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EDITED BY

Whit and Hallie Burnett

19

TALES OF TERROR

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19 TALES OF TERROR

A BANTAM BOOK

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FOREWORD

THIS IS a book of the hidden, strange, at times horrifying side of man's nature. These stories for a moment pull aside the curtains of the mind, and reveal dread lightning in the inscrutable dark.

They are stories of what happens when the night side of the mind takes over. The result may be a simple but terrifying delusion—or a hideous crime.

What happens in these stories is clear enough, but *why* did these people think as they did, act as they did? How can a man come to believe that he has fulfilled a glorious destiny by killing the beautiful girl he loves? Why does a man destroy himself in terror of a beast that exists only in his "heat-oppressed brain?"

The truest record of the human heart, said Chekhov, is found in fiction. If he were writing today he would find in fiction the truest record of the human mind as well—the record of increasingly intensive probings into the vaguely sensed feelings, the fears, and the passions of man's sinister side, the side that ranges back into the jungle mists of time.

Some of you will be satisfied to know what happens in these strange tales. Some of you will want to know why. And there will be some, perhaps, who will know that they will never know, exactly, the reason. If fiction is truth, it is also art. In art there is an element not quite revealed, not quite *there*, not exposed, but lying half hidden, enigmatic, in the stone. There is a music that sings on in us, unheard by others, a strange music which we ourselves, in the clangor and tumult of the times, hear only faintly—if at all.

—THE EDITORS

A. E. SHANDELING

RETURN OF THE GRIFFINS

GUNAR VRIES, emissary to the United Nations Conference in New York from the European Democracy of S——, sat on the edge of his bed in his hotel room, removing his shoes and socks.

He had declined to be present that evening at a party given in his honor by a wealthy expatriate, telephoning his regrets. In his stead he had sent his aide, a handsome young man who, besides being secretary and translator, was also a composer of symphonies; instructing him to confine himself to seduction and to the piano. As for Gunar Vries, he had had his supper sent up and after the tray was removed had locked his door and set himself to his writing: his daily personal letter to his president, in which he imparted observations too detailed to be made by phone, and letters to the members of his family, his wife Alice and his son Theodore at the Technological University. When he had signed his name for the third time, the night was late.

He was removing his second sock when the bed moved. He grasped the blankets to keep from being thrown, believing that an earthquake had struck. But the bottles did not slide from the dresser, no particles of ceiling fell, the chandelier did not sway. Only the bed moved. Then through his lifted knees he saw emerging from beneath the bed the head of an eagle, but three times the size of an eagle's head, and stretching out for a grip of the rug, an eagle's claw. Then followed a lion's body. So the lion had an eagle's head. Or the eagle had a lion's body.

When the creature emerged completely, Gunar saw that it had also two wings, great eagle wings, that now it stretched one at a time across the floor. The wing roots crackled, and the feathers swept across the rug with a swishing, rushing sound. The creature slouched to the center of the room, its forelegs

lifting stiffly, like a bird's legs, but in co-ordination with its hind-legs, that moved in the indolently potent manner of a lion.

Still heavy with sleep, the monster fell over on its side and gently lifting its wing, turned its head under and with closed beak nuzzled along the feathery pocket, in this way nudging itself to wakefulness and woe again. Then lifting its head, swinging it around and up, the creature looked straight at Gunar Vries. The eagle part took prominence—the curved beak, hard as stone, the thick encasing of golden feathers over its head, touched with red at the breast and extending down its forelegs to the very toes. Lion ears protruded through the feathers but were laid sleekly back. Its eyes burned ruby bright in the semi-darkness.

"Change of climate," it explained, "makes me sleepy."

Before he had entered politics, more than twenty years ago, Gunar Vries had been professor of ancient Greek civilization at the University of Afia, capital of S——. His past enabled him to recognize the creature. "Griffin?" he asked. "Is that your name?" He had several cats on his farm and a trained falcon, and spoke always with tenderness and respect to them, as now he spoke to this great creature.

"Yes," replied the griffin, "and of the pure strain. If you're wondering about the Sphinx and her woman's face, one of us became enamored of a virgin of your species; though I can't see what he saw in her."

The griffin spoke its own language, like no other in the world, and yet a concoction of them all, with archaic Greek like a warrior's chariot rumbling and shining through. It was like everything unspoken that a word cannot be put to and that is comprehended more readily than the spoken among men of different languages.

"You've been away several years," said Gunar, covering his bare feet again with shoes and socks. "What did you do in the time?"

"Took ourselves to the mountains of India," replied the griffin. "Sat in the sun, on the thresholds of our caves, or caught the Arimaspi, one-eyed men who seek gold in the mountains, ate them in a shrugging fashion, already gorged with our prowess. I might ask the same question of you. What didn't you do? By Apollo! Procreated not individuals but nations. Took the lid off a water kettle, and what steams out but ships and cities. Times have changed."

The creature's breath began to fill the room, an overly warm breath, smelling of raw meat, the rich, dark, stinging smell of blood clots and liver.

Gunar Vries had his trousers on and his gray hunting shirt that he wore evenings by himself, but he was cold. He turned

the radiator higher. "I presume," he said, standing with his back to the heat, "that you wandered down alone?"

"Only one of the vanguard," replied the creature, preening its breast.

Now Gunar Vries was fully aware of the monsters' significance. They were in their time sacred to Apollo, whose chariot they drew, and as Apollo was the prophetical deity, whose oracle when consulted delivered itself in enigmas, the word griffin, too, meant enigma. And because he was fully aware of this, he preferred not to seem aware.

The emissary rubbed his hands together briskly to make them warm. "What's the occasion?" he inquired.

The feigned innocence did not escape the griffin. The creature picked it apart like picking the tortoise from the shell. A hissing contempt came from its nostrils and partially opened beak. For a moment there seemed to be a geyser in the room.

"Emissary to the UN," it replied, "a conference called to promote the flowering of humanity, and all the time the delegates hard put to it to breathe with the possibility of atomic dust in the air no more than five years from now. And you want to know the occasion! Can you think of a time when the world faced a greater enigma?"

Gunar Vries was indeed concerned for humanity. It was something he traveled with in addition to his aide and his portfolio. Yet now it seemed to him that it was humanity in the abstract he had been carrying around—the formalities, the rules and regulations, the paperwork of a conference, humanity carefully composed and delivered with dignity. At the griffin's words, humanity suddenly became a third party in the room, and Gunar shivered with life, he shook convulsively as children do in excitement.

The monster slunk around the room, which became small as the cage in which a circus lion is confined. When it came to the desk it turned its head with ponderous grace and ran its eyes over the letters. Gunar Vries stirred indignantly and stepped forward, but on second thought was stricken with shame for his disrespect and stopped still. The griffin turned away, but in the turning managed to drop the nictitating membrane of its eyes, and the perusal became an act of idle curiosity. It padded away languidly, disdainfully, dragging one wing, and the emissary, hearing a strange clicking noise along the floor, looked down and saw for the first time the full length of the creature's talons. At each step they were nicking small holes in the rug.

The creature sat down by the window, and the tasseled end of its tail lifted and fell. There was a feminine restlessness in the way its feathers quivered, and at the same time a great seething of male energy that propelled it forward even as it sat still.

"Lift the window for me," it said, "and let me out on the ledge. Isn't there a park across the street?"

The emissary drew up the venetian blind and opened the window. The night entered, cold and fragrant with grass. The lamps in the park were almost pure white, as if encrusted with snow, and shone up through the delicate branches of the trees. People were sitting on the benches, talking and glancing up at the lighted windows of the hotel, where many dignitaries were in residence. Newsboys had built a fire in a refuse can, and taximen and journalists, tired of the plush and statuary of the lobby, were warming their hands around it. An ornate ledge ran along beneath the windows of the top floor, and the griffin leaped onto this.

"It won't be harmed," Gunar Vries told himself. "It's too fabulous. Even an oaf can see." A look of being protected lay in its eyes, a true and natural hauteur from an ancient epoch. He closed the window, and in his mind's eye he saw the creature continuing swiftly along the ledge, tail and wings spread out a bit, a dark and slithering form against the faintly lighted sky.

He went to his desk, took up his pen, and wrote in postscript on the letter to his president, *"My dear friend: This evening I saw one of the first griffins to return. Their coming, though unpredictable, was nevertheless inevitable. They will remain, I gather, until we decide our fate, one way or another."* Hearing a strange cry in the night, a mingling of lion's roar and eagle's scream and more than both, he wrote further, *"The cry of the griffin in the great cities of the world will become as familiar as the cry of the cock in the country, and even as the cock's cry wakens us from sleep and is portentous of the morning when we shall not be alive to hear it, so the cry of the griffin, on the roofs above traffic, is troublous, calling us, humanity, to a cognizance of our existence and heralding our possible end."*

WHEN Gunar awoke in the morning it was, as every day, to no other thought but the Conference. Not until he passed the desk on his return from his bath and saw that the three letters had been taken up by his aide for mailing was he reminded of the griffin. He stood still, startled and amused by such a dream. Well, the times evoked it. He had never before worked under such a strain, and the enigma of the times had taken form and substance, emerged in his dream a thing in itself, had become a living creature.

But as he was dressing, the laughter within ceased, and he was overcome by melancholy. It came to him that the griffin might have been other than a dream. His few hours of sleep had been shallow and hot, as if he had slept in a thunderstorm; remembering his sleep, he was almost certain he had not

dreamed. If the fabulous being had appeared, it had been an actual one. *But, of course, it had not appeared.* He could negate the event, he could prove it had been a dream by seeing again his letter to his president, the signature constituting the end, without postscript. He walked slowly to the door of the adjoining apartment, already tired as if at the end of the day. How old was he now? Fifty-six? And how long did men live, usually?

"Norbert, young man," he called, rapping at the half-open door, "you've not posted the letters yet? The three letters?"

His aide appeared at the door, opening it wider. "They made the plane at seven-thirty."

"The letter to the president?"

"All three were sealed," said Norbert, "and envelopes addressed. Did you wish to make changes?"

"A whim," he replied. He looked sharply at his aide. Norbert wrote symphonies, the modern kind; his disharmonies were not what they seemed but merged into a complete harmony. Was he not the one to understand the griffin? "If I tell him," thought Gunar, "if I tell him, laughing a little, with gestures, with shudders, why, two believing will make it untrue."

But Norbert seemed more erect than usual this morning, his eyes bluer, his fair hair fairer. He liked parties, and the atmosphere for him was still charged with his virtuosity. The emissary decided that to explain the griffin to him would bring the creature down to the level of a piano recital and the sensual laughter of short-armed women.

"Come," he said, signaling for Norbert to accompany him.

In the cab Gunar sat in a corner, holding his hat and gloves on his crossed knees, listening to Norbert read foreign newspapers on the UN proceedings. The cab came to a halt as traffic changed, and he gazed into the street. In a basement tailor shop, the name on the window so worn that the dim light within turned the letters translucent and coppery, a tailor sat sewing at his machine while his wife sat by the window, drinking from a cup.

As Gunar took in the shop and its occupants, he saw his second griffin. She—it was a female, as he could tell by the lack of red feathers on her breast—was sliding along the fence below the row of basement shops, the eagle head lifted and stiff with impending alarm.

He grasped Norbert's hand, and the young man laid down his paper. "You see," he said, as if he had tried before to convince his aide, "a female griffin."

Norbert bent across him to look. The griffin slipped down the stairs into the tailor's shop, pushing the door open with a claw, and for a moment Gunar saw, simultaneously, the eagle's head through the window and the lion's tail waving on the

stairs. Persons passing paid no attention, or only slight, as to a cat or a sparrow. The couple did not look up, neither the man from his sewing nor the wife from her cup. Gunar Vries was appalled. They went about their pursuits as before, while this enigma, this beast of life or death, slid along their streets, jangled their business bells.

"But are they so common a sight already?" he asked.

"What are?" Norbert had taken up his reading again, but courteously allowed himself to be engaged in conversation.

"The griffins. A female went into the tailor shop and you made no to-do about it."

"I didn't see one," said Norbert. "I didn't know what to look for. I'm sorry. What is it like?"

Gunar Vries drew into his corner again. "It's not a thing that you look for," he replied.

The delegates to the General Assembly of the United Nations assembled at their quarters. Gunar Vries sat in his place, his aide beside him, taking no part in the conversation before the fall of the gavel. The chairman entered, and following at his heels was a male griffin, larger, older than the one that had slept in Gunar's room. The creature was hoary and unkempt. Its eyes were yellow fire. It seated itself to the right of the chairman and with archaic grace surveyed the persons assembled.

THAT evening after supper the president replied by telephone. "Gunar, what's this talk of a griffin?" he asked. "It's a beast of classical antiquity, is it not? Well, to what use are you putting it?"

Ernest Gorgas was a fine man, and there was no one Gunar respected more. But how impotent the president's voice, how distant not only in space but in time! Gunar had the peculiar anticipatory feeling of hearing it fade away, as if mankind were running instantly into a post-historic age.

"Gunar," the president continued, his voice grinding into the receiver, louder, adamant, yet deeply kind and respectful, "the plea that you made to the Assembly today for international unity was the most moving I have ever heard. And the delivery of it—the eloquence, the impassioned tone! Maneuvering it the way you did was uncalled for and yet the most called-for thing in the world. If you are in your way sidestepping praise, being modest, bringing up this tale of a griffin coming to your room with a warning, it's no use. Gunar, my friend, there is no appointment that I have made in my term of office that has given me greater satisfaction."

"Ernest," replied Gunar, "the man who feels that he is not deserving of praise makes no move to sidestep it. He has a deaf

place in his ear the size of a pea, and with this he hears praise. No, my friend, a male griffin *was* in my room last evening. Since then I have seen two more. One, slipping along the street, female and playing nervous; the other, a more bestial creature and at the same time looking as if imbued with an omniscient intelligence. It was sitting to the right of the chairman today and commented often, succinctly, too. But though its voice was louder than any there it went unheard. At the conclusion of my speech it came to me and told me that it had heard Demosthenes, and that my eloquence exceeded his. It had been sent alone to take in the American Revolution and had heard Patrick Henry—it said that that gentleman's vigor did not touch mine. I did not take these comparisons as praise but was convinced that the precariousness of our times has never been equalled and that orators are made by the periods in which they live."

A long pause followed. When the president spoke again the subject was changed. He inquired about the discussions underway, Gunar's criticism and forecast of results.

Within another day the rumor had been circulated among the delegates that Gunar Vries, emissary from S——, was suffering from hallucinations. The suspicion was not relayed to newsmen or to anyone outside the circle of official delegates. It was a matter of respect not only for the member, as a distinguished person, and for his family, but for the delegates combined. If one was susceptible to weakness of this kind, it might be construed that all were. The curious thing was that the emissary seemed to be in full command of his intelligence while at the Conference table. No criticism could be cast upon the deft, perspicacious way in which he handled his country's interests. Not only this, he was one of the most energetic in tackling the problems of all humanity.

GUNAR Vries was called home on the second day after his speech. Newsmen, inquiring of him the reason for his departure, were told that he believed that his president was in possession of information that could not be discussed by phone or letter or through a messenger. In Gunar's place, to be guided by Norbert through the formalities, there appeared the youngest member of the supreme court of S——, a man not much older than Norbert, but with his own history up to ninety years already in his eyes.

Carrying his portfolio, Gunar Vries returned to S——. He was met at the airport by the president, and together they were driven to the palace. They dined and secluded themselves in the president's study.

"Gunar," said Ernest, as they sat facing each other, "I

could not ask for a better emissary. You have used the energy of twelve men. Now, wound up as you are, you will think I am crazy, you will think I am reckless putting your personal health before the welfare of the nation. But I want you to take a rest for awhile. Let someone else, not of your caliber but competent enough, assume your duties. You go to your farm, wear an old hat, go hunting, milk your cows, sow your wheat. We need as many hands as we can get working the land, and as much space yielding. Go home for a while, Gunar."

Gunar Vries had never been so frightened in his life. It was like the fear, only worse, that he had experienced as a boy of seventeen, when he had left his father and come to the city to study, when for the first time he had lived alone. For several days he had been almost unable to breathe. He had thought he would never again see his father or make a friend, he had thought that he was trapped in that one room forever.

"Has any action of mine," Gunar now asked slowly, "met with your disapproval? Have you found that the ability I evidenced as your minister of foreign affairs, have you found that this ability falls short of my responsibility as a delegate to the United Nations?"

Ernest gripped his forehead, half-hid his painful eyes with his hand. "They say that you see griffins."

"But I told you so myself."

"Doesn't it seem peculiar to you?"

"You prefer to quote the ones to whom it seems peculiar? No, my friend, it is the most natural thing in the world."

"But you are the only one who sees them."

"Does that fact make the griffin non-existent?" He felt a sharp derision coming on, took out his handkerchief and blew his nose. He tried to suppress the snort, but could not. It was his opinion of organized disorganization.

"If you take such a derogatory view of the Conference," the president said, "you won't want to return."

"On the contrary," Gunar replied, leaning forward to stuff his handkerchief away in his rear pocket. "They need me. They can't do without me. The time will come, believe me, when everyone there will see that creature sitting to the right of the chairman. And what a creature! What a magnificent creature!"

"Gunar." The president hesitated. "Before you go home, perhaps it would be wise for you to consult a psychiatrist. They have not all gone to greener pastures in the United States. There might be still a capable one or two practicing in France or Switzerland."

"I would have no belief in him if he did not see griffins himself," replied Gunar, laughing a little. "But for your sake, to

relieve you of anxiety and shame, I shall resign from the UN and from the Ministry. Name someone else to the post."

He wanted to rise from the chair, as a gesture fitting to climax, but found that he could not. His heart was palpitating. Well, he had seen his father again, made a friend, and been in so many rooms he could not remember them all. A boy's loneliness doesn't last, nor does that of a disgraced diplomat. You reach out for people, you have no more enemies. . . .

GUNAR traveled home by train that night, and a female griffin was co-occupant of his compartment. When he entered, she was already asleep on the couch, eagle head tucked under her right wing, left wing and left hindleg hanging to the floor. He sat opposite her and watched her in the dimly lit, rocking compartment.

He rode to his farm on the wagon of a neighbor. "You want to surprise Mrs. Vries?" the neighbor asked. The man had found Gunar, portfolio in hand, standing by his wagon, waiting for him to come from the assessor's office.

"No," replied Gunar. "I just came home, that's all."

"You are tired from the Conference?" the neighbor inquired, believing that it was over. He noticed the diplomat's sagging shoulders and sadness, and he halted the horses. "What's the world coming to?" he asked, gently, confidentially, as if Gunar Vries was the one to know.

And Gunar Vries laid his brow in his hand and wept, while the morning sun got in under his overcoat collar and warmed the nape of his neck.

For several days he went about his farm like a man taking a rest. He milked the cows, drove the tractor. There was a deep, still pool in his forest and he went to bathe in it, likening it to his loneliness. If he were drowning in it and cried out, no man would be near enough to help him. But when he left the pool and dressed again, his body was clean and deserving of respect because of its contact with loneliness, and approaching the farm he loved instantly from afar every small figure working.

Then one morning he saw on the roof of the east barn a young male griffin, and he called to it. The creature turned its large golden head slantwise.

"Come," coaxed Gunar, "a lamb? A pan of milk?" And when the creature eyed him without replying, he added, "A calf?"

The griffin dropped its beak and picked at something between its toes. "But I ate, just a couple of centuries ago. Caught four Arimaspi in a ravine."

ALICE begged Gunar to wait until she summoned Theodore, but he said no, that he would probably meet the boy in the city.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, for she had given him an idea. "I intend to speak on the steps of the Technological University anyway. When the scientific students see my griffin, it will be a triumph, believe me."

She went along the road with him, holding his elbow against her side and crying, and he bent his head away, unable to bear her grimaces. The griffin was slinking along the other side of the fence, and in a fit of energy suddenly both flew and ran, beating its wings close to earth, for a good half-mile down the fence. Why couldn't she see a thing like that?

He halted and caressed her, pushing back her short, pale hair. "Do you know that I love you?" he asked.

"Yes," she wept.

"The tour is a minor thing," he said. "I make it simply to return to you. If I don't go, how much longer and of what consequence will our love be?"

WHEN he set out again, alone, the griffin was returning to meet him, loping.

So he came into Afia, capital of S——, with the griffin at his side. He was dressed as for a session of the UN. He wore his favorite suit, tailored in London of a fine Scottish tweed, a white shirt, a dark red silk tie, and he carried a black Homberg and gray suede gloves. He took rooms in a first-rate hotel.

Entering the park around which were grouped the government buildings, he mounted the flagpole base and pleaded with refugees, messengers passing to and fro, and clerks eating their lunches, to recognize his companion. In the evening he let himself be enveloped by the crowds pouring into the operas and symphonies and cinemas. Jostled and stepped upon, he began to recount his experiences, and some persons, with mail order tickets and in no hurry, tarried around him. At midnight, when the streets were being deserted, he returned to his hotel, and the griffin spent the night in the vicinity.

