much more unconvincing than the stories of the red light on the sea. Several

sailors, men on small coasting ships, who were working up or down the Channel on that Saturday night, spoke of "seeing" the red light, and it must be said that there is a very tolerable agreement in their tales. All make the time as between midnight of the Saturday and one o'clock on the Sunday morning. Two of those sailormen are precise as to the time of the apparition; they fix it by elaborate calculations of their own as occurring at 12.20 a.m. And the story?

A red light, a burning spark seen far away in the darkness, taken at the first moment of seeing for a signal, and probably an enemy signal. Then it approached at a tremendous speed, and one man said he took it to be the port light of some new kind of navy motor-boat which was developing a rate, hitherto unheard of, a hundred or a hundred and fifty knots. And then, in the third instant of the sight, it was clear that this was no earthly speed. At first a red spark in the farthest distance; then a rushing lamp; and then, as if in an incredible point of time, it swelled into a vast rose of fire that filled all the sea and all the sky and hid the stars and possessed the land. "I thought the end of the world had come," one of the sailors said.

And then, an instant more, and it was gone from them, and four of them say that there was a red spark on Chapel Head, where the old grey chapel of St. Teilo stands, high above the water, in a cleft of the limestone rocks.

And thus the sailors; and thus their tales are incredible; but *they* are not incredible. I believe that men of the highest eminence in physical science have testified to the occurrence of phenomena every whit as marvellous, to things as absolutely opposed to all natural order, as we conceive it; and it may be said that nobody minds them. "That sort of thing has always been happening," as my friend remarked to me. But the men, whether or no the fire had ever been without them, there was no doubt that it was now within them, for it burned in their eyes. They were purged as if they had passed through the Furnace of the Sages, governed with Wisdom that the alchemists know. They spoke without much difficulty of what they had seen, or had seemed to see, with their eyes, but hardly at all of what their hearts had known,

when for a moment the glory of the fiery rose had been about them.

For some weeks afterwards they were still, as it were, amazed; almost, I would say, incredulous. If there had been nothing more than the splendid and fiery appearance, showing and vanishing, I do believe that they themselves would have discredited their own senses and denied the truth of their own tales. And one does not dare to say whether they would not have been right. Men like Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge are certainly to be heard with respect, and they bear witness to all manner of apparent evasions of laws which we, or most of us, consider far more deeply founded than the ancient hills. They may be justified; but in our hearts we doubt. We cannot wholly believe in inner sincerity that the solid table did rise, without mechanical reason or cause, into the air, and so defy that which we name the "law of gravitation". I know what may be said on the other side; I know that there is no true question of "law" in the case; that the law of gravitation really means just this: that I have never seen a table rising without mechanical aid, or an apple, detached from the bough, soaring to the skies instead of falling to the ground. The so-called law is just the sum of common observation and nothing more; yet I say, in our heart we do not believe that the table rises; much less do we believe in the rose of fire that for a moment swallowed up the skies and seas and shores of the Welsh coast last June.

And the men who saw it would have invented fairy tales to account for it, I say again, if it had not been for that which was within them.

They said, all of them, and it was certain now that they spoke the truth, that in the moment of the vision, every pain and ache and malady in their bodies had passed away. One man had been vilely drunk on venomous spirit, procured at "Jobson's Hole" down by the Cardiff Docks. He was horribly ill; he had crawled up from his bunk for a little fresh air; and in an instant his horrors and his deadly nausea had left him. Another man was almost desperate with the raging hammering pain of an abscess on a tooth; he says that when the red flame came near he felt as if a dull, heavy

blow had fallen on his jaw, and then the pain was quite gone; he could scarcely believe that there had been any pain there.

And they all bear witness to an extraordinary exaltation of the senses. It is indescribable, this; for they cannot describe it. They are amazed again; they do not in the least profess to know what happened; but there is no more possibility of shaking their evidence than there is a possibility of shaking the evidence of a man who says that water is wet and fire hot.

"I felt a bit queer afterwards," said one of them, "and I steadied myself by the mast, and I can't tell how I felt as I touched it. I didn't know that touching a thing like a mast could be better than a big drink when you're thirsty, or a soft pillow when you're sleepy."

I heard other instances of this state of things, as I must vaguely call it, since I do not know what else to call it. But I suppose we can all agree that to the man in average health, the average impact of the external world on his senses is a matter of indifference. The average impact; a harsh scream, the bursting of a motor tyre, any violent assault on the aural nerves will annoy him, and he may say "damn". Then, on the other hand, the man who is not "fit" will easily be annoyed and irritated by someone pushing past him in a crowd, by the ringing of a bell, by the sharp closing of a book.

But so far as I could judge from the talk of these sailors, the average impact of the external world had become to them a fountain of pleasure. Their nerves were on edge, but an edge to receive exquisite sensuous impressions. The touch of the rough mast, for example; that was a joy far greater than is the joy of fine silk to some luxurious skins; they drank water and stared as if they had been *fins gourmets* tasting an amazing wine; the creak and whine of their ship on its slow way were as exquisite as the rhythm and song of a Bach fugue to an amateur of music.

And then, within; these rough fellows have their quarrels and strifes and variances and envyings like the rest of us; but that was all over between them that had seen the rosy light; old enemies shook hands heartily, and roared with

laughter as they confessed one to another what fools they had been.

"I can't exactly say how it has happened or what has happened at all," said one, "but if you have all the world and the glory of it, how can you fight for fivepence?"

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The church of Llantrisant is a typical example of a Welsh parish church, before the evil and horrible period of "restoration".

This lower world is a palace of lies, and of all foolish lies there is none more insane than a certain vague fable about the mediaeval freemasons, a fable which somehow imposed itself upon the cold intellect of Hallam the historian. The story is, in brief, that throughout the Gothic period, at any rate, the art and craft of church building were executed by wandering guilds of "freemasons", possessed of various secrets of building and adornment, which they employed wherever they went. If this nonsense were true, the Gothic of Cologne would be as the Gothic of Colne, and the Gothic of Arles like to the Gothic of Abingdon. It is so grotesquely untrue that almost every county, let alone every country, has its distinctive style in Gothic architecture. Arfon is in the west of Wales; its churches have marks and features which distinguish them from the churches in the east of Wales.

The Llantrisant church has that primitive division between nave and chancel which only very foolish people decline to recognise as equivalent to the Oriental iconostasis and as the origin of the Western rood-screen. A solid wall divided the church into two portions; in the centre was a narrow opening with a rounded arch, through which those who sat towards the middle of the church could see the small, red-carpeted altar and the three roughly shaped lancet windows above it.

The "reading pew" was on the outer side of this wall of partition, and here the rector did his service, the choir being grouped in seats about him. On the inner side were the pews of certain privileged houses of the town and district.

On the Sunday morning the people were all in their accustomed places, not without a certain exultation in their eyes, not without a certain expectation of they knew not

what. The bells stopped ringing, the rector, in his old-fashioned, ample surplice, entered the reading-desk, and gave out the hymn:) "My God, and is Thy Table spread";

And, as the singing began, all the people who were in the pews within the wall came out of them and streamed through the archway into the nave. They took what places they could find up and down the church, and the rest of the congregation looked at them in amazement.

Nobody knew what had happened. Those whose seats were next to the aisle tried to peer into the chancel, to see what had happened or what was going on there. But somehow the light flamed so brightly from the windows above the altar, those being the only windows in the chancel, one small lancet in the south wall excepted, that no one could see anything at all.

"It was as if a veil of gold adorned with jewels was hanging there," one man said; and indeed there are a few odds and scraps of old painted glass left in the eastern lancets.

But there were few in the church who did not hear now and again voices speaking beyond the wall,

## VI

### Olwen's Dream

The well-to-do and dignified personages who left their pews in the chancel of Llantrisant Church and came hurrying into the nave could give no explanation of what they had done. They felt, they said, that they "had to go," and to go quickly; they were driven out, as it were, by a secret, irresistible command. But all who were present in the church that morning were amazed, though all exulted in their hearts; for they, like the sailors who saw the rose of fire on the waters, were filled with a joy that was literally ineffable, since they could not utter it or interpret it to themselves.

And they too, like the sailors, were transmuted, or the world was transmuted for them. They experienced what

the doctors call a sense of *bien être*, but a *bien être* raised to the highest power. Old men felt young again, eyes that had been growing dim now saw clearly, and saw a world that was like Paradise, the same world, it is true, but a world rectified and glowing, as if an inner flame shone in all things, and behind all things.