By the second day word had circulated that this man in the streets was actually Gunar Vries, come to tell of the existence of a fabulous beast or bird. The citizens jammed the streets, the fire-escapes, the roofs for blocks around the House of Commerce, and Gunar made his speech on the steps facing the park. Overjoyed as he was with the size of his audience, he spoke with such passion that the griffin, already unnerved by the crowd, its flesh creeping with the emissary's harping upon its existence, suddenly rose straight up into the air, screaming.

"Can't you see it?" Gunar Vries cried, pointing to the griffin beating the air, its beak open and its tongue flickering, its eyes

fierier than ever, absorbing the three o'clock sun. After hovering thirty feet above Gunar's head, it continued up and settled on a cornice three stories above him.

The people gazed upward, but lowered their eyes with no change in them. They did not ridicule the speaker, however. They were solemn and attentive, remembering the man he once was. While about them, more griffins, curious as to the throngs, flew in and came to rest on the roofs of distant buildings, their dark forms like statues of themselves against the sky.

Gunar Vries descended the steps, and the people made way for him. He was not disheartened. There was time for other cities and other assemblages. He wanted especially to draw a great crowd in New York, city of the Conference. The griffin flew down and followed at his heels; he heard its wings flapping in descent and then the click of its claws on the stone. A guttural warble was in its throat, a sign of uneasiness.

Two members of the police force stepped through the crowd to Gunar Vries. The force had been reluctant to take action against him for disturbing the peace, considering his prestige, but during the course of his speech they had received instructions from Ernest Gorgas himself: "Quietly, with respect for his person as a private citizen and as a former diplomat, arrest and transport him to quarters in the Hall of Justice. Detain him there until further instructions."

"Gunar Vries," said one, "it's the president's wish."

"If I resist?" he asked.

The other officer touched his elbow, and Gunar told himself, "All their force will be unavailing and will seem afterward like a touch at my elbow." He reached behind him, laid his hand on the griffin, and brought it forward.

"If I mount you," he asked, "can you rise with my weight?"

The griffin nodded, but was perturbed and glazed its eyes. "When you asked me to accompany you, did you also ask that I convey you? It's seldom we convey a mortal."

"That's what it comes to," said Gunar.

The griffin rose reluctantly in the stance of a lion rampant, but the emissary, stepping forward to place his arms around the eagle's neck and seat himself upon the lion's rump, was detained by the officers, who came in under the wing, each taking an elbow and an armpit, and prevailing against him.

Gunar Vries was deposited in the cell reserved for politicians, bankers, celebrated attorneys, actresses, professors. Here were ash trays, a water-cooler and dispenser. The furniture, though old and sagging, was still substantial, with faintly yellowed crocheted stars on the chairbacks. Waiting for him were his attorney and a psychiatrist, a jovial, plump young man.

"If they want bail," said Gunar to his attorney, "then give it to them. I'll be out of the country by morning."

"They're afraid of that," his attorney replied, a man competent as he was handsome. "How would it look, Gunar," he chided, "for a man of your status to misrepresent the country? The other nations will say, 'What choice was this?' They'll have respect for no emissary from S——."

The doctor, with whom he had shaken hands and who had been listening, kindly, alertly, smoking a cigarette, now spoke up. "Mr. Vries, contrary to the expressed wishes of Mr. Ernest Gorgas, I am not going to ask your participation in any analysis. I want a few answers from yourself to clarify, not my point of view as a doctor, but your own, as a man of responsibility. You claim to see griffins, beasts of ancient mythology. Is that true?"

"True," replied Gunar, "both that I claim to and that I see them." He took a cigarette from the silver case the doctor proffered him.

"And why griffins?" asked the doctor.

"Why not?" replied Gunar. "Because that's what they are. They're not snakes, they're not elephants. I'm sorry. I cannot make it as simple as that."

"No, no!" laughed the doctor, lighting Gunar's cigarette. His hand shook, and his small eyes, small mouth, and small mustache all laughed in his round face. "Why have they returned, I mean. Are they, to you, explanatory of our time?"

Well, here was a man after Gunar's own heart, and he would forget, in his appreciation, any ulterior motive the man might have of undermining that which he so eagerly explained.

And so he told of the creature's history and the meaning of its name, and the doctor was absorbed and nodded his head. "Tell me of a time," said Gunar, "when the world faced a greater enigma. We'll either make the earth fruitful as it has never been or we'll exterminate ourselves. We'll either wipe out everything we've built upon, all past epochs, or we'll go on to a greater time than man has ever known. If you look at the situation with your eyes open you'll find that it's quite a creature, a thing with eagle wings and the body of a lion and with eyes of fire."

Gunar ceased, having heard the flapping of wings outside the window as the griffin ascended to the roof. It had followed him, as he had expected.

"Well, it's a pity," sighed the doctor, "that only one man sees them."

The attorney bent forward impatiently. "The president is aware that as a private citizen you may speak as you wish. Nevertheless, he would like your promise as the promise of a

dear friend, that you will make no further speeches in public or in private assembly calling upon the people to recognize the existence of these creatures."

"You tell Ernest," replied Gunar, "that they're bigger than he is."

"Will you commit him?" the attorney asked the doctor.

The doctor had risen, as if he had no more to ask. He shook his head, pressed out his cigarette in the tray. "I prefer," he said, "to commit those persons who cannot see them."

The two men left him to consult by telephone with the president. When they returned they brought with them the guard, obliging to authority in release of the emissary as in confinement of him.

Gunar Vries picked up his hat and gloves. "There is one on the roof now," he said to the doctor, "if you care to see it."

This was an old prison, rigged up now with electricity and hot water. They went up the circular stone staircase, and the guard unlocked the gate. The griffin was lying on the parapet, drooping over the edge to watch the traffic three stories below, and at times lifting its head to look at the pigeons cooing and bobbing, circling and fluttering. It was large and dark against the pale yellow haze of the setting sun, and its feathers were delicately ruffled.

"Doctor," said Gunar, "do not let me lose faith in you."

"I see it," the doctor assured him.

The attorney coughed in vicarious embarassment.

Gunar stepped to the parapet, the doctor and attorney following. "Can we try our flight again?" he asked the griffin. The doctor turned pale, and Gunar, watching for just this response, continued, "Its back is broad enough and its neck the right size for my arms. I'll hamper it a bit, perhaps, but we'll manage. You think now that it's not here at all for me to climb upon, but an idea came to me while I was trying to mount it in the park: If I am afraid, then I am not certain of the griffin myself. In this way, by trusting myself to it, I prove its existence."

The doctor was plunged into remorse and self-doubt. He stood stock-still, his arms hanging numbly at his sides.

Suddenly the attorney was cognizant of Gunar Vries' kindliness, of depths to the man he had not considered. He placed his hand on Gunar's arms. "Gunar," he implored him, "we shall provide you with first-class accommodation by whatever means you care to travel. I shall see to it myself. I shall speak to the president and to the Chamber of Representatives. You will be authorized to go—indeed, dispatched."

But Gunar Vries had hold of the griffin's rear leg and drew himself onto the parapet. The guard, having taken the respite to smoke a cigarette, was leaning against the gate, watching the

men, believing that anything was sanctioned. And Gunar Vries, knowing that in a moment the three men would toss off their stupefaction and converge upon him, threw himself upon the griffin.

THEY flew in a westerly direction, passing over the city. The night moved up from behind and overtook them. With the earth so far below them, Gunar was not sure whether they were still over Europe or had reached the Atlantic Ocean.

"Can you drop a bit closer to earth?" Gunar called forward, and his voice was not as he expected it to be, bounced or pummeled by the wind, but went out into calm air, the atmosphere into which an oracle speaks.

"What for?" the griffin asked.

"But can you see any lights?"

The griffin glanced sideways in derision, enabling Gunar to see its eye, which was a blue distilled from the night, like a pure blue flame, and in it were reflected, nebulously, the lights of a city he believed to be New York.

JOHN STEINBECK

THE WHITE QUAIL

THE WALL opposite the fireplace in the living-room was a big dormer window stretching from the cushioned window seats almost to the ceiling—small diamond panes set in lead. From the window, preferably if you were sitting on the window seat, you could look across the garden and up the hill. There was a stretch of shady lawn under the garden oaks—around each oak there was a circle of carefully tended earth in which grew cinerarias, big ones with loads of flowers so heavy they bent the stems over, and ranging in color from scarlet to ultramarine. At the edge of the lawn, a line of fuchsias grew like little symbolic trees. In front of the fuchsias lay a shallow garden pool, the coping flush with the lawn for a very good reason.

Right at the edge of the garden, the hill started up, wild with cascara bushes and poison oak, with dry grass and live oak, very wild. If you didn't go around to the front of the house you couldn't tell it was on the very edge of the town.

Mary Teller, Mrs. Harry E. Teller, that is, knew the window and the garden were Right and she had a very good reason for knowing. Hadn't she picked out the place years ago where the house and garden would be? Hadn't she seen the house and the garden a thousand times while the place was still a dry flat against the shoulder of a hill? For that matter, hadn't she, during five years, looked at every attentive man and wondered whether he and that garden would go together? She didn't think so much, "Would this man like such a garden?" but, "Would the garden like such a man?" For the garden was herself, and after all she had to marry some one she liked.

When she met Harry Teller, the garden seemed to like him. It may have surprised him a little when, after he had proposed and was waiting sulkily for his answer, as men do, Mary broke

into a description of a big dormer window and a garden with a lawn and oak trees and cinerarias and then a wild hill.

He said, "Of course," rather perfunctorily.

Mary asked, "Do you think it's silly?"

He was waiting a little sullenly. "Of course not."

And then she remembered that he had proposed to her, and she accepted him, and let him kiss her. She said, "There will be a little cement pool flush with the lawn. Do you know why? Well, there are more birds on that hill than you'd ever think, yellowhammers and wild canaries and red-wing blackbirds, and of course sparrows and linnets, and lots of quail. Of course they'll be coming down to drink there, won't they?"

She was very pretty. He wanted to kiss her over and over, and she let him. "And fuchsias," she said. "Don't forget fuchsias. They're like little tropical Christmas trees. We'll have to have the lawn raked every day to keep the oak leaves clear."

He laughed at her. "You're a funny little bug. The lot isn't bought, and the house isn't built, and the garden isn't planted; and already you're worrying about oak leaves on the lawn. You're so pretty. You make me kind of—hungry."

That startled her a little. A little expression of annoyance crossed her face. But nevertheless she let him kiss her again, and then sent him home and went to her room, where she had a little blue writing desk and on it a copy-book to write things in. She took up a pen, of which the handle was a peacock feather, and she wrote, "Mary Teller" over and over again. Once or twice she wrote, "Mrs. Harry E. Teller."

II

The lot was bought and the house was built, and they were married. Mary drew a careful plan of the garden, and when the workmen were putting it in she didn't leave them alone for a moment. She knew to an inch where everything should be. And she drew the shape of the shallow pool for the cement workers, a kind of heart-shaped pool with no point at the bottom, with gradually sloping edges so the birds could drink easily.

Harry watched her with admiration. "Who could tell that such a pretty girl could have so much efficiency," he said.

That pleased her, too; and she was very happy, so that she said, "You can plant some of the things you like in the garden, if you want."

"No, Mary, I like too much to see your own mind coming out in the garden. You do it all your own way."

She loved him for that; but after all, it was her garden. She had invented it, and willed it, and she had worked out the colors

too, so carefully. It really wouldn't have been nice if, for instance, Harry had wanted some flowers that didn't go with the garden.

At last the green lawn was up, and the cinerarias around the oak trees bloomed in sunken pots. The little fuchsia trees had been moved in so carefully that not a leaf wilted.

The window seats behind the dormer windows were piled with cushions covered with bright, fadeless fabrics, for the sun shone in that window a good part of the day.

Mary waited until it was all done, all finished exactly as her mind had seen it; and then one evening when Harry came home from the office, she led him to the window seat. "You see," she said softly. "There it is, just the way I wanted it."

"It's beautiful," said Harry, "very beautiful."

"In a way I'm sad that it's done," she said. "But mostly I'm glad. We won't ever change it, will we, Harry? If a bush dies, we'll put another one just like it in the same place."

"Curious little bug," he said.

"Well, you see I've thought about it so long that it's part of me. If anything should be changed it would be like part of me being torn out."

He put out his hand to touch her, and then withdrew it. "I love you so much," he said, and then paused. "But I'm afraid of you, too."

She smiled quietly. "You? Afraid of me? What's there about me you can be afraid of?"

"Well, you're kind of untouchable. There's an inscrutability about you. Probably you don't even know it yourself. You're kind of like your own garden—fixed, and just so. I'm afraid to move around. I might disturb some of your plants."

Mary was pleased. "Dear," she said. "You let me do it. You made it my garden. Yes, you are dear." And she let him kiss her.

III

He was proud of her when people came in to dinner. She was so pretty, so cool and perfect. Her bowls of flowers were exquisite, and she talked about the garden modestly, hesitantly, almost as though she were talking about herself. Sometimes she took her guests into the garden. She pointed to a fuchsia tree. "I didn't know whether he would succeed," she said, just as though the plant were a person. "He ate a lot of plant food before he decided to come around." She smiled quietly to herself.

She was delightful when she worked in the garden. She wore a bright print dress, quite long in the skirt, and sleeveless. Somewhere she had found an old-fashioned sunbonnet. She wore

good sturdy gloves to protect her hands. Harry liked to watch her going about with a bag and a big spoon, putting plant food about the roots of her flowers. He liked it, too, when they went out at night to kill slugs and snails. Mary held the flashlight while Harry did the actual killing, crushing the slugs and snails into oozy, bubbling masses. He knew it must be a disgusting business to her, but the light never wavered. "Brave girl," he thought. "She has a sturdiness in back of that fragile beauty." She made the hunts exciting too. "There's a big one, creeping and creeping," she would say. "He's after that big bloom. Kill him! Kill him quickly!" They came into the house after the hunts laughing happily.

Mary was worried about the birds. "They don't come down to drink," she complained. "Not many of them. I wonder what's keeping them away."

"Maybe they aren't used to it yet. They'll come later. Maybe there's a cat around."

Her face flushed and she breathed deeply. Her pretty lips tightened away from her teeth. "If there's a cat, I'll put out poisoned fish," she cried. "I won't have a cat after my birds!"

Harry had to soothe her. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll buy an air gun. Then if a cat comes, we can shoot it, and it won't kill the cat, but it'll hurt, and the cat won't come back."

"Yes," she said more calmly. "That might be better."

The living-room was very pleasant at night. The fire burned up in a sheet of flame. If there was a moon, Mary turned off the lights and then they sat looking through the window at the cool blue garden and the dark oak trees.

It was utterly calm and eternal out there. And then the garden ended and the dark thickets of the hill began.

"That's the enemy," Mary said one time. "That's the world that wants to get in, all rough and tangled and unkempt. But it can't get in because the fuchsias won't let it. That's what the fuchsias are there for, and they know it. The birds can get in. They live out in the wild, but they come to my garden for peace and for water." She laughed softly. "There's something profound in all that, Harry. I don't know quite what it is. The quail are beginning to come down now. At least a dozen were at the pool this evening."

He said, "I wish I could see the inside of your mind. It seems to flutter around, but it's a cool, collected mind. It's so—sure of itself."

Mary went to sit on his lap for a moment. "Not so awfully sure. You don't know, and I'm glad you don't."

IV

One night when Harry was reading his paper under the lamp, Mary jumped up. "I left my garden scissors outside," she said. "The dew will rust them."

Harry looked over his paper. "Can't I get them for you?"

"No, I'll go. You couldn't find them." She went out into the garden and found the shears, and then she looked in the window, into the living room. Harry was still reading his paper. The room was clear, like a picture, like the set of a play that was about to start. A curtain of fire waved up in the fireplace. Mary stood still and looked. There was the big, deep chair she had been sitting in a minute ago. What would she be doing if she hadn't come outside? Suppose only essence, only mind and sight had come, leaving Mary in the chair? She could almost see herself sitting there. Her round arms and long fingers were resting on the chair. Her delicate, sensitive face was in profile, looking reflectively into the firelight. "What is she thinking about?" Mary whispered. "I wonder what's going on in her mind. Will she get up? No, she's just sitting there. The neck of that dresss is too wide, see how it slips sideways over the shoulder. But that's rather pretty. It looks careless, but neat and pretty. Now—she's smiling. She must be thinking something nice."

Sudenly Mary came to herself and realized what she had been doing. She was delighted. "There were two me's," she thought. "It was like having two lives, being able to see myself. That's wonderful. I wonder whether I can see it whenever I want to. I saw just what other people see when they look at me. I must tell Harry about that." But then a new picture formed; she saw herself explaining, trying to describe what had happened. She saw him looking over his paper with an intent, puzzled, almost pained look in his eyes. He tried so hard to understand when she told him things. He wanted to understand, and he never quite succeeded. If she told him about this vision tonight, he would ask questions. He would turn the thing over and over, trying to understand it, until finally he ruined it. He didn't want to spoil the things she told him, but he just couldn't help it. He needed too much light on things that light shriveled. No, she wouldn't tell him. She would want to come out and do it again, and she couldn't if he spoiled it for her.

Through the window she saw Harry put his paper down on his knee and look up at the door. She hurried in, showing him the shears to prove what she had gone for. "See, the rust was forming already. They'd've been all brown and nasty by morning."

He nodded and smiled at her. "It says in the paper we're going to have more trouble with that new loan bill. They put a

lot of difficulties in our way. Somebody has to loan money when people want to borrow."

"I don't understand loans," she said. "Somebody told me your company had title to nearly every automobile in town."

He laughed. "Well, not all, but a good many of them, anyway. When times are a little bit hard, we make money."

"It sounds terrible," she observed. "It sounds like taking unfair advantage."

He folded the paper and put it on the table beside his chair. "No, I don't think it's unfair," he said. "The people must have the money, and we supply it. The law regulates the interest rate. We haven't anything to do with that."

She stretched her pretty arms and fingers on the chair, as she had seen them through the window. "I suppose it really isn't unfair," she said. "It just sounds as though you took advantage of people when they were down."

Harry looked seriously into the fire for a long time. Mary could see him, and she knew he was worrying about what she said. Well, it would do him no harm to see what business really was like. Things seemed righter when you did them than when you thought about them. A little mental housecleaning mightn't be a bad thing for Harry.

After a little, he looked over at her. "Dear, you don't think it's unfair practice, do you?"

"Why, I don't know anything about loans. How can I tell what is fair?"

Harry insisted, "But do you *feel* it's unfair? Are you ashamed of my business? I wouldn't like it if you were."

Suddenly Mary felt very glad and pleased. "I'm not ashamed, silly. Every one has a right to make a living. You do what you do well."

"You're sure, now?"

"Of course I'm sure, silly."

After she was in bed in her own little bedroom she heard a faint click and saw the door knob turn, and then turn slowly back. The door was locked. It was a signal; there were things Mary didn't like to talk about. The lock was an answer to a question, a clean, quick, decisive answer. It was peculiar about Harry, though. He always tried the door silently. It seemed as though he didn't want her to know he had tried it. But she always did know. He was sweet and gentle. It seemed to make him ashamed when he turned the knob and found the door locked.

Mary pulled the light chain, and when her eyes had become accustomed to the dark, she looked out the window at her garden in the half moonlight. Harry was sweet, and understanding, too. That time about the dog. He had come running into the

house, really running. His face was so red and excited that Mary had a nasty shock. She thought there had been an accident. Later in the evening she had a headache from the shock. Harry had shouted, "Joe Adams—his Irish Terrier bitch had puppies. He's going to give me one! Thoroughbred stock, red as strawberries!" He had really wanted one of the pups. It hurt Mary that he couldn't have one. But she was proud of his quick understanding of the situation. When she explained how a dog would—do things on the plants of her garden, or even dig in her flower beds, how, worst of all, a dog would keep the birds away from the pool, Harry understood. He might have trouble with complicated things, like that vision from the garden, but he understood about the dog. Later in the evening, when her head ached, he soothed her and patted Florida Water on her head. That was the curse of imagination. Mary had seen, actually seen the dog in her garden, and the dug holes, and ruined plants. It was almost as bad as though it actually happened. Harry was ashamed, but really he couldn't help it if she had such an imagination. Mary couldn't blame him, how could he have known?

V

Late in the afternoon, when the sun had gone behind the hill, there was a time Mary called the really-garden-time. Then the high school girl was in from school and had taken charge of the kitchen. It was almost a sacred time. Mary walked out into the garden and across the lawn to a folding chair half behind one of the lawn oaks. She could watch the birds drinking in the pool from there. She could really *feel* the garden. When Harry came home from the office, he stayed in the house and read his paper until she came in from the garden, star-eyed. It made her unhappy to be disturbed.

The summer was just breaking. Mary looked into the kitchen and saw that everything was all right there. She went through the living room and lighted the laid fire, and then she was ready for the garden. The sun had just dropped behind the hill, and the blue gauze of the evening had settled among the oaks.