And the difficulty in recording this state is this, that it is so rare an experience that no set language to express it is in existence. A shadow of its raptures and ecstasies is found in the highest poetry; there are phrases in ancient books telling of the Celtic saints that dimly hint at it; some of the old Italian masters of painting had known it, for the light of it shines in their skies and about the battlements of their cities that are founded on magic hills. But these are but broken hints.

It is not poetic to go to Apothecaries' Hall for similes. But for many years I kept by me an article from the *Lancet* or the *British Medical Journal*—I forget which—in which a doctor gave an account of certain experiments he had conducted with a drug called the Mescal Button, or Anhelonium Lewinii. He said that while under the influence of the drug he had but to shut his eyes, and immediately before him there would rise incredible Gothic cathedrals, of such majesty and splendour and glory that no heart had ever conceived. They seemed to surge from the depths to the very heights of heaven, their spires swayed amongst the clouds and the stars, they were fretted with admirable imagery. And as he gazed, he would presently become aware that all the stones were living stones, that they were quickening and palpitating, and then that they were glowing jewels, say, emeralds, sapphires, rubies, opals, but of hues that the mortal eye had never seen.

That description gives, I think, some faint notion of the nature of the transmuted world into which these people by the sea had entered, a world quickened and glorified and full of pleasures. Joy and wonder were on all faces; but the deepest joy and the greatest wonder were on the face of the rector. For he had heard through the veil the Greek word for "holy", three times repeated.

And he, who had once been a horrified assistant at



High Mass in a foreign church, recognised the perfume of incense that filled the place from end to end.

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It was on that Sunday night that Olwen Phillips of Croeswen dreamed her wonderful dream. She was a girl of sixteen, the daughter of small farming people, and for many months she had been doomed to certain death. Consumption, which flourishes in that damp, warm climate, had laid hold of her; not only her lungs but her whole system was a mass of tuberculosis. As is common enough, she had enjoyed many fallacious brief recoveries in the early stages of the disease, but all hope had long been over, and now for the last few weeks she had seemed to rush vehemently to death. The doctor had come on the Saturday morning, bringing with him a colleague. They had both agreed that the girl's case was in its last stages. "She cannot possibly last more than a day or two," said the local doctor to her mother. He came again on the Sunday morning and found his patient perceptibly worse, and soon afterwards she sank into a heavy sleep, and her mother thought that she would never wake from it.

The girl slept in an inner room communicating with the room occupied by her father and mother. The door between was kept open, so that Mrs. Phillips could hear her daughter if she called to her in the night. And Olwen called to her mother that night, just as the dawn was breaking. It was no faint summons from a dying bed that came to the mother's ears, but a loud cry that rang through the house, a cry of great gladness. Mrs. Phillips started up from sleep in wild amazement, wondering what could have happened. And then she saw Olwen, who had not been able to rise from her bed for many weeks past, standing in the doorway in the faint light of the growing day. The girl called to her mother: "Mam! mam! It is all over. I am quite well again."

Mrs. Phillips roused her husband, and they sat up in bed staring, not knowing on earth, as they said afterwards, what had been done with the world. Here was their poor girl wasted to a shadow, lying on her death-bed, and the life sighing from her with every breath, and her voice, when she last uttered it, so weak that one had to put one's ear

to her mouth. And here in a few hours she stood up before them; and even in that faint light they could see that she was changed almost beyond knowing. And, indeed, Mrs. Phillips said that for a moment or two she fancied that the Germans must have come and killed them in their sleep, and so they were all dead together. But Olwen called out again, so the mother lit a candle and got up and went tottering across the room, and there was Olwen all gay and plump again, smiling with shining eyes. Her mother led her into her own room, and set down the candle there, and felt her daughter's flesh, and burst into prayers and tears of wonder and delight, and thanksgivings, and held the girl again to be sure that she was not deceived. And then Olwen told her dream, though she thought it was not a dream.