Mary thought, "It's like millions of not quite invisible fairies coming into my garden. You can't see one of them, but the millions change the color of the air." She smiled to herself at the nice thought. The clipped lawn was damp and fresh with watering. The brilliant cinerarias threw little haloes of color into the air. The fuchsia trees were loaded with blooms. The buds, like little red Christmas tree ornaments, and the open blooms like ballet-skirted ladies. They were so *right,* the fuchsias, so absolutely right. And they discouraged the enemy on the other side, the brush and scrubby, untrimmed trees.

Mary walked across the lawn in the evening to her chair, and sat down. She could hear the birds gathering to come down to the pool. "Making up parties," she thought, "coming to my garden in the evening. How they must love it! How I would like to come to my garden for the first time. If I could be two people —'Good evening, come into the garden, Mary.' 'Oh, isn't it lovely.' 'Yes, I like it, especially at this time. Quiet, now, Mary. Don't frighten the birds.' " She sat as still as a mouse. Her lips were parted with expectancy. In the brush the quail twittered sharply. A yellowhammer dropped to the edge of the pool. Two little flycatchers flickered out over the water and stood still in the air, beating their wings. And then the quail ran out, with funny little steps. They stopped and cocked their heads, to see whether it was safe. Their leader, a big fellow with a crest like a black question mark, sounded the bugle-like "All clear" call, and the band came down to drink.

And then it happened, the wonderful thing. Out of the brush ran a white quail. Mary froze. Yes, it was a quail, no doubt of it, and white as snow. Oh, this was wonderful! A shiver of pleasure, a bursting of pleasure swelled in Mary's breast. She held her breath. The dainty little white hen quail went to the other side of the pool, away from the ordinary quail. She paused and looked around, and then dipped her beak in the water.

"Why," Mary cried to herself, "she's like me!" A powerful ecstasy quivered in her body. "She's like the essence of me, an essence boiled down to utter purity. She must be the queen of the quail. She makes every lovely thing that ever happened to me one thing."

The white quail dipped her beak again and threw back her head to swallow.

The memories welled in Mary and filled her chest. Something sad, always something sad. The packages that came; untying the string was the ecstasy. The thing in the package was never quite——

The marvelous candy from Italy. "Don't eat it, dear. It's prettier than it's good." Mary never ate it, but looking at it was an ecstasy like this.

"What a pretty girl Mary is. She's like a gentian, so quiet." The hearing was an ecstasy like this.

"Mary dear, be very brave now. Your father has—passed away." The first moment of loss was an ecstasy like this.

The white quail stretched a wing backward and smoothed down the feathers with her beak. "This is the me that was everything beautiful. This is the center of me, my heart."

VI

The blue air became purple in the garden. The fuchsia buds blazed like little candles. And then a gray shadow moved out of the brush. Mary's mouth dropped open. She sat paralyzed with fear. A gray cat crept like death out of the brush, crept toward the pool and the drinking birds. Mary stared in horror. Her hand rose up to her tight throat. Then she broke the paralysis. She screamed terribly. The quail flew away on muttering wings. The cat bounded back into the brush. Still Mary screamed and screamed. Harry ran out of the house crying, "Mary! What is it, Mary?"

She shuddered when he touched her. She began to cry hysterically. He took her up in his arms and carried her into the house, and into her own room. She lay quivering on the bed. "What was it, dear? What frightened you?"

"It was a cat," she moaned. "It was creeping up on the birds." She sat up; her eyes blazed. "Harry, you must put out poison. Tonight you simply must put out some poison for that cat."

"Lie back, dear. You've had a shock."

"Promise me you'll put out poison." She looked closely at him and saw a rebellious light come into his eyes. "Promise."

"Dear," he apologized, "some dog might get it. Animals suffer terribly when they get poison."

"I don't care," she cried. "I don't want any animals in my garden, any kind."

"No," he said. "I won't do that. No, I can't do that. But I'll get up early in the morning. I'll take the new air gun and I'll shoot that cat so he'll never come back. The air gun shoots hard. It'll make a hurt the cat won't forget."

It was the first thing he had ever refused. She didn't know how to combat it; but her head ached, terribly. When it ached its worst he tried to make it up to her for refusing the poison. He kept a little pad soaked with Florida Water, and he patted it on her forehead. She wondered whether she should tell him about the white quail. He wouldn't believe it. But maybe if he knew how important it was, he might poison the cat. She waited until her nerves were calm before she told him. "Dear, there was a white quail in the garden."

"A white quail? Are you sure it wasn't a pigeon?"

There it was. Right from the first he spoiled it. "I know quail," she cried. "It was quite close to me. A white hen quail."

"That would be a thing to see," he said. "I never heard of one."

"But I tell you I saw it."

He dabbed at her forehead. "Well, I suppose it was an albino. No pigment in the feathers, something like that."

She was growing hysterical again. "You don't understand. That white quail was *me*, the secret me that no one can ever get at, the me that's way inside." Harry's face was contorted with the struggle to understand. "Can't you see, dear? The cat was after me. It was going to kill me. That's why I want to poison it." She studied his face. No, he didn't understand, he couldn't. Why had she told him? If she hadn't been so upset she never would have told him.

"I'll set my alarm clock," he assured her. "Tomorrow morning I'll give that cat something to remember."

At ten o'clock he left her alone. And when he had gone Mary got up and locked the door.

His alarm-clock bell awakened Mary in the morning. It was still dark in her room, but she could see the gray light of morning through the window. She heard Harry dressing quietly. He tiptoed past her door and went outside, closing the door silently for fear of awakening her. He carried the new shining air gun in his hand. The fresh gray morning air made him throw back his shoulders and step lightly over the damp lawn. He walked to the corner of the garden and lay down on his stomach in the wet grass.

The garden grew lighter. Already the quail were twittering metallically. The little brown band came to the edge of the brush and cocked their heads. Then the big leader called, "All's well," and his charges ran with quick steps to the pool. A moment later the white quail followed them. She went to the other side of the pool and dipped her beak and threw back her head. Harry raised the gun. The white quail tipped her head and looked toward him. The air gun spat with a vicious whisper. The quail flew off into the brush. But the white quail fell over and shuddered a moment, and lay still on the lawn.

Harry walked slowly over to her and picked her up. "I didn't mean to kill it," he said to himself. "I just wanted to scare it away." He looked at the white bird in his hand. Right in the head, right under the eye the BB shot had gone. Harry stepped to the line of fuchsias and threw the quail up into the brush. The next moment he put down the gun and crashed up through the undergrowth. He found the white quail, carried her far up the hill and buried her under a pile of leaves.

Mary heard him pass her door. "Harry, did you shoot the cat?"

"It won't ever come back," he said through the door.

"Well, I hope you killed it, but I don't want to hear the details."

Harry walked on into the living-room and sat down in a big

chair. The room was still dusky, but through the big dormer window the garden glowed and the tops of the lawn oaks were afire with sunshine.

"What a skunk I am," Harry said to himself. "What a dirty skunk, to kill a thing she loved so much." He dropped his head and looked at the floor. "I'm lonely," he said. "Oh, Lord, I'm so lonely!"

LORD DUNSANY

THE TWO BOTTLES OF RELISH

SMITHERS is my name. I'm what you might call a small man, and in a small way of business. I travel for Num-numo, a relish for meats and savories; the world famous relish I ought to say. It's really quite good, no deleterious acids in it, and does not affect the heart; so it is quite easy to push. I wouldn't have got the job if it weren't. But I hope some day to get something that's harder to push, as of course the harder they are to push, the better the pay. At present I can just make my way, with nothing at all over; but then I live in a very expensive flat. It happened like this, and that brings me to my story. And it isn't the story you'd expect from a small man like me, yet there's nobody else to tell it. Those that know anything of it besides me, are all for hushing it up.

Well, I was looking for a room to live in in London when first I got my job; it had to be in London, to be central; and I went to a block of buildings, very gloomy they looked, and saw the man that ran them and asked him for what I wanted; flats they called them; just a bedroom and a sort of a cupboard. Well he was showing a man round at the time who was a gent, in fact more than that, so he didn't take much notice of me, the man that ran all those flats didn't, I mean. So I just ran behind for a bit, seeing all sorts of rooms, and waiting till I could be shown my class of thing. We came to a very nice flat, a sitting room, bedroom and bathroom, and a sort of little place that they called a hall. And that's how I came to know Linley. He was the bloke that was being shown round.

"Bit expensive," he said.

And the man that ran the flats turned away to the window and picked his teeth. It's funny how much you can show by a simple thing like that. What he meant to say was that he'd hundreds of flats like that, and thousands of people looking for

them, and he didn't care who had them or whether they all went on looking. There was no mistaking him, somehow. And yet he never said a word, only looked away out of the window and picked his teeth. And I ventured to speak to Mr. Linley then; and I said, "How about it, sir, if I paid half, and shared it? I wouldn't be in the way, and I'm out all day, and whatever you said would go, and really I wouldn't be no more in your way than a cat."

You may be surprised at my doing it; and you'll be much more surprised at him accepting it; at least, you would if you knew me, just a small man in a small way of business; and yet I could see at once that he was taking to me more than he was taking to the man at the window.

"But there's only one bedroom," he said.

"I could make up my bed easy in that little room there," I said.

"The Hall," said the man looking round from the window, without taking his toothpick out.

"And I'd have the bed out of the way and hid in the cupboard by any hour you like," I said.

He looked thoughtful, and the other man looked out over London; and in the end, do you know, he accepted.

"Friend of yours?" said the flat man.

"Yes," answered Mr. Linley.

It was really very nice of him.

I'll tell you why I did it. Able to afford it? Of course not. But I heard him tell the flat man that he had just come down from Oxford and wanted to live for a few months in London. It turned out he wanted just to be comfortable and do nothing for a bit while he looked things over and chose a job, or probably just as long as he could afford it. Well I said to myself, what's the Oxford manner worth in business, especially a business like mine? Why, simply everything you've got. If I picked up only a quarter of it from this Mr. Linley I'd be able to double my sales, and that would soon mean I'd be given something a lot harder to push, with perhaps treble the pay. Worth it every time. And you can make a quarter of an education go twice as far again, if you're careful with it. I mean you don't have to quote the whole of the Inferno to show that you've read Milton; half a line may do it.

Well, about that story I have to tell. And you mightn't think that a little man like me could make you shudder. Well, I soon forgot about the Oxford manner when we settled down in our flat. I forgot it in the sheer wonder of the man himself. He had a mind like an acrobat's body, like a bird's body. It didn't want education. You didn't notice whether he was educated or not.

Ideas were always leaping up in him, things you'd never have thought of. And not only that, but if any ideas were about, he'd sort of catch them. Time and again I've found him knowing just what I was going to say. Not thought-reading, but what they call intuition. I used to try to learn a bit about chess, just to take my thoughts off Num-numo in the evening, when I'd done with it. But problems I never could do. Yet he'd come along and glance at my problem and say, "You probably move that piece first," and I'd say, "But where?" and he'd say, "Oh, one of those three squares." And I'd say, "But it will be taken on all of them." And the piece a queen all the time, mind you. And he'd say, "Yes, it's doing no good there: you're probably meant to lose it."

And, do you know, he'd be right.

You see he'd been following out what the other man had been thinking. That's what he'd been doing.

Well one day there was that ghastly murder at Unge. I don't know if you remember it. But Seeger had gone down to live with a girl in a bungalow on the North Downs, and that was the first we had heard of him.

The girl had £200, and he got every penny of it and she utterly disappeared. And Scotland Yard couldn't find her.

Well I'd happened to read that Seeger had bought two bottles of Num-numo; for the Otherthorpe police had found out everything about him, except what he did with the girl; and that of course attracted my attention or I should have never thought again about the case or said a word of it to Linley. Num-numo was always on my mind, as I always spent every day pushing it, and that kept me from forgetting the other thing. And so one day I said to Linley, "I wonder with all that knack you have for seeing through a chess problem, and thinking of one thing and another, that you don't have a go at that Otherthorpe mystery. It's a problem as much as chess," I said.

"There's not the mystery in ten murders that there is in one game of chess," he answered.

"It's beaten Scotland Yard," I said.

"Has it?" he asked.

"Knocked them end-wise," I said.

"It shouldn't have done that," he said. And almost immediately after he said, "What are the facts?"

We were both sitting at supper and I told him the facts, as I had them straight from the papers. She was a pretty blonde, she was small, she was called Nancy Elth, she had £200, they lived at the bungalow for five days. After that he stayed there for another fortnight, but nobody ever saw her alive again. Seeger said she had gone to South America, but later said he had never said South America, but South Africa. None of her

money remained in the bank where she had kept it, and Seeger was shown to have come by at least £150 just at that time. Then Seeger turned out to be a vegetarian, getting all his food from the greengrocer, and that made the constable in the village of Unge suspicious of him, for a vegetarian was something new to the constable. He watched Seeger after that, and it's well he did, for there was nothing that Scotland Yard asked him that he couldn't tell them about him, except of course the one thing. And he told the police at Otherthorpe five or six miles away, and they came and took a hand at it too.

They were able to say, for one thing, that he never went outside the bungalow and its tidy garden ever since she disappeared. You see, the more they watched him the more suspicious they got, as you naturally do if you're watching a man; so that very soon they were watching every move he made, but if it hadn't been for his being a vegetarian they'd never have started to suspect him, and there wouldn't have been enough evidence even for Linley. Not that they found out anything much against him, except that £150 dropping in from nowhere, and it was Scotland Yard that found that, not the police of Otherthorpe.

No, what the constable of Unge found out was about the larch trees, and that beat Scotland Yard utterly, and beat Linley up to the very last, and of course it beat me. There were ten larch trees in the bit of a garden, and he'd made some sort of an arrangement with the landlord, Seeger had, before he took the bungalow, by which he could do what he liked with the larch trees. And then from about the time that little Nancy Elth must have died he cut every one of them down. Three times a day he went at it for nearly a week, and when they were all down he cut them all up into logs no more than two feet long and laid them all in neat heaps. You never saw such work. And what for? To give an excuse for the axe was one theory. But the excuse was bigger than the axe: it took him a fortnight, hard work every day. And he could have killed a little thing like Nancy Elth without an axe, and cut her up, too. Another theory was that he wanted firewood, to make away with the body. But he never used it. He left it all standing there in those neat stacks. It fairly beat everybody.

Well, those are the facts I told Linley. Oh yes, and he bought a big butcher's knife. Funny thing, they all do. And yet it isn't so funny after all; if you've got to cut a woman up, you've got to cut her up; and you can't do that without a knife. Then, there were some negative facts. He hadn't burned her. Only had a fire in the small stove now and then, and only used it for cooking. They got on to that pretty smartly, the Unge constable did, and the men that were lending him a hand from Otherthorpe.

There were some little woody places lying round, shaws they call them in that part of the country, the country people do, and they could climb a tree handy and unobserved and get a sniff at the smoke in almost any direction it might be blowing. They did now and then and there was no smell of flesh burning, just ordinary cooking. Pretty smart of the Otherthorpe police that was, though of course it didn't help to hang Seeger. Then later on the Scotland Yard men went down and got another fact, negative but narrowing things down all the while. And that was that the chalk under the bungalow and under the little garden had none of it been disturbed. And he'd never been outside it since Nancy disappeared. Oh yes, and he had a big file besides the knife. But there was no sign of any ground bones found on the file, or any blood on the knife. He'd washed them of course. I told all that to Linley.

Now I ought to warn you before I got any further; I am a small man myself and you probably don't expect anything horrible from me. But I ought to warn you this man was a murderer, or at any rate somebody was; the woman had been made away with, a nice pretty little girl, too, and the man that had done that wasn't necessarily going to stop at things you might think he'd stop at. With the mind to do a thing like that, and with the shadow of the rope to drive him further, you can't say what he'll stop at. Murder tales seem nice things sometimes for a lady to sit and read all by herself by the fire. But murder isn't a nice thing, and when a murderer's desperate and trying to hide his tracks he isn't even as nice as he was before. I'll ask you to bear that in mind. Well I've warned you.

So I says to Linley, "And what do you make of it?"

"Drains?" said Linley.

"No," I says, "you're wrong there. Scotland Yard has been into that. And the Otherthorpe people before them. They've had a look in the drains, such as they are, a little thing running into a cesspool beyond the garden; and nothing has gone down it, nothing that ought't to have, I mean."

He made one or two other suggestions, but Scotland Yard had been before him in every case. That's really the crab of my story, if you'll excuse the expression. You want a man who sets out to be a detective to take his magnifying glass and go down to the spot; to go to the spot before everything; and then to measure the footmarks and pick up the clues and find the knife that the police have overlooked. But Linley never even went near the place, and he hadn't got a magnifying glass, not as I ever saw, and Scotland Yard was before him every time.

In fact they had more clues than anybody could make head or tail of. Every kind of clue to show that he'd murdered the poor little girl; every kind of clue to show that he hadn't dis-

posed of the body; and yet the body wasn't there. It wasn't in South America either, and not much more likely in South Africa. And all the time, mind you, that enormous bunch of chopped larch wood, a clue that was staring everyone in the face and leading nowhere. No, we didn't seem to want any more clues, and Linley never went near the place. The trouble was to deal with the clues we'd got. I was completely mystified; so was Scotland Yard; and Linley seemed to be getting no forwarder; and all the while the mystery was hanging on me. I mean if it were not for the trifle I'd chanced to remember, and if it were not for one chance word I said to Linley, that mystery would have gone the way of all the other mysteries that men have made nothing of, a darkness, a little patch of night in history.

Well, the fact was Linley didn't take much interest in it at first, but I was so absolutely sure that he could do it, that I kept him to the idea. "You can do chess problems," I said.

"That's ten times harder," he said, sticking to his point.

"Then why don't you do this?" I said.

"Then go and take a look at the board for me," said Linley.

That was his way of talking. We'd been a fortnight together, and I knew it by now. He meant go down to the bungalow at Unge. I know you'll say why didn't he go himself, but the plain truth of it is that if he'd been tearing about the countryside he'd never have been thinking, whereas sitting here in this chair by the fire in our flat there was no limit to the ground he could cover, if you follow my meaning. So down I went by train next day, and got out at Unge station. And there were the North Downs rising up before me.

"It's up there isn't it?" I said to the porter.

"That's right," he said. "Up there by the lane; and mind to turn to your right when you get to the old yew tree, a very big tree, you can't mistake it, and then . . ." and he told me the way so that I couldn't go wrong. I found them all like that, very nice and helpful. You see it was Unge's day at last; everyone had heard of Unge now; you could have got a letter there any time just then without putting the county or post town, and this was what Unge had to show. I dare say if you tried to find Unge now . . . ; well, anyway, they were making hay while the sun shone.

Well, there the hill was, going up into sunlight, going up like a song. You don't want to hear about the spring, and all the May colors that came down over everything later on in the day, and all those birds; but I thought, "What a nice place to bring a girl to." And then when I thought that he'd killed her there, well I'm only a small man, as I said, but when I thought of her on that hill with all the birds singing, I said to myself, "Wouldn't

it be odd if it turned out to be me after all that got that man killed, if he did murder her."

So I soon found my way up to the bungalow and began prying about, looking over the hedge into the garden. And I didn't find much, and I found nothing at all that the police hadn't found already, but there were those heaps of larch logs staring me in the face and looking very queer.

I did a lot of thinking, leaning against the hedge, breathing the smell of the May, and looking over the top of it at the larch logs, and the neat little bungalow the other side of the garden. Lots of theories I thought of; till I came to the best thought of all; and that was that if I left the thinking to Linley, with his Oxford-and-Cambridge education, and only brought him the facts, as he had told me, I should be doing more good in my way than if I tried to do any big thinking. I forgot to say that I had gone to Scotland Yard in the morning. Well, there wasn't really much to tell. What they asked me was, what I wanted. And, not having an answer exactly ready, I didn't find out very much from them.

But it was quite different at Unge; everyone was most obliging; it was their day there, as I said. The constable let me go indoors, so long as I didn't touch anything, and he gave me a look at the garden from the inside. And I saw the stumps of the ten larch trees, and I noticed one thing that Linley said was very observant of me, not that it turned out to be any use, but any way I was doing my best; I noticed that the stumps had been all chopped anyhow. And from that I thought that the man that did it didn't know much about chopping. The constable said that was a deduction. So then I said that the axe was blunt when he used it; and that certainly made the constable think, though he didn't actually say I was right this time.

Did I tell you that Seeger never went outdoors, except to the little garden to chop wood, ever since Nancy disappeared? I think I did. Well it was perfectly true. They'd watched him night and day, one or another of them, and the Unge constable told me that himself. That limited things a good deal. The only thing I didn't like about it was that I felt Linley ought to have found all that out instead of ordinary policemen, and I felt that he could have too. There'd have been romance in a story like that. And they'd never have done it if the news hadn't gone round that the man was a vegetarian and only dealt at the greengrocers. Likely as not even that was only started out of pique by the butcher. It's queer what little things may trip a man up. Best to keep straight is my motto. But perhaps I'm straying a bit away from my story. I should like to do that for ever; forget that it ever was; but I can't.

Well I picked up all sorts of information; clues I suppose I

should call it in a story like this; though they none of them seemed to lead anywhere. For instance, I found out everything he ever bought at the village; I could even tell you the kind of salt he bought, quite plain with no phosphate in it, that they sometimes put in to make it tidy. And then he got ice from the fishmongers, and plenty of vegetables, as I said, from the greengrocer, Mergin and Sons. And I had a bit of talk over it all with the constable. Slugger he said his name was. I wondered why he hadn't come in and searched the place as soon as the girl was missing. "Well, you can't do that," he said. "And besides, we didn't suspect at once, not about the girl, that is. We only suspected there was something wrong about him on account of him being a vegetarian. He stayed a good fortnight after the last that was seen of her. And then we slipped in like a knife. But, you see, no one had been inquiring about her, there was no warrant out."

"And what did you find," I asked Slugger, "when you went in?"

"Just a big file," he said, "and the knife and the axe that he must have got to chop her up with."

"But he got the axe to chop trees with," I said.

"Well, yes," he said, but rather grudgingly.

"And what did he chop them for?" I asked.

"Well of course my superiors have theories about that," he said, "that they mightn't tell to everybody."

You see, it was those logs that were beating them.

"But did he cut her up at all?" I asked.

"Well, he said that she was going to South America," he answered. Which was really very fair-minded of him.

I don't remember now much else that he told me. Seeger left the plates and dishes all washed up and very neat, he said.

Well I brought all this back to Linley, going up by the train that started just about sunset. I'd like to tell you about the late spring evening, so calm over that grim bungalow; but you'll want to hear of the murder. Well, I told Linley everything, though much of it didn't seem to me to be worth the telling. The trouble was that the moment I began to leave anything out, he'd know it, and make me drag it in. "You can't tell what may be vital," he'd say. "A tin tack swept away by a housemaid might hang a man."

All very well, but be consistent even if you are educated at Eton and Harrow; and whenever I mentioned Num-numo, which after all was the beginning of the whole story, because he wouldn't have heard of it if it hadn't been for me, and my noticing that Seeger had bought two bottles of it, why then he said that things like that were trivial and we should keep to the main issues. I naturally talked a bit about Num-numo, because

only that day I had pushed close on fifty bottles of it in Unge. A murder certainly stimulates people's minds, and Seeger's two bottles gave me an opportunity that only a fool could have failed to make something of. But of course all that was nothing at all to Linley.

You can't see a man's thoughts and you can't look into his mind, so that all the most exciting things in the world can never be told of. But what I think happened all that evening with Linley, while I talked to him before supper, and all through supper, and sitting smoking afterwards in front of our fire, was that his thoughts were stuck at a barrier there was no getting over. And the barrier wasn't the difficulty of finding ways and means by which Seeger might have made away with the body, but the impossibility of finding why he chopped those masses of wood every day for a fortnight, and paid as I'd just found out, £25 to his landlord to be allowed to do it. That's what was beating Linley. As for the ways by which Seeger might have hidden the body, it seemed to me that every way was blocked by the police. If you said he buried it they said the chalk was undisturbed, if you said he carried it away they said he never left the place, if you said he burned it they said no smell of burning was ever noticed when the smoke blew low, and when it didn't they climbed trees after it. I'd taken to Linley wonderfully, and I didn't have to be educated to see there was something big in a mind like his, and I thought that he could have done it. When I saw the police getting in before him like that, and no way that I could see of getting past them, I felt real sorry.

Did anyone come to the house, he asked me once or twice? Did anyone take anything away from it? But we couldn't account for it that way. Then perhaps I made some suggestion that was no good, or perhaps I started talking of Num-numo again, and he interrupted me rather sharply.

"But what would you do, Smithers?" he said. "What would you do yourself?"

"If I'd murdered poor Nancy Elth?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

"I can't ever imagine doing such a thing," I told him.

He sighed at that, as though it were something against me.

"I suppose I should never be a detective," I said. And he just shook his head.

Then he looked broodingly into the fire for what seemed an hour. And then he shook his head again. We both went to bed after that.

I shall remember the next day all my life. I was till evening, as usual, pushing Num-numo. And we sat down to supper about nine. You couldn't get things cooked at those flats, so of course

we had it cold. And Linley began with a salad. I can see it now, every bit of it. Well, I was still a bit full of what I'd done in Unge, pushing Num-numo. Only a fool, I know, would have been unable to push it there; but still, I *had* pushed it; and about fifty bottles, forty-eight to be exact, are something in a small village, whatever the circumstances. So I was talking about it a bit; and then all of a sudden I realized that Num-numo was nothing to Linley, and I pulled myself up with a jerk. It was really very kind of him; do you know what he did? He must have known at once why I stopped talking, and he just stretched out a hand and said: "Would you give me a little of your Num-numo for my salad?"

I was so touched I nearly gave it him. But of course you don't take Num-numo with salad. Only for meats and savories. That's on the bottle.

So I just said to him, "Only for meats and savories." Though I don't know what savories are. Never had any.

I never saw a man's face go like that before.

He seemed still for a whole minute. And nothing speaking about him but that expression. Like a man that's seen a ghost, one is tempted to say. But it wasn't really at all. I'll tell you what he looked like. Like a man that's seen something that no one has ever looked at before, something he thought couldn't be.

And then he said in a voice that was all quite changed, more low and gentle and quiet it seemed, "No good for vegetables, eh?"

"Not a bit," I said.

And at that he gave a kind of sob in his throat. I hadn't thought he could feel things like that. Of course I didn't know what it was all about; but, whatever it was, I thought all that sort of thing would have been knocked out of him at Eton and Harrow, an educated man like that. There were no tears in his eyes but he was feeling something horribly.

And then he began to speak with big spaces between his words, saying, "A man might make a mistake perhaps, and use Num-numo with vegetables."

"Not twice," I said. What else could I say?

And he repeated that after me as though I had told of the end of the world, and adding an awful emphasis to my words, till they seemed all clammy with some frightful significance, and shaking his head as he said it.

Then he was quite silent.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Smithers," he said.

"Yes," I said.

"Smithers," said he.

And I said, "Well?"

"Look here Smithers," he said, "you must 'phone down to the grocer at Unge and find out from him this."

"Yes?" I said.

"Whether Seeger bought those two bottles, as I expect he did, on the same day, and not a few days apart. He couldn't have done that."

I waited to see if any more was coming, and then I ran out and did what I was told. It took me some time, being after nine o'clock, and only then with the help of the police. About six days apart they said; and so I came back and told Linley. He looked up at me so hopefully when I came in, but I saw that it was the wrong answer by his eyes.

You can't take things to heart like that without being ill, and when he didn't speak I said, "What you want is a good brandy, and go to bed early."

And he said, "No. I must see someone from Scotland Yard. 'Phone round to them. Say here at once."

But I said, "I can't get an inspector from Scotland Yard to call on us at this hour."

His eyes were all lit up. He was all there all right.

"Then tell them," he said, "they'll never find Nancy Elth. Tell one of them to come here and I'll tell him why." And he added, I think only for me, "They must watch Seeger, till one day they get him over something else."

And, do you know, he came. Inspector Ulton; he came himself.

While we were waiting I tried to talk to Linley. Partly curiosity, I admit. But I didn't want to leave him to those thoughts of his, brooding away by the fire. I tried to ask him what it was all about. But he wouldn't tell me. "Murder is horrible," is all he would say. "And as a man covers his tracks up it only gets worse."

He wouldn't tell me. "There are tales," he said, "that one never wants to hear."

That's true enough. I wish I'd never heard this one. I never did actually. But I guessed it from Linley's last words to Inspector Ulton, the only ones that I overheard. And perhaps this is the point at which to stop reading my story, so that you don't guess it too; even if you think you want murder stories. For don't you rather want a murder story with a bit of romantic twist, and not a story about real foul murder? Well, just as you like.

In came Inspector Ulton, and Linley shook hands in silence, and pointed the way to his bedroom; and they went in there and talked in low voices, and I never heard a word.

A fairly hearty-looking man was the inspector when they went into that room.

They walked through our sitting room in silence when they came out, and together they went into the hall, and there I heard the only words they said to each other. It was the Inspector that first broke that silence.

"But why," he said, "did he cut down the trees?"

"Solely," said Linley, "in order to get an appetite."

MARY NORTON

PAUL'S TALE

"'HO! HO!' said the king, slapping his fat thighs. 'Methinks this youth shows promise.' But, at that moment, the court magician stepped forward . . . What *is* the matter, Paul? Don't you like this story?"

"Yes, I like it."

"Then lie quiet, dear, and listen."

"It was just a sort of stalk of a feather pushing itself through the eiderdown."

"Well, you needn't help it, dear. It's destructive. Where were we?" Aunt Isobel's short-sighted eyes searched down the page of the book. She looked comfortable and pink and plump, rocking there in the firelight. ". . . stepped forward . you see the court magician knew that the witch had taken the magic music box, and that Colin—Paul, you aren't listening!"

"Yes, I am. I can hear."

"Of course you can't hear—right under the bed clothes! What are you doing, dear?"

"I'm seeing what a hot water bottle feels like."

"Don't you know what a hot water bottles feels like?"

"I know what it feels like to me. I don't know what it feels like to itself."

"Well, shall I go on or not?"

"Yes, go on," said Paul. He emerged from the bed clothes, his hair ruffled.

Aunt Isobel looked at him curiously. He was her godson; he had a bad feverish cold; and his mother had gone to London. "Does it tire you, dear, to be read to?" she said at last.

"No. But I like told stories better than read stories."

Aunt Isobel got up and put some more coal on the fire. Then she looked at the clock. She sighed. "Well, dear," she said brightly, as she sat down once more on the rocking chair,

"What sort of story would you like?" She unfolded her knitting.

"I'd like a real story."

"How do you mean, dear?" Aunt Isobel began to cast on. The cord of her pince-nez, anchored to her bosom, rose and fell in gentle undulations.

Paul flung round on his back, staring at the ceiling. "*You* know," he said, "quite real—so you know it must have happened."

"Shall I tell you about Grace Darling?"

"No. Tell me about a little man."

"What sort of a little man?"

"A little man just as high—" Paul's eyes searched the room —"as that candlestick on the mantelshelf, but without the candle."

"But that's a very small candlestick. It's only about six inches."

"Well, about that big."

Aunt Isobel began knitting a few stitches. She was disappointed about the fairy story. She had been reading with so much expression, making a deep voice for the king, and a wicked, oily voice for the court magician, and a fine, cheerful, boyish voice for Colin, the swineherd. A little man—what could she say about a little man? "Ah," she exclaimed suddenly, and laid down her knitting, smiling at Paul. Little men . . . of course . . .

"Well," said Aunt Isobel, drawing in her breath. "Once upon a time, there was a little, tiny man, and he was no bigger than that candlestick—there on the mantelshelf."

Paul settled down, his cheek on his crook'd arm, his eyes on Aunt Isobel's face. The firelight flickered softly on the walls and ceiling.

"He was the sweetest little man you ever saw, and he wore a little red jerkin and a dear little cap made out of a foxglove. His boots . . ."

"He didn't have any," said Paul.

Aunt Isobel looked startled. "Yes," she exclaimed. "He had boots—little, pointed—"

"He didn't have any clothes," contradicted Paul. "He was quite bare."

Aunt Isobel looked perturbed. "But he would have been cold," she pointed out.

"He had thick skin," explained Paul. "Like a twig."

"Like a twig?"

"Yes. You know that sort of wrinkly, nubbly skin on a twig."

Aunt Isobel knitted in silence for a second or two. She didn't

like the little naked man nearly as much as the little dressed man; she was trying to get used to him. After a while she went on.

"He lived in a bluebell wood, among the roots of a dear old tree. He had a dear little house, tunneled out of the soft, loamy earth, with a bright blue front door."

"Why didn't he live in it?" asked Paul.

"He did live in it, dear," exclaimed Aunt Isobel patiently.

"I thought he lived in the potting shed."

"In the potting shed?"

"Well, perhaps he had two houses. Some people do. I wish I'd seen the one with the blue front door."

"Did you see the one in the potting shed?" asked Aunt Isobel, after a second's bewildered silence.

"Not inside. Right inside. I'm too big. I just sort of saw into it with a flashlight."

"And what was it like?" asked Aunt Isobel, in spite of herself.

"Well, it was clean—in a potting-shed sort of way. He'd made the furniture himself. The floor was just earth but he'd trodden it down so that it was hard. It took him years."

"Well, dear, you seem to know more about this little man than I do."

Paul snuggled his head more comfortably against his elbow. He half-closed his eyes. "Go on," he said dreamily.

Aunt Isobel glanced at him hesitatingly. How beautiful he looked, she thought, lying there in the firelight with one curled hand lying lightly on the counterpane. "Well," she went on, "this little man had a little pipe made of a straw." She paused, rather pleased with this idea. "A little hollow straw, through which he played jiggity little tunes. And to which he danced." She hesitated. "Among the bluebells," she added. Really, this was quite a pretty story. She knitted hard for a few seconds, breathing heavily, before the next bit would come. "Now," she continued brightly, in a changed, higher, and more conversational voice, "up in the tree, there lived a fairy."

"In the tree?" asked Paul incredulously.

"Yes," said Aunt Isobel, "in the tree."

Paul raised his head. "Do you know that for certain?"

"Well, Paul," began Aunt Isobel. Then she added playfully, "Well, I suppose I do."

"Go on," said Paul.

"Well, this fairy—"

Paul raised his head again. "Couldn't you go on about the little man?"

"But, dear, we've done the little man—how he lived in the tree roots, and played a pipe, and all that."

"You didn't say about his hands and feet."

"His hands and feet?"

"How sort of big his hands and feet looked, and how he could scuttle along. Like a rat," Paul added.

"Like a rat!" exclaimed Aunt Isobel.

"And his voice. You didn't say anything about his voice."

"What sort of a voice," Aunt Isobel looked almost scared, "did he have?"

"A croaky sort of voice. Like a frog. And he says 'Will 'ee' and 'Do 'ee' "

"Willy and Dooey . . ." repeated Aunt Isobel, as if fascinated.

"Instead of 'Will you' and 'Do you.' You know."

"Has he—got a Sussex accent?"

"Sort of. He isn't used to talking. He's the last one. He's been all alone, for years and years."

"Did he—" Aunt Isobel swallowed. "Did he tell you that?"

"Yes. He had an aunt and she died about fifteen years ago. But even when she was alive, he never spoke to her."

"Why?" asked Aunt Isobel.

"He didn't like her," said Paul.

There was silence. Paul stared dreamily into the fire. Aunt Isobel sat as if turned to stone, her hands idle in her lap. After a while, she cleared her throat. "When did you first see this little man, Paul?"

"Oh, ages and ages ago. When did you?"

"I—Where did you find him?"

"Under the chicken house."

"Did you—did you speak to him?"

Paul made a little snort. "No. I just popped a tin over him."

"You caught him!"

"Yes. There was an old rusty chicken-food tin near. I just popped it over him." Paul laughed. "He scrabbled away inside. Then I popped an old kitchen plate that was there on top of the tin."

Aunt Isobel sat staring at Paul. "What—did you do with him then?"

"I put him in a cake tin, and made holes in the lid. I gave him a bit of bread and milk."

"Didn't he—say anything?"

"Well, he was sort of croaking."

"And then?"

"Well, I sort of forgot I had him."

"You forgot!"

"I went fishing, you see. Then it was bedtime. And next day I didn't remember him. Then when I went to look for him, he was lying curled up at the bottom of the tin. He'd gone all soft. He just hung over my finger. All soft."

Aunt Isobel's eyes protruded dully. "What did you do then?"

"I gave him some cherry corjil in a fountain-pen filler."

"That revived him?"

"Yes, that's when he began to talk. And told me about his aunt and everything. I harnessed him up, then, with a bit of string."

"Oh, Paul," exclaimed Aunt Isobel. "how cruel!"

"Well, he'd have got away. It didn't hurt him. Then I tamed him."

"How did you tame him?"

"Oh, how you tame anything. With food mostly. Chips of gelatine and raw sago he liked best. Cheese, he liked. I'd take him out and let him go down rabbit holes and things, on the string. Then he would come back and tell me what was going on. I put him down all kinds of holes in trees and things."

"Whatever for?"

"Just to know what was going on. I have all kinds of uses for him."

"Why," stammered Aunt Isobel, half rising from her chair, "you haven't still got him, have you?"

Paul sat up on his elbow. "Yes. I've got him. I'm going to keep him till I go to school. I'll need him at school like anything."

"But it isn't—You wouldn't be allowed—" Aunt Isobel became suddenly extremely grave. "Where is he now?"

"In the cake tin."

"Where is the cake tin?"

"Over there. In the toy cupboard."

Aunt Isobel looked fearfully across the shadowed room. She stood up. "I am going to put the light on, and I shall take that cake tin out into the garden."

"It's raining," Paul reminded her.

"I can't help that," said Aunt Isobel. "It is wrong and wicked to keep a little thing like that shut up in a cake tin. I shall take it out on to the back porch and open the lid."

"He can hear you," said Paul.

"I don't care if he can hear me." Aunt Isobel walked toward the door. "I'm thinking of his good, as much as of anyone else's." She switched on the light. "Now, which was the cupboard?"

"That one, near the fireplace."

The door was ajar. Timidly Aunt Isobel pulled it open with one finger. There stood the cake tin amid a medley of torn cardboard, playing cards, pieces of jigsaw puzzle, and an open paint box.

"What a mess, Paul!"

Nervously Aunt Isobel stared at the cake tin and, falsely innocent, the British Royal Family stared back at her, painted

brightly on a background of Allied flags. The holes in the lid were narrow and wedge-shaped; made, no doubt, by the big blade of the best cutting-out scissors.

Aunt Isobel drew in her breath sharply. "If you weren't ill, I'd make you do this. I'd make you carry the tin out and watch you open the lid—" She hesitated as if unnerved by the stillness of the rain-darkened room and the sinister quiet within the cake tin.

Then bravely she put out her hand. Paul watched her, absorbed, as she stretched forward the other hand and, very gingerly, picked up the cake tin. His eyes were dark and deep. He saw the lid was not quite on. He saw the corner, in contact with that ample bosom, rise. He saw the sharp edge catch the cord of Aunt Isobel's pince-nez and, fearing for her rimless glasses, he sat up in bed.

Aunt Isobel felt the tension, the pressure of the pince-nez on the bridge of her nose. A pull, it was, a little steady pull as if a small dark claw, as wrinkled as a twig, had caught the hanging cord. . . .

"Look out!" cried Paul.

Loudly she shrieked and dropped the box. It bounced away and then lay still, gaping emptily upon its side. In the horrid hush, they heard the measured planking of the lid as it trundled off beneath the bed.

Paul broke the silence with a croupy cough. "Did you see him?" he asked, hoarse but interested.

"No," stammered Aunt Isobel, almost with a sob. "I didn't. I didn't see him."

"But you nearly did."

Aunt Isobel sat down limply in the upholstered chair. Her hand wavered vaguely round her brow and her cheeks looked white and pendulous, as if deflated. "Yes," she muttered, shivering slightly, "Heaven help me—I nearly did."

Paul gazed at her a moment longer. "That's what I mean," he said.

"What?" asked Aunt Isobel weakly, but as if she did not really care.

"About stories. Being real."

LORD MOUNTDRAGO

DR. AUDLIN looked at the clock on his desk. It was twenty minutes to six. He was surprised that his patient was late, for Lord Mountdrago prided himself on his punctuality; he had a sententious way of expressing himself which gave the air of an epigram to a commonplace remark, and he was in the habit of saying that punctuality is a compliment you pay to the intelligent and a rebuke you administer to the stupid. Lord Mountdrago's appointment was for five-thirty.

There was in Dr. Audlin's appearance nothing to attract attention. He was tall and spare, with narrow shoulders and something of a stoop; his hair was grey and thin; his long, sallow face deeply lined. He was not more than fifty, but he looked older. His eyes, pale blue and rather large, were weary. When you had been with him for a while you noticed that they moved very little; they remained fixed on your face, but so empty of expression were they that it was no discomfort. They seldom lit up. They gave no clue to his thoughts nor changed with the words he spoke. If you were of an observant turn it might have struck you that he blinked much less often than most of us. His hands were on the large side, with long, tapering fingers; they were soft but firm, cool put not clammy. You could never have said what Dr. Audlin wore unless you had made a point of looking. His clothes were dark. His tie was black. His dress made his sallow lined face paler and his pale eyes more wan. He gave you the impression of a very sick man.