She said she woke up in the deep darkness, and she knew the life was fast going from her. She could not move so much as a finger, she tried to cry out, but no sound came from her lips. She felt that in another instant the whole world would fall from her—her heart was full of agony. And as the last breath was passing her lips, she heard a very faint, sweet sound, like the tinkling of a silver bell. It came from far away, from over by Ty-newydd. She forgot her agony and listened, and even then, she says, she felt the swirl of the world as it came back to her. And the sound of the bell swelled and grew louder, and it thrilled all through her body, and the life was in it. And as the bell rang and trembled in her ears, a faint light touched the wall of her room and reddened, till the whole room was full of rosy fire. And then she saw standing before her bed three men in blood-coloured robes with shining faces. And one man held a golden bell in his hand. And the second man held up something shaped like the top of a table. It was like a great jewel, and it was of a blue colour, and there were rivers of silver and of gold running through it and flowing as quick streams into water, and then it was green as the sea near the shore, and then it was the sky at night with all the stars shining, and then the sun and the moon came down and washed in it. And the third man held up high above this a cup that was like a rose on fire; "there was a great burning in it, and a dropping of blood in it, and a red cloud above it, and I saw a great secret. And I heard a voice

that sang nine times, 'Glory and praise to the Conqueror of Death, to the Fountain of Life immortal.' Then the red light went from the wall, and it was all darkness, and the bell rang faint again by Capel Teilo, and then I got up and called to you."

The doctor came on the Monday morning with the death certificate in his pocket-book, and Olwen ran out to meet him. I have quoted his phrase in the first chapter of this record: "A kind of resurrection of the body." He made a most careful examination of the girl; he has stated that he found that every trace of disease had disappeared. He left on the Sunday morning a patient entering into the coma that precedes death, a body condemned utterly and ready for the grave. He met at the garden gate on the Monday morning a young woman in whom life sprang up like a fountain, in whose body life laughed and rejoiced as if it had been a river flowing from an unending well.

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Now this is the place to ask one of those questions—there are many such—which cannot be answered. The question is as to the continuance of tradition; more especially as to the continuance of tradition among the Welsh Celts of today. On the one hand, such waves and storms have gone over them. The wave of the heathen Saxons went over them, then the wave of Latin mediaevalism, then the waters of Anglicanism; last of all the flood of their queer Calvinistic Methodism, half Puritan, half pagan. It may well be asked whether any memory can possibly have survived such a series of deluges. I have said that the old people of Llantrisant had their tales of the Bell of Teilo Sant; but these were but vague and broken recollections. And then there is the name by which the "strangers" who were seen in the market-place were known; that is more precise. Students of the Graal legend know that the keeper of the Graal in the romances is the "King Fisherman", or the "Rich Fisherman"; students of Celtic hagiology know that it was prophesied before the birth of Dewi (or David) that he should be "a man of aquatic life", that another legend tells how a little child, destined to be a saint, was discovered on a stone in the river, how through his childhood a fish for his

nourishment was found on that stone every day, while another saint, Ilar, if I remember, was expressly known as "The Fisherman". But has the memory of all this persisted in the church-going and chapel-going people of Wales at the present day? It is difficult to say. There is the affair of the Healing Cup of Nant Eos, or Tregaron Healing Cup, as it is also called. It is only a few years ago since it was shown to a wandering harper, who treated it lightly, and then spent a wretched night, as he said, and came back penitently and was left alone with the sacred vessel to pray over it, till "his mind was at rest". That was in 1887.

Then for my part—I only know modern Wales on the surface, I am sorry to say—I remember three or four years ago speaking to my temporary landlord of certain relics of Saint Teilo, which are supposed to be in the keeping of a particular family in that country. The landlord is a very jovial, merry fellow, and I observed with some astonishment that his ordinary, easy manner was completely altered as he said, gravely, "That will be over there, up by the mountain," pointing vaguely to the north. And he changed the subject, as a Freemason changes the subject.

There the matter lies, and its appositeness to the story of Llantrisant is this: that the dream of Olwen Phillips was, in fact the Vision of the Holy Graal.

## VII

### The Mass of the Sangraal

"*Ffeiradwyr Melcisidec! Ffeiriadwyr Melcisidec!*" shouted the old Calvinistic Methodist deacon with the grey beard. "Priesthood of Melchizedek! Priesthood of Melchizedek!"

And he went on:

"The Bell that is like *y glwys yr angel ym mharadwys*—the joy of the angels in Paradise—is returned; the Altar that is of a colour that no man can discern is returned, the Cup that came from Syon is returned, the ancient Offering is restored, the Three Saints have come back to the church of the *tri sant*, the Three Holy Fishermen are amongst us, and their net is full. *Gogoniant, gogoniant*—glory, glory!"

Then another Methodist began to recite in Welsh a verse from Wesley's hymn.