Dr. Audlin was a psychoanalyst. He had adopted the profession by accident and practised it with misgiving. When the war broke out he had not been long qualified and was getting experience at various hospitals; he offered his services to the authorities, and after a time was sent out to France. It was then that he discovered his singular gift. He could allay certain

pains by the touch of his cool, firm hands, and by talking to them often induce sleep in men who were suffering from sleeplessness. He spoke slowly. His voice had no particular colour, and its tone did not alter with the words he uttered, but it was musical, soft and lulling. He told the men that they must rest, that they mustn't worry, that they must sleep; and rest stole into their jaded bones, tranquillity pushed their anxieties away, like a man finding a place for himself on a crowded bench, and slumber fell on their tired eyelids like the light rain of spring upon the fresh-turned earth. Dr. Audlin found that by speaking to men with that low, monotonous voice of his, by looking at them with his pale, quiet eyes, by stroking their weary foreheads with his long firm hands, he could soothe their perturbations, resolve the conflicts that distracted them and banish the phobias that made their lives a torment. Sometimes he effected cures that seemed miraculous. He restored speech to a man who, after being buried under the earth by a bursting shell, had been struck dumb, and he gave back the use of his limbs to another who had been paralyzed after a crash in a plane. He could not understand his powers; he was of a sceptical turn, and though they say that in circumstances of this kind the first thing is to believe in yourself, he never quite succeeded in doing that; and it was only the outcome of his activites, patent to the most incredulous observer, that obliged him to admit that he had some faculty, coming from he knew not where, obscure and uncertain, that enabled him to do things for which he could offer no explanation. When the war was over he went to Vienna and studied there, and afterwards to Zurich; and then settled down in London to practise the art he had so strongly acquired. He had been practising now for fifteen years, and had attained, in the specialty he followed, a distinguished reputation. People told one another of the amazing things he had done, and though his fees were high, he had as many patients as he had time to see. Dr. Audlin knew that he had achieved some very extraordinary results; he had saved men from suicide, others from the lunatic asylum, he had assuaged griefs that embittered useful lives, he had turned unhappy marriages into happy ones, he had eradicated abnormal instincts and thus delivered not a few from a hateful bondage, he had given health to the sick in spirit; he had done all this, and yet at the back of his mind remained the suspicion that he was little more than a quack.

It went against his grain to exercise a power that he could not understand, and it offended his honesty to trade on the faith of the people he treated when he had no faith in himself. He was rich enough now to live without working, and the work exhausted him; a dozen times he had been on the point of giving

up practice. He knew all that Freud and Jung and the rest of them had written. He was not satisfied; he had an intimate conviction that all their theory was hocus-pocus, and yet there the results were, incomprehensible, but manifest. And what had he not seen of human nature during the fifteen years that patients had been coming to his dingy back room in Wimpole Street? The revelations that had been poured into his ears, sometimes only too willingly, sometimes with shame, with reservations, with anger, had long ceased to surprise him. Nothing could shock him any longer. He knew by now that men were liars, he knew how extravagant was their vanity; he knew far worse than that about them; but he knew that it was not for him to judge or to condemn. But year by year as these terrible confidences were imparted to him his face grew a little greyer, its lines a little more marked and his pale eyes more weary. He seldom laughed, but now and again when for relaxation he read a novel he smiled. Did their authors really think the men and women they wrote of were like that? If they only knew how much more complicated they were, how much more unexpected, what irreconcilable elements coexisted within their souls and what dark and sinister contentions afflicted them!

It was a quarter to six. Of all the strange cases he had been called upon to deal with, Dr. Audlin could remember none stranger than that of Lord Mountdrago. For one thing the personality of his patient made it singular. Lord Mountdrago was an able and a distinguished man. Appointed Secretary for Foreign Affairs when still under forty, now after three years in office he had seen his policy prevail. It was generally acknowledged that he was the ablest politician in the Conservative Party, and only the fact that his father was a peer, on whose death he would no longer be able to sit in the House of Commons, made it impossible for him to aim at the premiership. But if in these democratic times it is out of the question for a Prime Minister of England to be in the House of Lords, there was nothing to prevent Lord Mountdrago from continuing to be Secretary for Foreign Affairs in successive Conservative administrations and so for long directing the foreign policy of his country.

Lord Mountdrago had many good qualities. He had intelligence and industry. He was widely travelled and spoke several languages fluently. From early youth he had specialized in foreign affairs and had conscientiously made himself acquainted with the political and economic circumstances of other countries. He had courage, insight and determination. He was a good speaker, both on the platform and in the House, clear, precise and often witty. He was a brilliant debater and his gift of repartee was celebrated. He had a fine presence: he was a

tall, handsome man, rather bald and somewhat too stout, but this gave him solidity and an air of maturity that were of service to him. As a young man he had been something of an athlete and had rowed in the Oxford boat, and he was known to be one of the best shots in England. At twenty-four he had married a girl of eighteen whose father was a duke and her mother a great American heiress, so that she had both position and wealth, and by her he had had two sons. For several years they had lived privately apart, but in public united, so that appearances were saved, and no other attachment on either side had given the gossips occasion to whisper. Lord Mountdrago indeed was too ambitious, too hard-working, and it must be added too patriotic, to be tempted by any pleasures that might interfere with his careeer. He had in short a great deal to make him a popular and successful figure. He had unfortunately great defects.

He was a fearful snob. You would not have been surprised at this if his father had been the first holder of the title. That the son of an ennobled lawyer, manufacturer or distiller should attach an inordinate importance to his rank is understandable. The earldom held by Lord Mountdrago's father was created by Charles II, and the barony held by the first earl dated from the Wars of the Roses. For three hundred years the successive holders of the title had allied themselves with the noblest families of England. But Lord Mountdrago was as conscious of his birth as a *nouveau riche* is conscious of his money. He never missed an opportunity of impressing it upon others. He had beautiful manners when he chose to display them, but this he did only with people whom he regarded as his equals. He was coldly insolent to those whom he looked upon as his social inferiors. He was rude to his servants and insulting to his secretaries. The subordinate officials in the government offices to which he had been successively attached feared and hated him. His arrogance was horrible. He knew that he was a great deal cleverer than most of the persons he had to do with, and never hesitated to apprise them of the fact. He had no patience with the infirmities of human nature. He felt himself born to command and was irritated with people who expected him to listen to their arguments or wished to hear the reasons for his decisions. He was immeasurably selfish. He looked upon any service that was rendered him as a right due to his rank and intelligence and therefore deserving of no gratitude. It never entered his head that he was called upon to do anything for others. He had many enemies: he despised them. He knew no one who merited his assistance, his sympathy or his compassion. He had no friends. He was distrusted by his chiefs, because they doubted his loyalty; he was unpopular with his party, because

he was overbearing and discourteous; and yet his merit was so great, his patriotism so evident, his intelligence so solid and his management of affairs so brilliant, that they had to put up with him. And what made it possible to do this was that on occasion he could be enchanting: when he was with persons whom he considered his equals, or whom he wished to captivate, in the company of foreign dignitaries or women of distinction, he could be gay, witty and debonair; his manners then reminded you that in his veins ran the same blood as had run in the veins of Lord Chesterfield; he could tell a story with point, he could be natural, sensible and even profound. You were surprised at the extent of his knowledge and the sensitiveness of his taste. You thought him the best company in the world; you forgot that he had insulted you the day before and was quite capable of cutting you dead the next.

Lord Mountdrago almost failed to become Dr. Audlin's patient. A secretary rang up the doctor and told him that his lordship, wishing to consult him, would be glad if he would come to his house at ten o'clock on the following morning. Dr. Audlin answered that he was unable to go to Lord Mountdrago's house, but would be pleased to give him an appointment at his consulting room at five o'clock on the next day but one. The secretary took the message and presently rang back to say that Lord Mountdrago insisted on seeing Dr. Audlin in his own house and the doctor could fix his own fee. Dr. Audlin replied that he saw patients only in his consulting room and expressed his regret that unless Lord Mountdrago was prepared to come to him he could not give him his attention. In a quarter of an hour a brief message was delivered to him that his lordship would come not next day but one, but next day, at five.

When Lord Mountdrago was then shown in he did not come forward, but stood at the door and insolently looked the doctor up and down. Dr. Audlin perceived that he was in a rage; he gazed at him, silently, with still eyes. He saw a big heavy man, with greying hair, receding on the forehead so that it gave nobility to his brow, a puffy face with bold regular features and an expression of haughtiness. He had somewhat the look of one of the Bourbon sovereigns of the eighteenth century.

"It seems that it is as difficult to see you as a Prime Minister, Dr. Audlin. I'm an extremely busy man."

"Won't you sit down?" said the doctor.

His face showed no sign that Lord Mountdrago's speech in any way affected him. Dr. Audlin sat in his chair at the desk. Lord Mountdrago still stood, and his frown darkened.

"I think I should tell you that I am His Majesty's Secretary for Foreign Affairs," he said acidly.

"Won't you sit down?" the doctor repeated.

Lord Mountdrago made a gesture, which might have suggested that he was about to turn on his heel and stalk out of the room; but if that was his intention he apparently thought better of it. He seated himself. Dr. Audlin opened a large book and took up his pen. He wrote without looking at his patient.

"How old are you?"

"Forty-two."

"Are you married?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been married?"

"Eighteen years."

"Have you any children?"

"I have two sons."

Dr. Audlin noted down the facts as Lord Mountdrago abruptly answered his questions. Then he leaned back in his chair and looked at him. He did not speak; he just looked, gravely, with pale eyes that did not move.

"Why have you come to see me?" he asked at length.

"I've heard about you. Lady Canute is a patient of yours, I understand. She tells me you've done her a certain amount of good."

Dr. Audlin did not reply. His eyes remained fixed on the other's face, but they were so empty of expression that you might have thought he did not even see him.

"I can't do miracles," he said at length. Not a smile, but the shadow of a smile flickered in his eyes. "The Royal College of Physicians would not approve of it if I did."

Lord Mountdrago gave a brief chuckle. It seemed to lessen his hostility. He spoke more amiably.

"You have a very remarkable reputation. People seem to believe in you."

"Why have you come to me?" repeated Dr. Audlin.

Now it was Lord Mountdrago's turn to be silent. It looked as though he found it hard to answer. Dr. Audlin waited. At last Lord Mountdrago seemed to make an effort. He spoke.

"I'm in perfect health. Just as a matter of routine I had myself examined by my own doctor the other day, Sir Augustus Fitzherbert, I daresay you've heard of him, and he tells me I have the physique of a man of thirty. I work hard, but I'm never tired, and I enjoy my work. I smoke very little and I'm an extremely moderate drinker. I take a sufficiency of exercise and I lead a regular life. I am a perfectly sound, normal, healthy man. I quite expect you to think it very silly and childish of me to consult you."

Dr. Audlin saw that he must help him.

"I don't know if I can do anything to help you. I'll try. You're distressed?"

Lord Mountdrago frowned.

"The work that I'm engaged in is important. The decisions I am called upon to make can easily affect the welfare of the country and even the peace of the world. It is essential that my judgment should be balanced and my brain clear. I look upon it as my duty to eliminate any cause of worry that may interfere with my usefulness."

Dr. Audlin had never taken his eyes off him. He saw a great deal. He saw behind his patient's pompous manner and arrogant pride an anxiety that he could not dispel.

"I asked you to be good enough to come here because I know by experience that it's easier for someone to speak openly in the dingy surroundings of a doctor's consulting room than in his accustomed environment."

"They're certainly dingy," said Lord Mountdrago acidly. He paused. It was evident that this man who had so much self-assurance, so quick and decided a mind that he was never at a loss, at this moment was embarrassed. He smiled in order to show the doctor that he was at his ease, but his eyes betrayed his disquiet. When he spoke again it was with unnatural heartiness.

"The whole thing's so trivial that I can hardly bring myself to bother you with it. I'm afraid you'll just tell me not to be a fool and waste your valuable time."

"Even things that seem very trivial may have their importance. They can be a symptom of a deep-seated derangement. And my time is entirely at your disposal."

Dr. Audlin's voice was low and grave. The monotone in which he spoke was strangely soothing. Lord Mountdrago at length made up his mind to be frank.

"The fact is I've been having some very tiresome dreams lately. I know it's silly to pay any attention to them, but—well, the honest truth is that I'm afraid they've got on my nerves."

"Can you describe any of them to me?"

Lord Mountdrago smiled, but the smile that tried to be careless was only rueful.

"They're so idiotic, I can hardly bring myself to narrate them."

"Never mind."

"Well, the first I had was about a month ago. I dreamt that I was at a party at Connemara House. It was an official party. The King and Queen were to be there, and of course decorations were worn. I was wearing my ribbon and my star. I went into a sort of cloakroom they have to take off my coat. There was a little man there called Owen Griffiths, who's a Welsh member of Parliament, and to tell you the truth, I was surprised to see him. He's very common, and I said to myself, 'Really,

Lydia Connemara is going too far, whom will she ask next?' I thought he looked at me rather curiously, but I didn't take any notice of him; in fact I cut the little bounder and walked upstairs. I suppose you've never been there?"

"Never."

"No, it's not the sort of house you'd ever be likely to go to. It's a rather vulgar house, but it's got a very fine marble staircase, and the Connemaras were at the top receiving their guests. Lady Connemara gave me a look of surprise when I shook hands with her, and began to giggle; I didn't pay much attention—she's a very silly, ill-bred woman, and her manners are no better than those of her ancestress whom King Charles II made a duchess. I must say the reception rooms at Connemara House are stately. I walked through, nodding to a number of people and shaking hands; then I saw the German Ambassador talking with one of the Austrian archdukes. I particularly wanted to have a word with him, so I went up and held out my hand. The moment the Archduke saw me he burst into a roar of laughter. I was deeply affronted. I looked him up and down sternly, but he only laughed the more. I was about to speak to him rather sharply, when there was a sudden hush, and I realized that the King and Queen had come. Turning my back on the Archduke, I stepped forward, and then, quite suddenly, I noticed that I hadn't got any trousers on. I was in short silk drawers, and I wore scarlet sock suspenders. No wonder Lady Connemara had giggled; no wonder the Archduke had laughed! I can't tell you what that moment was. An agony of shame. I awoke in a cold sweat. Oh, you don't know the relief I felt to find it was only a dream."

"It's the kind of dream that's not so very uncommon," said Dr. Audlin.

"I daresay not. But an odd thing happened next day. I was in the lobby of the House of Commons, when that fellow Griffiths walked slowly past me. He deliberately looked down at my legs, and then he looked me full in the face, and I was almost certain he winked. A ridiculous thought came to me. He'd been there the night before and seen me make that ghastly exhibition of myself and was enjoying the joke. But of course I knew that was impossible because it was only a dream. I gave him an icy glare, and he walked on. But he was grinning his head off."

Lord Mountdrago took his handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the palms of his hands. He was making no attempt now to conceal his perturbation. Dr. Audlin never took his eyes off him.

"Tell me another dream."

"It was the night after, and it was even more absurd than the first one. I dreamt that I was in the House. There was a debate

on foreign affairs which not only the country, but the world, had been looking forward to with the gravest concern. The government had decided on a change in their policy which vitally affected the future of the Empire. The occasion was historic. Of course the House was crowded. All the ambassadors were there. The galleries were packed. It fell to me to make the important speech of the evening. I had prepared it carefully. A man like me has enemies—there are a lot of people who resent my having achieved the position I have at an age when even the cleverest men are content with situations of relative obscurity —and I was determined that my speech should not only be worthy of the occasion, but should silence my detractors. It excited me to think that the whole world was hanging on my lips. I rose to my feet. If you've ever been in the House you'll know how members chat to one another during a debate, rustle papers and turn over reports. The silence was the silence of the grave when I began to speak. Suddenly I caught sight of that odious little bounder on one of the benches opposite, Griffiths, the Welsh member; he put out his tongue at me. I don't know if you've ever heard a vulgar music-hall song called 'A Bicycle Made for Two.' It was very popular a great many years ago. To show Griffiths how completely I despised him I began to sing it. I sang the first verse right through. There was a moment's surprise, and when I finished they cried 'Hear, hear,' on the opposite benches. I put up my hand to silence them and sang the second verse. The House listened to me in stony silence and I felt the song wasn't going down very well. I was vexed, for I have a good baritone voice, and I was determined that they should do me justice. When I started the third verse the members began to laugh; in an instant the laughter spread; the ambassadors, the strangers in the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery, the ladies in the Ladies' Gallery, the reporters, they shook, they bellowed, they held their sides, they rolled in their seats; everyone was overcome with laughter except the ministers on the Front Bench immediately behind me. In that incredible, in that unprecedented, uproar they sat petrified. I gave them a glance, and suddenly the enormity of what I had done fell upon me. I had made myself the laughing-stock of the whole world. With misery I realized that I should have to resign. I woke and knew it was only a dream."

Lord Mountdrago's grand manner had deserted him as he narrated this, and now having finished he was pale and trembling. But with an effort he pulled himself together. He forced a laugh to his shaking lips.

"The whole thing was so fantastic that I couldn't help being amused. I didn't give it another thought, and when I went into the House on the following afternoon I was feeling in very

good form. The debate was dull, but I had to be there, and I read some documents that required my attention. For some reason I chanced to look up, and I saw that Griffiths was speaking. He has an unpleasant Welsh accent and an unprepossessing appearance. I couldn't imagine that he had anything to say that it was worth my while to listen to, and I was about to return to my papers when he quoted two lines from 'A Bicycle Made for Two.' I couldn't help glancing at him, and I saw that his eyes were fixed on me with a grin of bitter mockery. I faintly shrugged my shoulders. It was comic that a scrubby little Welsh member should look at me like that. It was an odd coincidence that he should quote two lines from that disastrous song that I'd sung all through in my dream. I began to read my papers again, but I don't mind telling you that I found it difficult to concentrate on them. I was a little puzzled. Owen Griffiths had been in my first dream, the one at Connemara House, and I'd received a very definite impression afterwards that he knew the sorry figure I'd cut. Was it a mere coincidence that he had just quoted those two lines? I asked myself if it was possible that he was dreaming the same dreams as I was. But of course the idea was preposterous, and I determined not to give it a second thought."

There was a silence. Dr. Audlin looked at Lord Mountdrago and Lord Mountdrago looked at Dr. Audlin.

"Other people's dreams are very boring. My wife used to dream occasionally and insist on telling me her dreams next day with circumstantial detail. I found it maddening."

Dr. Audlin faintly smiled.

"You're not boring me."

"I'll tell you one more dream I had a few days later. I dreamt that I went into a public house at Limehouse. I've never been to Limehouse in my life and I don't think I've ever been in a public house since I was at Oxford, and yet I saw the street and the place I went into as exactly as if I were at home there. I went into a room—I don't know whether they call it the saloon bar or the private bar; there was a fireplace and a large leather armchair on one side of it, and on the other a small sofa; a bar ran the whole length of the room, and over it you could see into the public bar. Near the door was a round marble-topped table and two armchairs beside it. It was a Saturday night, and the place was packed. It was brightly lit, but the smoke was so thick that it made my eyes smart. I was dressed like a rough, with a cap on my head and a handkerchief round my neck. It seemed to me that most of the people there were drunk. I thought it rather amusing. There was a gramophone going, or the radio, I don't know which, and in front of the fireplace two women were doing a grotesque dance.

There was a little crowd around them, laughing, cheering and singing. I went up to have a look, and some man said to me: ' 'Ave a drink, Bill.' There were glasses on the table full of a dark liquid which I understand is called brown ale. He gave me a glass, and not wishing to be conspicuous I drank it. One of the women who were dancing broke away from the other and took hold of the glass. ' 'Ere, what's the idea?' she said. 'That's my beer you're putting away.' 'Oh, I'm sorry,' I said, 'this gentleman offered it to me, and I very naturally thought it was his to offer.' 'All right, mate,' she said, 'I don't mind. You come an' 'ave a dance with me.' Before I could protest she'd caught hold of me and we were dancing together. And then I found myself sitting in the armchair with the woman on my lap and we were sharing a glass of beer. I should tell you that sex has never played any great part in my life. I married young because in my position it was desirable that I should marry, but also in order to settle once and for all the question of sex. I had the two sons I made up my mind to have, and then I put the whole matter on one side. I've always been too busy to give much thought to that kind of thing, and living so much in the public eye as I do, it would have been madness to do anything that might give rise to a scandal. The greatest asset a politician can have is a blameless record as far as women are concerned. I have no patience with the men who smash up their careers for women. I only despise them. The woman I had on my knees was drunk; she wasn't pretty and she wasn't young: in fact she was just a blowsy old prostitute. She filled me with disgust, and yet when she put her mouth to mine and kissed me, though her breath stank of beer and her teeth were decayed, though I loathed myself, I wanted her—I wanted her with all my soul. Suddenly I heard a voice: 'That's right, old boy, have a good time.' I looked up, and there was Owen Griffiths. I tried to spring out of the chair, but that horrible woman wouldn't let me. 'Don't you pay no attention to 'im,' she said, 'e's only one of them nosy parkers.' 'You go to it,' he said. 'I know Moll. She'll give you your money's worth all right.' You know, I wasn't so much annoyed at his seeing me in that absurd situation as angry that he should address me as old boy. I pushed the woman aside and stood up and faced him. 'I don't know you, and I don't want to know you,' I said. 'I know you all right,' he said. 'And my advice to you, Molly, is, see that you get your money, he'll bilk you if he can.' There was a bottle of beer standing on the table close by. Without a word I seized it by the neck and hit him over the head with it as hard as I could. I made such a violent gesture that it woke me up."

"A dream of that sort is not incomprehensible," said Dr.

Audlin. "It is the revenge nature takes on persons of unimpeachable character."

"The story's idotic. I haven't told it you for its own sake. I've told it you for what happened the next day. I wanted to look up something in a hurry, and I went into the library of the House. I got the book and began reading. I hadn't noticed when I sat down that Griffiths was sitting in a chair close by me. Another of the Labour Members came in and went up to him. 'Hullo, Owen,' he said to him, 'you're looking pretty dicky today.' 'I've got an awful headache,' he answered, 'I feel as if I'd been cracked over the head with a bottle.' "

Now Lord Mountdrago's face was grey with anguish.

"I knew then that the idea I'd had and dismissed as preposterous was true. I knew that Griffiths was dreaming my dreams and that he remembered them as well as I did."

"It may also have been a coincidence."

"When he spoke he didn't speak to his friend, he deliberately spoke to me. He looked at me with sullen resentment."

"Can you offer any suggestion why this same man should come into your dreams?"

"None."

Dr. Audlin's eyes had not left his patient's face and he saw that he lied. He had a pencil in his hand, and he drew a straggling line or two on his blotting paper. It often took a long time to get people to tell the truth, and yet they knew that unless they told it he could do nothing for them.

"The dream you've just described to me took place just over three weeks ago. Have you had any since?"

"Every night."

"And does this man Griffiths come into them all?"

"Yes."

The doctor drew more lines on his blotting paper. He wanted the silence, the drabness, the dull light of that little room to have its effect on Lord Mountdrago's sensibility. Lord Mountdrago threw himself back in his chair and turned his head away so that he should not see the other's grave eyes.

"Dr. Audlin, you must do something for me. I'm at the end of my tether. I shall go mad if this goes on. I'm afraid to go to sleep. Two or three nights I haven't. I've sat up reading and when I felt drowsy put on my coat and walked till I was exhausted. But I must have sleep. With all the work I have to do I must be at concert pitch; I must be in complete control of all my faculties. I need rest; sleep brings me none. I no sooner fall asleep than my dreams begin, and he's always there, that vulgar little cad, grinning at me, mocking me, despising me. It's a monstrous persecution. I tell you, Doctor, I'm not the man of

my dreams; it's not fair to judge me by them. Ask anyone you like. I'm an honest, upright, decent man. No one can say anything against my moral character either private or public. My whole ambition is to serve my country and maintain its greatness. I have money, I have rank, I'm not exposed to many of the temptations of lesser men, so that it's no credit to me to be incorruptible; but this I can claim, that no honour, no personal advantage, no thought of self would induce me to swerve by a hairsbreadth from my duty. I've sacrificed everything to become the man I am. Greatness is my aim. Greatness is within my reach, and I'm losing my nerve. I'm not that mean, despicable, cowardly, lewd creature that horrible little man sees. I've told you three of my dreams; they're nothing; that man has seen me do things that are so beastly, so horrible, so shameful, that even if my life depended on it I wouldn't tell them. And he remembers them. I can hardly meet the derision and disgust I see in his eyes, and I even hesitate to speak because I know my words can seem to him nothing but utter humbug. He's seen me do things that no man with any self-respect would do, things for which men are driven out of the society of their fellows and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment; he's heard the foulness of my speech; he's seen me not only ridiculous, but revolting. He despises me and he no longer pretends to conceal it. I tell you that if you can't do something to help me I shall either kill myself or kill him."

"I wouldn't kill him if I were you," said Dr. Audlin coolly, in that soothing voice of his. "In this country the consequences of killing a fellow creature are awkward."

"I shouldn't be hanged for it, if that's what you mean. Who would know that I'd killed him? That dream of mine has shown me how. I told you, the day after I'd hit him over the head with a beer bottle he had such a headache that he couldn't see straight. He said so himself. That shows that he can feel with his waking body what happens to his body asleep. It's not with a bottle I shall hit him next time. One night, when I'm dreaming, I shall find myself with a knife in my hand or a revolver in my pocket—I must because I want to so intensely—and then I shall seize my opportunity. I'll stick him like a pig; I'll shoot him like a dog. In the heart. And then I shall be free of this fiendish persecution."

Some people might have thought that Lord Mountdrago was mad; after all the years during which Dr. Audlin had been treating the diseased souls of men he knew how thin a line divides those whom we call sane from those whom we call insane. He knew how often in men who to all appearance were healthy and normal, who were seemingly devoid of imagination, and who fulfilled the duties of common life with credit to them-

selves and with benefit to their fellows, when you gained their confidence, when you tore away the mask they wore to the world, you found not only hideous abnormality, but kinks so strange, mental extravagances so fantastic, that in that respect you could only call them lunatic. If you put them in an asylum, not all the asylums in the world would be large enough. Anyhow, a man was not certifiable because he had strange dreams and they had shattered his nerve. The case was singular, but it was only an exaggeration of others that had come under Dr. Audlin's observation; he was doubtful, however, whether the methods of treatment that he had so often found efficacious would here avail.

"Have you consulted any other member of my profession?" he asked.

"Only Sir Augustus. I merely told him that I suffered from nightmares. He said I was overworked and recommended me to go for a cruise. That's absurd. I can't leave the Foreign Office just now when the international situation needs constant attention. I'm indispensable, and I know it. On my conduct at the present juncture my whole future depends. He gave me sedatives. They had no effect. He gave me tonics. They were worse than useless. He's an old fool."

"Can you give any reason why it should be this particular man who persists in coming into your dreams?"

"You asked me that question before. I answered it."

That was true. But Dr. Audlin had not been satisfied with the answer.

"Just now you talked of persecution. Why should Owen Griffiths want to persecute you?"

"I don't know."

Lord Mountdrago's eyes shifted a little. Dr. Audlin was sure that he was not speaking the truth.

"Have you ever done him an injury?"

"Never."

Lord Mountdrago made no movement, but Dr. Audlin had a queer feeling that he shrank into his skin. He saw before him a large, proud man who gave the impression that the questions put to him were an insolence, and yet for all that, behind that facade, was something shifting and startled that made you think of a frightened animal in a trap. Dr. Audlin leaned forward and by the power of his eyes forced Lord Mountdrago to meet them.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure. You don't seem to understand that our ways lead along different paths. I don't wish to harp on it, but I must remind you that I am a minister of the Crown and Griffiths is an obscure member of the Labour Party. Naturally there's no

social connection between us; he's a man of very humble origin, he's not the sort of person I should be likely to meet at any of the houses I go to; and politically our respective stations are so far separated that we could not possibly have anything in common."

"I can do nothing for you unless you tell me the complete truth."

Lord Mountdrago raised his eyebrows. His voice was rasping.

"I'm not accustomed to having my word doubted, Dr. Audlin. If you're going to do that, I think to take up any more of your time can only be a waste of mine. If you will kindly let my secretary know what your fee is, he will see that a cheque is sent to you."

For all the expression that was to be seen on Dr. Audlin's face you might have thought that he simply had not heard what Lord Mountdrago said. He continued to look steadily into his eyes, and his voice was grave and low.

"Have you done anything to this man that *he* might look upon as an injury?"

Lord Mountdrago hesitated. He looked away, and then, as though there were in Dr. Audlin's eyes a compelling force that he could not resist, looked back. He answered sulkily:

"Only if he was a dirty, second-rate little cad."

"But that is exactly what you've described him to be."

Lord Mountdrago sighed. He was beaten. Dr. Audlin knew that the sigh meant he was going at last to say what he had till then held back. Now he had no longer to insist. He dropped his eyes and began again drawing vague geometrical figures on his blotting paper. The silence lasted two or three minutes.

"I'm anxious to tell you everything that can be of any use to you. If I didn't mention this before, it's only because it was so unimportant that I didn't see how it could possibly have anything to do with the case. Griffiths won a seat at the last election, and he began to make a nuisance of himself almost at once. His father's a miner, and he worked in a mine himself when he was a boy; he's been a school-master in the board schools and a journalist. He's that half-baked, conceited intellectual, with inadequate knowledge, ill-considered ideas and impractical plans, that compulsory education has brought forth from the working classes. He's a scrawny, grey-faced man who looks half starved, and he's always very slovenly in appearance; heaven knows members nowadays don't bother much about their dress, but his clothes are an outrage to the dignity of the House. They're ostentatiously shabby, his collar's never clean, and his tie's never tied properly; he looks as if he hadn't had a bath for a month, and his hands are filthy. The Labour Party

have two or three fellows on the Front Bench who've got a certain ability, but the rest of them don't amount to much. In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king: because Griffiths is glib and has a lot of superficial information on a number of subjects, the Whips on his side began to put him up to speak whenever there was a chance. It appeared that he fancied himself on foreign affairs, and he was continually asking me silly, tiresome questions. I don't mind telling you that I made a point of snubbing him as soundly as I thought he deserved. From the beginning I hated the way he talked, his whining voice and his vulgar accent; he had nervous mannerisms that intensely irritated me. He talked rather shyly, hesitatingly, as though it were torture to him to speak and yet he was forced to by some inner passion, and often he used to say some very disconcerting things. I'll admit that now and again he had a sort of tub-thumping eloquence. It had a certain influence over the ill-regulated minds of the members of his party. They were impressed by his earnestness, and they weren't, as I was, nauseated by his sentimentality. A certain sentimentality is the common coin of political debate. Nations are governed by self-interest, but they prefer to believe that their aims are altruistic, and the politician is justified if with fair words and fine phrases he can persuade the electorate that the hard bargain he is driving for his country's advantage tends to the good of humanity. The mistake people like Griffiths made is to take these fair words and fine phrases at their face value. He's a crank, and a noxious crank. He calls himself an idealist. He has at his tongue's end all the tedious blather that the intelligentsia have been boring us with for years. Non-resistance. The brotherhood of man. You know the hopeless rubbish. The worst of it was that it impressed not only his own party, it even shook some of the sillier, more sloppy-minded members of ours. I heard rumours that Griffiths was likely to get office when a Labour Government came in; I even heard it suggested that he might get the Foreign Office. The notion was grotesque but not impossible. One day I had occasion to wind up a debate on foreign affairs which Griffiths had opened. He'd spoken for an hour. I thought it a very good opportunity to cook his goose, and by God, sir, I cooked it. I tore his speech to pieces. I pointed out the faultiness of his reasoning and emphasized the deficiency of his knowledge. In the House of Commons the most devastating weapon is ridicule: I mocked him; I bantered him; I was in good form that day and the House rocked with laughter. Their laughter excited me, and I excelled myself. The Opposition sat glum and silent, but even some of them couldn't help laughing once or twice; it's not intolerable, you know, to see a colleague, perhaps a rival, made a fool of. And

if ever a man was made a fool of, I made a fool of Griffiths. He shrank down in his seat; I saw his face go white, and presently he buried it in his hands. When I sat down I'd killed him. I'd destroyed his prestige for ever; he had no more chance of getting office when a Labour Government came in than the policeman at the door. I heard afterwards that his father, the old miner, and his mother had come up from Wales, with various supporters of his in the constituency, to watch the triumph they expected him to have. They had seen only his utter humiliation. He'd won the constituency by the narrowest margin. An incident like that might very easily lose him his seat. But that was no business of mine."

"Should I be putting it too strongly if I said you had ruined his career?" asked Dr. Audlin.

"I don't suppose you would."

"That is a very serious injury you've done him."

"He brought it on himself."

"Have you never felt any qualms about it?"

"I think perhaps if I'd known that his father and mother were there I might have let him down a little more gently."

There was nothing further for Dr. Audlin to say, and he set about treating his patient in such a manner as he thought might avail. He sought by suggestion to make him forget his dreams when he awoke; he sought to make him sleep so deeply that he would not dream. He found Lord Mountdrago's resistance impossible to break down. At the end of an hour he dismissed him.

Since then he had seen Lord Mountdrago half a dozen times. He had done him no good. The frightful dreams continued every night to harass the unfortunate man, and it was clear that his general condition was growing rapidly worse. He was worn out. His irritability was uncontrollable. Lord Mountdrago was angry because he received no benefit from his treatment, and yet continued it, not only because it seemed his only hope, but because it was a relief to him to have someone with whom he could talk openly. Dr. Audlin came to the conclusion at last that there was only one way in which Lord Mountdrago could achieve deliverance, but he knew him well enough to be assured that of his own free will he would never, never take it. If Lord Mountdrago was to be saved from the breakdown that was threatening, he must be induced to take a step that must be abhorrent to his pride of birth and his self-complacency. Dr. Audlin was convinced that to delay was impossible. He was treating his patient by suggestion, and after several visits found him more susceptible to it. At length he managed to get him into a condition of somnolence. With his

low, soft, monotonous voice he soothed his tortured nerves. He repeated the same words over and over again. Lord Mountdrago lay quite still, his eyes closed; his breathing was regular, and his limbs were relaxed. Then Dr. Audlin in the same quiet tone spoke the words he had prepared.

"You will go to Owen Griffiths and say that you are sorry that you caused him that great injury. You will say that you will do whatever lies in your power to undo the harm that you have done him."

The words acted on Lord Mountdrago like the blow of a whip across his face. He shook himself out of his hypnotic state and sprang to his feet. His eyes blazed with passion, and he poured forth upon Dr. Audlin a stream of angry vituperation such as even he had never heard. He swore at him. He cursed him. He used language of such obscenity that Dr. Audlin, who had heard every sort of foul word, sometimes from the lips of chaste and distinguished women, was surprised that he knew it.

"Apologize to the filthy little Welshman? I'd rather kill myself."

"I believe it to be the only way in which you can regain your balance."

Dr. Audlin had not often seen a man presumably sane in such a condition of uncontrollable fury. Lord Mountdrago grew red in the face, and his eyes bulged out of his head. He did really foam at the mouth. Dr. Audlin watched him coolly, waiting for the storm to wear itself out, and presently he saw that Lord Mountdrago, weakened by the strain to which he had been subjected for so many weeks, was exhausted.

"Sit down," he said then, sharply.

Lord Mountdrago crumpled up into a chair.

"Christ, I feel all in. I must rest a minute and then I'll go."

For five minutes perhaps they sat in complete silence. Lord Mountgdrago was a gross, blustering bully, but he was also a gentleman. When he broke the silence he had recovered his self-control.

"I'm afraid I've been very rude to you. I'm ashamed of the things I've said to you, and I can only say you'd be justified if you refused to have anything more to do with me. I hope you won't do that. I feel that my visits to you do help me. I think you're my only chance."

"You mustn't give another thought to what you said. It was of no consequence."

"But there's one thing you mustn't ask me to do, and that is to make excuses to Griffiths."

"I've thought a great deal about your case. I don't pretend to understand it, but I believe that your only chance of release is to do what I proposed. I have a notion that we're none of us

one self, but many, and one of the selves in you has risen up against the injury you did Griffiths and has taken on the form of Griffiths in your mind and is punishing you for what you cruelly did. If I were a priest I should tell you that it is your conscience that has adopted the shape and lineaments of this man to scourge you to repentance and persuade you to reparation."

"My conscience is clear. It's not my fault if I smashed the man's career. I crushed him like a slug in my garden. I regret nothing."

It was on these words that Lord Mountdrago had left him. Reading through his notes, while he waited, Dr. Audlin considered how best he could bring his patient to the state of mind that, now that his usual methods of treatment had failed, he thought alone could help him. He glanced at his clock. It was six. It was strange that Lord Mountdrago did not come. He knew he had intended to because a secretary had rung up that morning to say that he would be with him at the usual hour. He must have been detained by pressing work. This notion gave Dr. Audlin something else to think of: Lord Mountdrago was quite unfit to work and in no condition to deal with important matters of state. Dr. Audlin wondered whether it behooved him to get in touch with someone in authority, the Prime Minister or the Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and impart to him his conviction that Lord Mountdrago's mind was so unbalanced that it was dangerous to leave affairs of moment in his hands. It was a ticklish thing to do. He might cause needless trouble and get roundly snubbed for his pains. He shrugged his shoulders.

"After all," he reflected, "the politicians have made such a mess of the world during the last five-and-twenty years, I don't suppose it makes much odds if they're mad or sane."

He rang the bell.

"If Lord Mountdrago comes now, will you tell him that I have another appointment at six-fifteen and so I'm afraid I can't see him."

"Very good, sir."

"Has the evening paper come yet?"

"I'll go and see."

In a moment the servant brought it in. A huge headline ran across the front page: Tragic Death of Foreign Minister.

"My God!" cried Dr. Audlin.

For once he was wrenched out of his wonted calm. He was shocked, horribly shocked, and yet he was not altogether surprised. The possibility that Lord Mountdrago might commit suicide had occurred to him several times, for that it was suicide

he could not doubt. The paper said that Lord Mountdrago had been waiting in a tube station, standing on the edge of the platform, and as the train came in was seen to fall on the rail. It was supposed that he had had a sudden attack of faintness. The paper went on to say that Lord Mountdrago had been suffering for some weeks from the effects of overwork, but had felt it impossible to absent himself while the foreign situation demanded his unremitting attention. Lord Mountdrago was another victim of the strain that modern politics placed upon those who played the more important parts in it. There was a neat little piece about the talents and industry, and patriotism and vision, of the deceased statesman, followed by various surmises upon the Prime Minister's choice of successor. Dr. Audlin read all this. He had not liked Lord Mountdrago. The chief emotion that his death caused in him was dissatisfaction with himself because he had been able to do nothing for him.

Perhaps he had done wrong in not getting into touch with Lord Mountdrago's doctor. He was discouraged, as always when failure frustrated his conscientious efforts, and repulsion seized him for the theory and practice of this empiric doctrine by which he earned his living. He was dealing with dark and mysterious forces that it was perhaps beyond the powers of the human mind to understand. He was like a man blindfold trying to feel his way to he knew not whither. Listlessly he turned the pages of the paper. Suddenly he gave a great start, and an exclamation once more was forced from his lips. His eyes had fallen on a small paragraph near the bottom of a column. Sudden Death of an M.P., he read. Mr. Owen Griffiths, member for so-and-so, had been taken ill in Fleet Street that afternoon and when he was brought to Charing Cross Hospital life was found to be extinct. It was supposed that death was due to natural causes, but an inquest would be held. Dr. Audlin could hardly believe his eyes. Was it possible that the night before Lord Mountdrago had at last in his dream found himself possessed of the weapon, knife or gun, that he had wanted, and had killed his tormentor, and had that ghostly murder, in the same way as the blow with the bottle had given him a racking headache on the following day, taken effect a certain number of hours later on the waking man? Or was it, more mysterious and more frightful, that when Lord Mountdrago sought relief in death, the enemy he had so cruelly wronged, unappeased, escaping from his own mortality, had pursued him to some other sphere, there to torment him still? It was strange. The sensible thing was to look upon it merely as an odd coincidence. Dr. Audlin rang the bell.

"Tell Mrs. Milton that I'm sorry I can't see her this evening, I'm not well."

It was true; he shivered as though of an ague. With some kind of spiritual sense he seemed to envisage a bleak, a horrible void. The dark night of the soul engulfed him, and he felt a strange, primeval terror of he knew not what.

GLORIA NEUSTADT BIGGS

THE CAT

HARRY MARTIN and his wife, Clara, walked down the hill that led from their house to the boulevard, with that nervous, impatient stride so common to city-bred people. Their faces betrayed no interest in their surroundings, nor in each other. They walked together, but they were very far apart. When they came to the fork at the bottom of the hill, Clara made as if to take the street to the left.

"This way's shorter," Harry said abruptly.

Clara started to answer, but thought better of it. He knew perfectly well why she hated going that way. But she shrugged her shoulders and fell in step with him as he took the street to the right. They had gone only half a block when a gray cat darted out from behind a hedge on to the pavement ahead of them. It was what Clara had been dreading, and she stopped and let out a short cry of terror.

"Oh, for God's sakes," Harry said, disgusted.

"Make him go away." Her voice was tight with fear.

"Scat! Go away!" He advanced toward the cat, hissing at him. The animal stood poised for a moment, staring at the woman, his eyes glowing like jewels; then, with a frightened look at the man, sprang across the short lawn and slunk under a car parked by the curb. Clara put her hand to her stomach and let out her breath in a long sigh.

"Oh, for God's sakes," Harry said again. "Aren't you ever going to get over being scared by a cat?"

She made no answer, but keeping her eyes fixed on the place where the cat had disappeared, walked gingerly past the car.

He took her arm, without tenderness, and urged her along the street. "Damned if I see how you can be afraid of something that can't hurt you. If you were afraid of dogs, it would

make some sense. A dog can at least bite you. But a cat can't even do that. Why are you afraid of them, anyhow?"

"I don't know," Clara said angrily, "I've told you before I don't know. I just don't like them."

"Don't like them," he snorted. "Don't make me laugh. You're just plain scared to death of them."

"All right," she said, "I am scared of them. You're scared of some things too."

"Sure. I'm afraid of getting run over by a three-ton truck. But so's everybody."

"You're afraid of being asphyxiated by gas, too," she said shrewdly, remembering how he had confessed to her once of his almost pathological fear of escaping gas.

"Well, naturally," he answered, irritated. "Anybody'd be afraid of being asphyxiated."

She laughed. "But you're more scared than anybody else. And you're scared of escaping gas, whether it asphyxiates you or not."

"O.K. O.K. Let's forget it."

They were nearing the boulevard now. As usual, it was crowded. When they reached the corner, Clara stopped for a moment, looking about her at the people. A theater halfway down the block caught her eye.