God still respects Thy sacrifice,  
Its savour sweet doth always please;  
The offering smokes through earth and skies,  
Diffusing life and joy and peace;  
To these Thy lower courts it comes  
And fills them with Divine perfumes.

The whole church was full, as the old books tell, of the odour of the rarest spices. There were lights shining within the sanctuary through the narrow archway.

This was the beginning of the end of what befell at Llantrisant. For it was the Sunday after the night on which Olwen Phillips had been restored from death to life. There was not a single chapel of the Dissenters open in the town that day. The Methodists with their minister and their deacons and all the Nonconformists had returned on this Sunday morning to "the old hive". One would have said, a church of the Middle Ages, a church in Ireland today. Every seat—save those in the chancel—was full, all the aisles were full, the churchyard was full; everyone on his knees, and the old rector kneeling before the door into the holy place.

Yet they can say but very little of what was done beyond the veil. There was no attempt to perform the usual service; when the bells had stopped the old deacon raised his cry, and priest and people fell down on their knees as they thought they heard a choir within singing "Alleluya, alleluya, alleluya". And as the bells in the tower ceased ringing, there sounded the thrill of the bell from Syon, and the golden veil of sunlight fell across the door into the altar, and the heavenly voices began their melodies,

A voice like a trumpet cried from within the brightness:}

*Agyos, Agyos, Agyos.*

And the people, as if an age-old memory stirred in them, replied:

*Agyos yr Tâd, agyos yr Mab, agyos yr Yspryd Glan. Sant, sant, sant, Drinod sant vendigeid. Sanctus Arglydd Dduw Sabaoth, Dominus Deus.*

There was a voice that cried and sang from within the altar; most of the people had heard some faint echo of it in the chapels; a voice rising and falling and soaring in awful

modulations that rang like the trumpet of the Last Angel. The people beat upon their breasts, the tears were like rain of the mountains on their cheeks; those that were able fell down flat on their faces before the glory of the veil. They said afterwards that men of the hills, twenty miles away, heard that cry and that singing, roaring upon them on the wind, and they fell down on their faces and cried, "The offering is accomplished", knowing nothing of what they said.

There were a few who saw three come out of the door of the sanctuary, and stand for a moment on the space before the door. These three were in dyed vesture, red as blood. One stood before two, looking to the west, and he rang the bell. And they say that all the birds of the wood, and all the waters of the sea, and all the leaves of the trees, and all the winds of the high rocks uttered their voices with the ringing of the bell. And the second held up the lost altar that they once called *Sapphirus*, which was like the changing of the sea and of the sky, and like the mixture of gold and silver. And the third heaved up high over the altar a cup that was red with burning and the blood of the offering.

And the old rector cried aloud then before the entrance:

*Bendigeid yr Offeren yn oes oesoedd*—blessed be the Offering unto the age of ages.

And then the Mass of the Sangraal was ended, and then began the passing out of that land of the holy persons and holy things that had returned to it after the long years. It seemed, indeed, to many that the thrilling sound of the bell was in their ears for days, even for weeks after that Sunday morning. But thenceforth neither bell nor altar nor cup was seen by anyone; not openly, that is, but only in dreams by day and by night. Nor did the people see strangers again in the market of Llantrisant, nor in the lonely places where certain persons oppressed by great affliction and sorrow had once or twice encountered them.

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But that time of visitation will never be forgotten by the people. Many things happened in the nine days that have not been set down in this record—or legend. Some of them were trifling matters, though strange enough in other times. Thus a man in the town who had a fierce dog that

was always kept chained up found one day that the beast had become mild and gentle.

And this is odder: Edward Davies, of Lanafon, a farmer, was roused from sleep one night by a queer yelping and barking in his yard. He looked out of the window and saw his sheep-dog playing with a big fox; they were chasing each other by turns, rolling over and over one another, "cutting such capers as I did never see the like", as the astonished farmer put it. And some of the people said that during this season of wonder the corn shot up and the grass thickened, and the fruit was multiplied on the trees in a very marvellous manner,