"Oh look, Harry," she said eagerly, "there's that new Humphrey Bogart picture."

"Listen, we came out to see 'Thirty Seconds over Tokyo' and that's where we're going."

"All right. I don't care. I just don't like airplane pictures."

"This isn't an airplane picture. And besides, Van Johnson's in it. That ought to give you a thrill."

She gave him a scornful look and during the rest of the walk to the theater neither spoke. There was a long line in front of the movie house. They took their place at the end and waited. When finally the rope was lifted and the crowd oozed in, she caught sight of herself in the huge mirror that ran across one side of the lobby. The look of nervous fatigue on her face startled her, and she raised her eyebrows sharply to smooth out the furrows across her brow.

"C'mon," Harry took her briskly by the wrist and jostled his way through the crowd. People turned, annoyed. She was glad when they were in the dark theater and safe in their seats.

It was almost a week later when Harry brought Clara the gift. She had come home from her office earlier that day than usual, and was already in the kitchen fixing dinner when he opened the front door.

"Hey, Clara," he yelled, "I brought you a present."

She lowered the flame under the bubbling vegetables, wiped her hands on her apron, and went into the living room.

He was standing by the door, awkwardly holding a large box, with slits cut in the top. She looked at him, puzzled. "What is it?" she asked.

"It's a present—for you. Come here." He set the box on the sofa and took off the top. Inside was a small, furry kitten, black all over except for a beautiful white streak at the throat and white smudges on each paw.

"Oh, Harry!" Her eyes dilated with shock.

"Pat him, Clara. He can't hurt you."

Ashamed of her own unreasoning fear, she put her hand unwillingly forward and touched the kitten's head. The animal made a small noise and put his head against the side of the box.

"There, he likes it. See? Do it again. Go on, Clara, pat it again."

Still frightened, she stretched her hand forward and stroked the kitten's back. Excitement burned in her eyes.

"That's a girl," Harry said approvingly. "Now, pick him up."

"No." She withdrew her hand. "No. I don't want to pick him up."

"Pick him up, Clara," Harry ordered. "It's a little kitten. It can't hurt you. Pick him up and see."

She looked at her husband for an instant, then at the kitten, so small and furry, so helpless. Quickly she stretched out both her hands and picked up the kitten. The animal blinked at her and turned his head, rubbing his cheek along her shoulder.

"Why, Harry," she said, her voice breaking with emotion, "I'm not afraid of him at all." She pressed the kitten to her shoulder and stroked him under the chin.

"Sure, you're not scared. It's just what I thought." He was obviously pleased with himself. "Have a little kitten like this all your own, and you'll get fond of it."

"You mean to keep him? Oh, no. I don't want to keep him. I wouldn't like that at all."

"Sure you will. That's why I bought him, silly. You'll get so crazy about him, you won't even notice when he stops being a kitten and gets to be a cat. And if you have a cat yourself, you can't go around being afraid of other people's cats."

"You really think that, Harry?" There was a desperate note in her voice.

"Sure. I know it."

For a full minute she stood there, looking down at the kitten in her arms. Then she gently placed him on the rug and sat down on the floor, watching him closely.

"Here." Harry handed her a piece of string from the box. "Play with him."

She took the string and threw it back and forth on the rug. The kitten turned his little head from right to left, then sprang at the string and caught it under one paw. Clara laughed. "Oh Harry," she looked up at her husband, the laughter still lighting up her eyes, "he's cute."

"I knew you'd like him. That's what I said to myself. All Clara needs is to have a kitten of her own, and she'll stop being scared of cats."

She looked at him, smiling, a charming radiance spreading over her face. It was almost the first thoughtful thing he had ever done for her and she felt touched, as she rarely did, by a warm gush of gratitude.

"I didn't know you knew how it terrifies me—all the time. I just thought you thought I was being silly."

"No," he said, embarrassed by her intensity, "I knew cats scared you."

"All the time," she went on. "When I go out back to empty the garbage, I'm scared there'll be a cat there. In the morning on the way to the office, I hate opening the front door because there might be a cat on the steps. And all the way to the corner, I keep looking around for fear that one will spring out at me. Even in restaurants and when I go to have my hair done, I'm afraid there might be a cat somewhere around. Harry, it's awful, awful."

"Yeah, it must be." He was thoroughly uncomfortable now, and he rose, restlessly. "You'll get over it."

She looked at the kitten, playing by himself with the piece of string. "I've never told you this before, Harry, but I've tried to figure out why I'm afraid of cats. And you know what it is? I'm afraid they'll rub their backs against my legs. That's what I'm afraid of. I know as well as you that they can't hurt me. But I'm afraid they'll rub their backs against my legs. When I have slacks on, I'm not half as scared of them as when I'm wearing a dress. Isn't that funny, Harry?"

"That certainly is funny." He stooped down to play with the kitten.

"You remember that time we went to the Grovers' cocktail party? I'd had a lot to drink and while I was standing there talking to Mrs. Grover, a cat walked into the living room right by me. And you know, I looked right down at the cat and wasn't scared at all. Just because I'd been drinking. Isn't that funny, Harry? Just because I'd been drinking I wasn't scared of the cat at all."

He laughed. "Well, we'll just have to keep you drunk all the time." He sniffed. "Don't I smell something burning?"

She rose to her feet. "It must be those beans. I'll go fix them."

She stood for a moment, looking down at her husband who was playing with the kitten.

"I didn't know you understood. All this time I never knew you understood. I'm so glad you do." She ran her fingers through his hair. "Thanks an awful lot. Maybe together we can fight this thing off."

He coughed a few times. "Sure," he said, "you'll be all right now."

She patted him on the shoulder and went back to the kitchen. Over the noise of running water, he could hear her humming lightly.

"For God's sakes," he muttered to himself, "sometimes she talks as though she were bats."

The next month much of their life together centered around the kitten. Harry found a wooden box in the cellar that was just the right height for a bed and painted it a light shade of blue inside and out. Clara lined the box with padding and covered the padding with a red-and-blue print cotton. They bought a little pillow for the kitten and some special dishes for his food.

Every morning before they each went to their separate jobs, they made almost a ritual of giving him some warm milk. And at night, when they came home, the first question was about their new pet.

They had quite a time naming him, but finally Harry hit upon "Satan."

"He's a little devil. A little devil—that's what you are," Harry was saying one night to the kitten in that meaningless way people have of talking to animals. Suddenly he turned to Clara, "Let's call him Satan."

She had wanted to call him by some softer, prettier word, but Harry was so delighted with the name, that she agreed. Later he took some red paint and carefully lettered across the blue box the name Satan.

Clara never felt completely at ease with the kitten, but when Harry was present, she concealed her discomfort. And it was a source of wonder to her that she was much more confident of herself with the kitten when Harry was there. When she was alone with Satan, she never played with him or touched him. But when Harry was in the room, she stroked the kitten's back and petted him endlessly. It was as though she believed she could overcome her fear by persuading Harry that she had lost it.

She made no effort, however, to hide the terror she still felt of the cats they passed on the street. But curiously enough, Harry's attitude toward this changed sharply. He became al-

most paternal, treating her like a child whose fear of the dark was foolish, but permissible because it would pass with time.

"When Satan grows up," he would say, "you won't be afraid of cats any more." He was still inordinately proud of his own cleverness in bringing the animal home.

"Yes," she would answer. In her heart she didn't believe it, but it was a hope to cling to.

Satan was almost three months old when she gave up that hope, finally and completely. Harry had gone out to play poker with some of the men from his office. She was glad to have him go. Despite the miraculous way the kitten seemed to have brought them closer together, she was often irritated by him, and relieved to be in the house without him.

She was upstairs in her bedroom, reading, when she came across a particularly descriptive passage of a girl lighting a cigarette. She suddenly wished she had a cigarette and went down to the living room to get one. The heat was on in the living room and Satan was lying in front of the radiator, licking his paws. She gave him a cursory look as she walked across the room toward the cigarette box, then stopped and looked at him again. The old uneasy feeling came to life and stirred within her.

"Hello, Satan," she said loudly.

The animal looked at her coolly and rose, stretching himself luxuriously.

"Lie down, Satan," she ordered, as though she were talking to a dog.

The animal ignored her command and took a few steps in her direction. For the first time she saw that, though he was not full grown, all of his characteristics as a kitten had disappeared. He was a cat—small and young—but not a kitten any longer. A cat.

Her fear mounted. "Lie down," she yelled.

He turned his feline eyes on her, coldly and blankly, then dropped his head to lick his front paw.

She took fresh courage and started across the room again to the cigarette box. The cat brought his head up slowly and looked at her. Her courage melted, and she stopped short.

"You're just a cat," she said glaring at him. "You're not going to scare me. You've been living in this house for months. I've fed you and petted you. You're not going to scare me—not now." She took a slow step forward. The cat pushed back on his haunches and easily, effortlessly sprang on top of the table where the cigarette box was.

Clara turned and ran, slamming the living-room door after her. In the small hall she leaned against the wall and sobbed

hysterically. All her fears, all her dead hopes seemed to crowd up in her throat and choke her.

When the tears stopped flowing, she remembered that Harry would be coming home soon. Unless she got the cat in its bed in the pantry, Harry might bring it upstairs into the bedroom.

She stood there, thinking, and then went into the kitchen and heated some milk on the gas stove. When the milk was warm, she poured it into the cat's dish and set it on the floor of the pantry. Softly she called "Kitty, kitty, kitty. Come here, Satan. Come have a little milk."

There was no sound. She remembered that the door to the living room was shut and that the cat couldn't get to her, even if he heard her. She switched on all the lights and walked back to the living-room door, throwing it open wide. The cat was lying in front of the radiator again.

She went back to the kitchen. The pantry door opened into the kitchen and she stood behind the door, grasping the knob. Louder this time, she called "Come, Satan. Come kitty, kitty, kitty."

She could hear the tap of the cat's paws on the tiled floor of the dining room. Her hand clenched the knob tighter. The cat walked into the room and with only a brief look at her went directly to the pantry where the dish of milk was waiting. Instantly she slammed shut the pantry door and locked it. Relief swept her. But now that she had the cat where he couldn't get to her, she had to see what he was doing. Cautiously she parted the curtains over the glass pane in the upper half of the door.

The animal, startled by the noise of the slamming door, had turned his head and was looking up at the glass pane with frightened, gleaming eyes.

They stood there that way for a minute, the woman on one side of the door, the cat on the other. Then the woman, overcome by nausea, dropped the curtains and stumbled upstairs to her bedroom.

The next morning, when the alarm went off, she didn't get up.

"I don't feel so well this morning, Harry. Think I'll take the day off."

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, yawning.

"Nothing special. I think I'll just stay in bed for a while."

He looked at her. "Wish I could get away with staying home for a day." He got out of bed sluggishly and began to get dressed.

"Why don't you have breakfast out, Harry? Be a change for you."

"I'll get myself something to eat. You don't have to bother."

"No," she said sharply, "you'd better go out. I forgot to get coffee and I think we're out of eggs, too." She was lying.

"O.K. Maybe it would be good to have breakfast out for a change."

She lay in bed quietly until he was ready to leave, and then raised her cheek for him to kiss.

"You don't look sick," he said.

"I'm not sick," she retorted. "I just feel like staying in bed."

"It's all right with me." He started out the bedroom door, then stopped.

"You want me to feed the kitten?" he asked.

"No," she said quickly. "I'll feed him."

"O.K. Don't forget to take care of him."

"No," she answered, as he walked down the stairs, "I'll take care of him."

After he had gone, she stayed in bed, staring at the ceiling. She would have liked to stay in bed all day, but she had worked in offices of one kind or another for too many years to be able to throw off the habit of doing things on schedule. She rose, showered and dressed, and called the office. Then she went downstairs for breakfast.

In the kitchen, she walked to the pantry door, parted the curtains, and looked at the cat. He was busy cleaning himself and didn't see her. She thought of the fruit and eggs and butter in the refrigerator in the pantry, but knew that she would rather go without food than have another session with the cat. So she fixed some dry toast and coffee and sat down in the dining room to eat it.

She thought of calling the pound of the S.P.C.A. to come for the cat, but was afraid if she called them that they would ask too many questions. She thought of poisoning him too, but put that out of her mind.

Whatever she did, she would have to do quickly, before Harry came home and without Harry's knowing about it. Restlessly she walked into the living room and looked out the window. A young boy walked by, kicking at the pavement with his sneakers. Impulsively she opened the window and called "Oh, boy! Boy!"

The boy turned. It was the Johnson kid from down the street.

"Come here a minute, Jimmy," she called.

The boy crossed the lawn and stood by the window, smiling politely.

"How would you like to make a dollar?" she asked, smiling coyly.

He looked down at his feet. "I haven't got time to mow your lawn, Mrs. Martin. If you ask—"

"I don't want you to mow the lawn, Jimmy," she interrupted him. "I want you to do a little favor for me—sort of a secret mission."

"What d'ya want me to do?" he asked suspiciously.

"I have a cat here, and I want you to give it to somebody for me."

"Why, sure." His face broke into a grin. "Who to?"

"I don't care. Just give it to anybody, long as they don't live in this neighborhood. Just take it on a streetcar until you see somebody you'd like to give it to—and give it to them."

He looked puzzled. "Don't you want the cat yourself?"

"No," she said firmly. "Listen, Jimmy, I want you to do this for me, without a lot of questions. All right?"

"Why, sure, Mrs. Martin. Where is the cat?"

"In the pantry. The back door is unlocked and you can go around there and get it. Then get on a streetcar and give it away. You understand?"

"Yeah, yeah, I understand."

"Good for you!" She turned away from the window to get the money. When she came back, the coy smile was on her face again. "Jimmy, I'll give you two dollars if you promise not to tell Mr. Martin about this. What is it you kids say—'cross my heart and hope to die'?"

He laughed uncomfortably. "I won't tell anybody. You can trust me." He took the two dollars from her and went around to the back of the house.

She stood there motionless, listening to him opening the door, talking to the cat, closing the door and coming back to the front of the house. She waved good-by to him as he walked across the lawn holding the cat under his arm, and then shut the window.

The rest of the day she spent preparing herself for Harry's home-coming. When she heard the click of his key in the front door, she was ready.

"Hullo, Harry," she called cheerily.

"Hullo," he answered, "How's Satan?"

"I don't know," she said calmly, coming into the living room. "I haven't seen him all day. I think he must have run away."

"Run away?" Harry looked startled. "What do you mean?"

"I don't quite know myself," she said casually. "I was hanging out some laundry and I forgot to shut the back door. When I came back in, the cat wasn't in the pantry. I called and called him, but he didn't show up, so I thought he must have run away."

"What did you just say?" He walked slowly toward her, his small eyes narrowing with suspicion.

"What do you mean? You heard what I said."

"That's it. I heard what you said. You said 'the cat wasn't in the pantry.' You didn't say 'kitten.' You've never called him a cat before." He was standing directly in front of her now, and suddenly he reached forward and grabbed her by the wrist.

"You're lying," he said in a low voice. "You got rid of Satan. It turned into a cat all of a sudden and you got scared. You got rid of it. Didn't you? Ha. Telling me you were sick this morning. I knew you were lying. You just wanted to stay home so you could get rid of that cat, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't." She pulled her hand away from him. "I was sick this morning. And don't grab my wrist."

"I'll grab worse than your wrist. You got rid of that cat yourself, didn't you? Didn't you?"

"Yes, if you want to know so much, I did. What's it to you?"

"Crazy, that's what you are. Plumb loony. A grown woman and you get scared of your own pet—your own pet—that we've fed and played with for months."

She advanced toward him with a cold fury. "Don't you call me crazy! The only crazy thing I ever did was to marry you."

"Plumb crazy." He began to pace up and down the living room. "I bring her home a kitten and she says—" he pitched his voice high in a mocking imitation of hers, " 'Oh Harry, isn't he cute? I'm not afraid of cats. I'm just scared they'll rub against my legs.' " He dropped his voice down to its natural register. "You better go get your head examined."

"Get out of here," she screamed at him. "Get out and stay out."

He sensed that his mocking words had hurt her, so he pitched his voice high again. " 'I didn't know you understood, Harry,' " he imitated her, " 'I'm so glad you understand.' "

She walked closer to him and slapped him full across the face. He grabbed her hand. "Who did you give that kitten to?"

"None of your business. Get out of here."

"I'll get out of here when you tell me who you gave that kitten to."

"I'm not telling you, so you might as well—" She cried out as he squeezed her fingers.

"You're going to tell me who you gave that kitten to, or I'll round up every cat in the neighborhood and bring them all back here."

She stared at him wide-eyed, stunned by his threat and by the realization that he was capable of carrying it out.

"Let go of my hand and I'll tell you."

He dropped her hand.

"I gave it to a man who walked past the house."

"What man?"

"I don't know. He just happened to be walking past."

"You don't know his name or where he lives?"

"No."

"You're lying. You know something about him."

"I'm not lying." She looked him straight in the eyes.

He picked up his hat and coat and walked to the door. "Well, I'll find him. And if you're lying, God help you."

He slammed the door after him, and she sat down on the sofa, weak and faint. For a long time she sat there, not thinking, just staring at the floor. Finally her thoughts began to collect themselves. She roused herself, reached out for a cigarette, and lit it. As she smoked, she thought about leaving Harry for good. She could pack and get out tonight, before he came home. She stood up, thinking about going upstairs to pack, but she was so enervated that she sat down again. Tomorrow, she thought. Tomorrow I'll do it.

A chill began to shake her and she realized how cold it was in the room. A few logs lying neatly in the fireplace caught her eye. She thought how warm and cheering it would be if she had a fire and though it was a great effort, she rose and walked wearily across to the fireplace. A wicker basket holding some kindling wood lay by the hearth. She picked up some of the sticks and began preparing the fire. One long heavy slat with nails protruding from one end caught on the sleeve of her dress. She stooped to pull the material away.

An odd noise made her turn around. The front door at the far end of the living room was opening quietly. Through the door came Satan.

Her face distorted in terror. The front door closed quickly and she heard Harry's steps going swiftly along the little walk to the street, then dying off in the distance.

She opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came. The cat took a few steps forward and sprang up on the arm of the big chair in the middle of the room. Resting on his haunches, he sat there perfectly still, his eyes fastened on her.

She became consumed by panic and holding her hand to her stomach, she rocked back and forth, sobbing pitifully. The cat watched her, making no move.

"Oh God," she said out loud, "I can't stand it. I can't stand it." She got to her feet. She was still holding the wooden slat with the nail and brandishing this in front of her, she started to walk across the room to the front door. Just as she passed by the chair, the cat climbed down from the arm to the floor. Her self-control completely deserted her and she began to run, screaming, for the door.

But the cat was there first. Conscious now only of fear, she lashed out at him with her arm so that the wooden slat nearly

hit him. He jumped back, startled, against the wall. Wildly she brought her arm down again and this time the slat struck him full across the body and one nail drove itself into his head. It happened so fast, he made no noise at all. Just fell over in a hideous little heap, the board still fastened to his head.

She fell back, staring at the dead cat in horror. Then she dropped on the sofa, clapping her hands over her eyes, pressing her fingers so hard against her face that her nails dug into her forehead. One long sob broke from her lips, but after that she was quiet. Her hands slipped down from her face. She sat there spent, exhausted.

Suddenly an unholy eagerness lit up her face. She looked around the room, as though the familiar furniture would help her to formulate the plan of action taking shape in her mind. Her eyes, then her body came alive. She stood up. Her legs were shaking so she had to hold on to the arm of the sofa, but after a moment the shaking stopped. Without another look at the cat, she left the room and went upstairs to her bedroom. She walked directly to the closet, pulled out her hat and coat, and picked up the pocketbook lying on her dresser. She tried to put on some lipstick, but her hand was shaking so badly she gave that up. Methodically, she went into the bathroom for her toothbrush and tooth paste, returned to the bedroom, and took a clean nightgown out of the drawer. She folded some cleansing tissues around the brush and paste, rolled them up neatly in the nightgown, and put them in her purse. Her hairbrush and comb and some cold cream went in next.

Her mind was crystal clear now, and the shaking only spasmodic. She opened the desk drawer, took out several war bonds and the bank book, shook some coins out of a pig bank on the desk, and scooped up some change in the stamp box. All these she plunged into her bag. With one final look around to be sure she had forgotten nothing of immediate importance, she walked out of the room.

Halfway down the stairs, the shaking started again and she had to lean against the banister, unable to go on. After a minute it stopped, and she continued down the stairs, through the dining room and into the kitchen.

The kitchen was in complete darkness, but without turning on the lights she walked directly to the stove, her steps sure and firm from years of habit. Without fumbling, she turned on each burner and as the flames leaped into being from the four jets, she leaned over and blew them out, one by one. With a final puff, she blew out the pilot.

"Gas," she said aloud, letting out the "s" in a long sibilance

that echoed the soft hiss of the escaping gas. "That's what he's afraid of."

She laughed a hard, ugly laugh, then quickly walked to the back door and left the house.