More important, it seemed, was the case of Williams, the grocer; though this may have been a purely natural deliverance. Mr. Williams was to marry his daughter Mary to a smart young fellow from Carmarthen, and he was in great distress over it. Not over the marriage itself, but because things had been going very badly with him for some time, and he could not see his way to giving anything like the wedding entertainment that would be expected of him. The wedding was to be on the Saturday—that was the day on which the lawyer, Lewis Prothero, and the farmer, Philip James, were reconciled—and this John Williams, without money or credit, could not think how shame would not be on him for the meagreness and poverty of the wedding feast. And then on the Tuesday came a letter from his brother, David Williams, Australia, from whom he had not heard for fifteen years. And David, it seemed, had been making a great deal of money, and was a bachelor, and here was with his letter a paper good for a thousand pounds: "You may as well enjoy it now as wait till I am dead." This was enough, indeed, one might say; but hardly an hour after the letter had come the lady from the big house (Plas Mawr) drove up in all her grandeur, and went into the shop and said, "Mr. Williams, your daughter Mary has always been a very good girl, and my husband and I feel that we must give her some little thing on her wedding, and we hope she'll be very happy." It was a gold watch worth fifteen pounds. And after Lady Watcyn, advances the old doctor with a dozen of port, forty years upon it, and a long sermon on how to decant it. And the old rector's old wife

brings to the beautiful dark girl two yards of creamy lace, like an enchantment, from her wedding fifty years ago; and the squire, Sir Watcyn, as if his wife had not been already with a fine gift, calls from his horse, and brings out Williams and barks like a dog at him, "Goin' to have a weddin', eh, Williams? Can't have a weddin' without champagne, y' know; wouldn't be legal, don't y' know. So look out for a couple of cases." So Williams tells the story of the gifts; and certainly there was never so famous a wedding in Llantrisant before.

All this, of course, may have been altogether in the natural order; the "glow" as they call it, seems more difficult to explain. For they say that all through the nine days, and indeed after the time had ended, there never was a man weary or sick at heart in Llantrisant, or in the country round it. For if a man felt that his work of the body or the mind was going to be too much for his strength, then there would come to him of a sudden a warm glow and a thrilling all over him, and he felt as strong as a giant, and happier than he had ever been in his life before, so that lawyer and hedger each rejoiced in the task that was before him, as if it were sport and play.

And much more wonderful than this or any other wonders was forgiveness, with love to follow it. There were meetings of old enemies in the market-place and in the street that made the people lift up their hands and declare that it was as if one walked the miraculous streets of Syon;

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But as to the "phenomena", the occurrences for which, in ordinary talk, we should reserve the word "miraculous"? Well, what do we know? The question that I have already stated comes up again, as to the possible survival of old tradition in a kind of dormant, or torpid, semi-conscious state. In other words, did the people "see" and "hear" what they expected to see and hear? This point, or one similar to it, occurred in a debate between Andrew Lang and Anatole France as to the visions of Joan of Arc. M. France stated that when Joan saw St. Michael, she saw the traditional archangel of the religious art of her day, but to the best of my belief Andrew Lang proved that the visionary figure Joan described was not in the least like the fifteenth-century conception of St. Michael. So, in the case of Llantrisant, I



have stated that there was a sort of tradition about the Holy Bell of Teilo Sant; and it is, of course, barely possible that some vague notion of the Graal Cup may have reached even Welsh country folks through Tennyson's "Idylls". But so far I see no reason to suppose that these people had ever heard of the portable altar (called Saphirus in William of Malmesbury) or of its changing colours "that no man could discern",

And then there are the other questions of the distinction between hallucination and vision, of the average duration of one and the other, and of the possibility of collective hallucination. If a number of people all see (or think they see) the same appearances, can this be merely hallucination? I believe there is a leading case on the matter, which concerns a number of people seeing the same appearance on a church wall in Ireland; but there is, of course, this difficulty, that one may be hallucinated and communicate this impression to the others, telepathically.

But at the last, what do we know?

# GRUESOME SPECTRES... GRISLY APPARITIONS...

Unearthly visitors in the dead of  
night . . . in stories like

## JERRY BUNDLER...

They all distinctly heard a step in the passage outside. It stopped at the door, and as they watched with bated breath, the door creaked and slowly opened. Malcolm fell back, open-mouthed, as a white, leering face, with sunken eyeballs and close-cropped bullet head, appeared at the opening.

Not a man spoke or moved, but all watched with a horrible fascination as the creature removed its dirty neckcloth and its head rolled on its shoulder.

For a minute it paused and then, holding the rag before it, moved towards Malcolm.

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