ISAK DINESEN

THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE CARNATION

THREE-QUARTERS of a century ago there lay in Antwerp, near the harbour, a small hotel named the Queen's Hotel. It was a neat, respectable place, where sea captains stayed with their wives.

To this house there came, on a March evening, a young man, sunk in gloom. As he walked up from the harbour, to which he had come on a ship from England, he was, he felt, the loneliest being in the world. And there was no one to whom he could speak of his misery, for to the eyes of the world he must seem safe and fortunate, a young man to be envied by everyone.

He was an author who had had a great success with his first book. The public had loved it; the critics had been at one in praising it; and he had made money on it, after having been poor all his life. The book, from his own experience, treated the hard lot of poor children, and it had brought him into contact with social reformers. He had been enthusiastically received within a circle of highly cultivated, noble men and women. He had even married into their community, the daughter of a famous scientist, a beautiful young woman, who idolized him.

He was now going to Italy with his wife, there to finish his next book, and was, at the moment, carrying the manuscript in his portmanteau. His wife had preceded him by a few days, for she wanted to visit her old school in Brussels on the way. "It will do me good," she had said, smiling, "to think and talk of other things than you." She was now waiting for him at the Queen's Hotel, and would wish to think and talk of nothing else.

All these things looked pleasant. But things were not what

they looked. They hardly ever were, he reflected, but in his case they were even exactly the opposite. The world had been turned upside down upon him; it was no wonder that he should feel sick, even to death, within it. He had been trapped, and had found out too late.

For he felt in his heart that he would never again write a great book. He had no more to tell, and the manuscript in his bag was nothing but a pile of paper that weighed down his arm. In his mind he quoted the Bible, because he had been to Sunday School when he was a boy, and thought: "I am good for nothing but to be cast out and be trodden under foot by men."

How was he to face the people who loved him, and had faith in him: his public, his friends and his wife? He had never doubted but that they must love him better than themselves, and must consider his interests before their own, on account of his genius, and because he was a great artist. But when his genius had gone, there were only two possible future courses left. Either the world would despise and desert him, or else it might go on loving him, irrespective of his worthiness as an artist. From this last alternative, although in his thoughts he rarely shied at anything, he turned in a kind of *horror vaccui;* it seemed in itself to reduce the world to a void and a caricature, a Bedlam. He might bear anything better than that.

The idea of his fame augmented and intensified his despair. If in the past he had been unhappy, and had at times contemplated throwing himself in the river, it had at least been his own affair. Now he had had the glaring searchlight of renown set on him; a hundred eyes were watching him; and his failure, or suicide, would be the failure and suicide of a world-famous author.

And even these considerations were but minor factors in his misfortune. If worse came to worst, he could do without his fellow-creatures. He had no great opinion of them, and might see them go, public, friends and wife, with infinitely less regret than they would ever have suspected, as long as he himself could remain face to face, and on friendly terms, with God.

The love of God and the certainty that in return God loved him beyond other human beings had upheld him in times of poverty and adversity. He had a talent for gratitude as well; his recent good luck had confirmed and sealed the understanding between God and him. But now he felt that God had turned away from him. And if he were not a great artist, who was he that God should love him? Without his visionary powers, without his retinue of fancies, jests and tragedies, how could he even approach the Lord and implore Him to redress him? The truth was that he was then no better than other people. He might receive the world, but he had never in his life deceived

himself. He had become estranged from God, and how was he now to live?

His mind wandered, and on its own brought home fresh material for suffering. He remembered his father-in-law's verdict on modern literature. "Superficiality," the old man had thundered, "is the mark of it. The age lacks weight; its greatness is hollow. Now your own noble work, my dear boy . . ." Generally the views of his father-in-law were to him of no consequence whatever, but at the present moment he was so low in spirits that they made him writhe a little. Superficiality, he thought, was the word which the public and the critics would use about him, when they came to know the truth—lightness, hollowness. They called his work noble because he had moved their hearts when he described the sufferings of the poor. But he might as well have written of the sufferings of kings. And he had described them, because he happened to know them. Now, that he had made his fortune, he found that he had got no more to say of the poor, and that he would prefer to hear no more of them. The word "superficiality" made an accompaniment to his steps in the long street.

While he had meditated upon these matters he had walked on. The night was cold, a thin, sharp wind ran straight against him. He looked up, and reflected that it was going to rain.

The young man's name was Charlie Despard. He was a small, slight person, a tiny figure in the lonely street. He was not yet thirty, and looked extraordinarily young for his age; he might have been a boy of seventeen. He had brown hair and skin, but blue eyes, a narrow face and a nose with a faint bend to one side. He was extremely light of movement, and kept himself very straight, even in his present state of depression, and with the heavy portmanteau in his hand. He was well dressed, in a havelock, all his clothes had a new look on him, and were indeed new.

He turned his mind towards the hotel, wondering whether it would be any better to be in a house than out in the street. He decided that he would have a glass of brandy when he came there. Lately he had turned to brandy for consolation; sometimes he found it there and at other times not. He also thought of his wife, who was waiting for him. She might be asleep by now. If only she would not have locked the door, so that he should have to wake her up and talk, her nearness might be a comfort to him. He thought of her beauty and her kindness to him. She was a tall young woman with yellow hair and blue eyes, and a skin as white as marble. Her face would have been classic if the upper part of it had not been a little short and narrow in proportion to the jaw and chin. The same peculiarity was repeated in her body; the upper part of it was a little too short

and slight for the hips and legs. Her name was Laura. She had a clear, grave, gentle gaze, and her blue eyes easily filled with tears of emotion, her admiration for him in itself would make them run full when she looked at him. What was the good of it all to him? She was not really his wife; she had married a phantom of her own imagination, and he was left out in the cold.

He came to the hotel, and found that he did not even want the brandy. He only stood in the hall, which to him looked like a grave, and asked the porter if his wife had arrived. The old man told him that Madame had arrived safely, and had informed him that Monsieur would come later. He offered to take the traveller's portmanteau upstairs for him, but Charlie reflected that he had better bear his own burdens. So he got the number of the room from him, and walked up the stairs and along the corridor alone. To his surprise he found the double door of the room unlocked, and went straight in. This seemed to him the first slight favour that fate had shown him for a long time.

The room, when he entered it, was almost dark; only a faint gas-jet burned by the dressing-table. There was a scent of violets in the air. His wife would have brought them and would have meant to give them to him with a line from a poem. But she lay deep down in the pillows. He was so easily swayed by little things at the present time that his heart warmed at his good luck. While he took off his shoes he looked round and thought: "This room, with its sky-blue wallpaper and crimson curtains, has been kind to me; I will not forget it."

But when he got into bed he could not sleep. He heard a clock in the neighborhood strike the quarter-stroke once, and twice, and three times. He felt that he had forgotten the art of sleeping and would have to lie awake for ever. "That is," he thought, "because I am really dead. There is no longer any difference to me between life and death."

Suddenly, without warning, for he had heard no steps approaching, he heard somebody gently turning the handle of the door. He had locked the door when he came in. When the person in the corridor discovered that, he waited a little, then tried it once more. He seemed to give it up, and after a moment softly drummed a little tune upon the door, and repeated it. Again there was a silence; then the stranger lowly whistled a bit of a tune. Charlie became deadly afraid that in the end all this would wake up his wife. He got out of bed, put on his green dressing-gown and went and opened the door with as little noise as possible.

The corridor was more clearly lighted than the room, and there was a lamp on the wall above the door. Outside, beneath

it, stood a young man. He was tall and fair, and so elegantly dressed that Charlie was surprised to meet him in the Queen's Hotel. He had on evening clothes, with a cloak flung over them, and he wore in a buttonhole a pink carnation that looked fresh and romantic against the black and white. But what struck Charlie the moment he looked at him was the expression in the young man's face. It was so radiant with happiness, it shone with such gentle, humble, wild, laughing rapture that Charlie had never seen the like of it. An angelic messenger straight from Heaven could not have displayed a more exuberant, glorious ecstasy. It made the poet stare at him for a minute. Then he spoke, in French—since he took it that the distinguished young man of Antwerp must be French, and he himself spoke French well, for he had in his time been apprenticed to a French hairdresser. "What is it you want?" he asked. "My wife is asleep and I very much want to sleep myself."

The young man with the carnation had appeared as deeply surprised at the sight of Charlie as Charlie at the sight of him. Still, his strange beatitude was so deeply rooted within him that it took him some time to change his expression into that of a gentleman who meets another gentleman. The light of it remained on his face, mingled with bewilderment, even when he spoke and said: "I beg your pardon. I infinitely regret to have disturbed you. I have made a mistake." Then Charlie closed the door and turned. With the corner of his eye he saw that his wife was sitting up in her bed. He said, shortly, for she might still be only half awake: "It was a gentleman. I believe he was drunk." At his words she lay down again, and he went back to bed himself.

The moment he was in his bed he was seized by a tremendous agitation; he felt that something irreparable had happened to him. For a while he did not know what it was, nor whether it was good or bad. It was as if a gigantic, blazing light had gone up on him, passed, and left him blinded. Then the impression slowly formed and consolidated, and made itself known in a pain so overwhelming that it contracted him as in a spasm.

For here, he knew, was the glory, the meaning and the key of life. The young man with the carnation had it. That infinite happiness which beamed on the face of the young man with the carnation was to be found somewhere in the world. The young man was aware of the way to it, but he, he had lost it. Once upon a time, it seemed to him, he too had known it, and had let go his hold, and here he was, forever doomed. O God, God in Heaven, at what moment had his own road taken off from the road of the young man with the carnation?

He saw clearly now that the gloom of his last weeks had been but the foreboding of this total perdition. In his agony, for he

was really in the grip of death, he caught at any means of salvation, fumbled in the dark and struck at some of the most enthusiastic reviews of his book. His mind at the next moment shrank from them as if they had burnt him. Here, indeed, lay his ruin and damnation: with the reviewers, the publishers, the reading public, and with his wife. They were the people who wanted books, and to obtain their end would turn a human being into printed matter. He had let himself be seduced by the least seductive people in the world; they had made him sell his soul at a price which was in itself a penalty. "I will put enmity," he thought, "between the author and the readers, and between thy seed and their seed; thou shalt bruise their heel, but they shall bruise thine head." It was no wonder that God had ceased to love him, for he had, from his own free will, exchanged the things of the Lord—the moon, the sea, friendship, fights—for the words that describe them. He might now sit in a room and write down these words, to be praised by the critics, while outside, in the corridor, ran the road of the young man with the carnation into that light which made his face shine.

He did not know how long he had lain like this; he thought that he had wept, but his eyes were dry. In the end he suddenly fell asleep and slept for a minute. When he woke up he was perfectly calm and resolved. He would go away. He would save himself, and he would go in search of that happiness which existed somewhere. If he were to go to the end of the world for it, it did not signify; indeed it might be the best plan to go straight to the end of the world. He would now go down to the harbour and find a ship to take him away. At the idea of a ship he became calm.

He lay in bed for an hour more; then he got up and dressed. The while he wondered what the young man with the carnation had thought of him. He will have thought, he said to himself: "Ah, le pauvre petit bonhomme à la robe de chambre verte." Very silently he packed his portmanteau; his manuscript he first planned to leave behind, then took it with him in order to throw it into the sea, and witness its destruction. As he was about to leave the room he bethought himself of his wife. It was not fair to leave a sleeping woman, forever, without some word of farewell. Theseus, he remembered, had done that. But it was hard to find the word of farewell. In the end, standing by the dressing-table he wrote on a sheet from his manuscript, "I have gone away. Forgive me if you can." Then he went down. In the loge the porter was nodding over a paper. Charlie thought: "I shall never see him again. I shall never again open this door."

When he came out the wind had lowered, it rained, and the rain was whispering and murmuring on all sides of him. He

took off his hat; in a moment his hair was dripping wet, and the rain ran down his face. In this fresh, unexpected touch there was a purport. He went down the street by which he had come, since it was the only street he knew in Antwerp. As he walked, it seemed as if the world was no longer entirely indifferent to him, nor was he any longer absolutely lonely in it. The dispersed, dissipated phenomena of the universe was consolidating, very likely into the devil himself, and the devil had him by the hand or the hair.

Before he expected it, he was down by the harbour and stood upon the wharf, his portmanteau in his hand, gazing down into the water. It was deep and dark, the lights from the lamps on the quay played within it like young snakes. His first strong sensation about it was that it was salt. The rainwater came down on him from above; the salt water met him below. That was as it should be. He stood here for a long time, looking at the ships. He would go away on one of them.

The hulls loomed giant-like in the wet night. They carried things in their bellies, and were pregnant with possibilities; they were porters of destinies, his superiors in every way, with the water on all sides of them. They swam; the salt sea bore them wherever they wanted to go. As he looked, it seemed to him that a kind of sympathy was going forth from the big hulks to him; they had a message for him, but at first he did not know what it was. Then he found the word; it was superficiality. The ships were superficial, and kept to the surface. Therein lay their power; to ships the danger is to get to the bottom of things, to run aground. They were even hollow, and hollowness was the secret of their being; the great depths slaved for them as long as they remained hollow. A wave of happiness heaved Charlie's heart; after a while he laughed in the dark.

"My sisters," he thought, "I should have come to you long ago. You beautiful, superficial wanderers, gallant, swimming conquerors of the deep! You heavy, hollow angels, I shall thank you all my life. God keep you afloat, big sisters, you and me. God preserve our superficiality." He was very wet by now, his hair and his havelock were shining softly, like the sides of the ships in the rain. "And now," he thought, "I shall hold my mouth. My life has had altogether too many words; I cannot remember now why I have talked so much. Only when I came down here and was silent in the rain was I shown the truth of things. From now on I shall speak no more, but I shall listen to what the sailors will tell me, the people who are familiar with the floating ships, and keep off the bottom of things. I shall go to the end of the world, and hold my mouth."

He had hardly made this resolution before a man on the wharf came up and spoke to him. "Are you looking for a

ship?" he asked. He looked like a sailor, Charlie thought, and like a friendly monkey as well. He was a short man with a weather-bitten face and a neck-beard. "Yes, I am," said Charlie. "For which ship?" asked the sailor. Charlie was about to answer: "For the ark of Noah, from the flood." But in time he realized that it would sound foolish. "You see," he said, "I want to get aboard a ship, and go for a journey." The sailor spat, and laughed. "A journey?" he said. "All right. You were staring down into the water, so that in the end I believed that you were going to jump in." "Ah, yes, to jump in!" said Charlie. "And so you would have saved me? But there it is, you are too late to save me. You should have come last night, that would have been the right moment. The only reason why I did not drown myself last night," he went on, "was that I was short of water. If the water had come to me then! Here lies the water—good; here stands the man—good. If the water comes to him he drowns himself. It all goes to prove that the greatest of poets make mistakes, and that one should never become a poet." The sailor by this time had made up his mind that the young stranger was drunk. "All right, my boy," he said, "if you have thought better about drowning yourself, you may go your own way, and good night to you." This was a great disappointment to Charlie, who thought that the conversation was going extraordinarily well. "Nay, but can I not come with you?" he asked the sailor. "I am going into the inn of La Croix du Midi," the sailor answered, "to have a glass of rum." "That," Charlie exclaimed, "is an excellent idea, and I am in luck to meet a man who has such ideas."

They went together into the inn of La Croix du Midi close by, and there met two more sailors, whom the first sailor knew, and introduced them to Charlie as a mate and a supercargo. He himself was captain of a small ship riding at anchor outside the harbour. Charlie put his hand in his pocket and found it full of the money which he had taken with him for his journey. "Let me have a bottle of your best rum for these gentlemen," he said to the waiter, "and a pot of coffee for myself." He did not want any spirits in his present mood. He was actually scared of his companions, but he found it difficult to explain his case to them. "I drink coffee," he said, "because I have taken"—he was going to say: a vow, but thought better of it—"a bet. There was an old man on a ship—he is, by the way, an uncle of mine—and he bet me that I could not keep from drink for a year, but if I won, the ship would be mine." "And have you kept from it?" the captain asked. "Yes, as God lives," said Charlie. "I declined a glass of brandy not twelve hours ago, and what, from my talk, you may take to be drunkenness, is nothing but the effect of the smell of the sea." The mate asked: "Was the

man who bet you a small man with a big belly and only one eye?" "Yes, that is Uncle!" cried Charlie. "Then I have met him myself, on my way to Rio," said the mate, "and he offered me the same terms, but I would not take them."

Here the drinks were brought and Charlie filled the glasses. He rolled himself a cigarette, and joyously inhaled the aroma of the rum and of the warm room. In the light of a dim hanging-lamp the three faces of his new acquaintances glowed fresh and genial. He felt honoured and happy in their company and thought: "How much more they know than I do." He himself was very pale, as always when he was agitated. "May your coffee do you good," said the captain. "You look as if you had got the fever." "Nay, but I have had a great sorrow," said Charlie. The others put on condolent faces, and asked him what sorrow it was. "I will tell you," said Charlie. "It is better to speak of it, although a little while ago I thought the opposite. I had a tame monkey I was very fond of; his name was Charlie. I had bought him from an old woman who kept a house in Hongkong, and she and I had to smuggle him out in the dead of midday, otherwise the girls would never have let him go, for he was like a brother to them. He was like a brother to me, too. He knew all my thoughts, and was always on my side. He had been taught many tricks already when I got him, and he learned more while he was with me. But when I came home the English food did not agree with him, nor did the English Sunday. So he grew sick, and he grew worse, and one Sabbath evening he died on me." "That was a pity," said the captain compassionately. "Yes," said Charlie. "When there is only one person in the world whom you care for, and that is a monkey, and he is dead, then that is a pity."

The supercargo, before the others came in, had been telling the mate a story. Now for the benefit of the others he told it all over. It was a cruel tale of how he had sailed from Buenos Aires with wool. When five days out in the doldrums the ship had caught fire, and the crew, after fighting the fire all night, had got into the boats in the morning and left her. The supercargo himself had had his hands burnt; all the same he had rowed for three days and nights, so that when they were picked up by a steamer from Rotterdam his hand had grown round his oar, and he could never again stretch out the two fingers. "Then," he said, "I looked at my hand, and I swore an oath that if I ever came back on dry land, the Devil take me and the Devil hold me if ever I went to sea again." The other two nodded their heads gravely at his tale, and asked him where he was off to now. "Me?" said the supercargo. "I have shipped for Sydney."

The mate described a storm in the Bay, and the captain gave

them a story of a blizzard in the North Sea, which he had experienced when he was but a sailor-boy. He had been set to the pumps, he narrated, and had been forgotten there, and as he dared not leave, he had pumped for eleven hours. "At that time," he said, "I too, swore to stay on land, and never to set foot on the sea again."

Charlie listened, and thought: "These are wise men. They know what they are talking about. For the people who travel for their pleasure when the sea is smooth, and smiles at them, and who declare that they love her, they do not know what love means. It is the sailors, who have been beaten and battered by the sea, and who have cursed and damned her, who are her true lovers. Very likely the same law applies to husbands and wives. I shall learn more from the seamen. I am a child and a fool, compared to them."

The three sailors were conscious, from his silent, attentive attitude, of the young man's reverence and wonder. They took him for a student, and were content to divulge their experiences to him. They also thought him a good host, for he steadily filled their glasses, and ordered a fresh bottle when the first was empty. Charlie, in return for their stories, gave them a couple of songs. He had a sweet voice and tonight was pleased with it himself; it was a long time since he had sung a song. They all became friendly. The captain slapped him on the back and told him that he was a bright boy and might still be turned into a sailor.

But as, a little later, the captain began to talk tenderly of his wife and family, whom he had just left, and the supercargo, with pride and emotion, informed the party that within the last three months two barmaids of Antwerp had had twins, girls with red hair like her father's, Charlie remembered his own wife and became ill at ease. These sailors, he thought, seemed to know how to deal with their women. Probably there was not one of them so afraid of his wife as to run away from her in the middle of night. If they knew that he had done so, he reflected, they would think less well of him.

The sailors had believed him to be much younger than he was; so in their company he had come to feel himself like a very young man, and his wife now looked to him more like a mother than a mate. His real mother, although she had been a respectable tradeswoman, had had a drop of gypsy blood in her, and none of his quick resolutions had ever taken her by surprise. Indeed, he reflected, she kept upon the surface through everything, and swam there, majestically, like a proud, dark, ponderous goose. If tonight he had gone to her and told her of his decision to go to sea, the idea might very well have excited and pleased her. The pride and gratitude which he had always felt

towards the old woman, now, as he drank his last cup of coffee, were transferred to the young. Laura would understand him, and side with him.

He sat for some time, weighing the matter. For experience had taught him to be careful here. He had, before now, been trapped as by a strange optical delusion. When he was away from her, his wife took on all the appearance of a guardian angel, unfailing in sympathy and support. But when again he met her face to face, she was a stranger, and he found his road paved with difficulties.

Still tonight all this seemed to belong to the past. For he was in power now; he had the sea and the ships with him, and before him the young man with the carnation. Great images surrounded him. Here, in the inn of La Croix du Midi he had already lived through much. He had seen a ship burn down, a snowstorm in the North Sea, and the sailor's homecoming to his wife and children. So potent did he feel that the figure of his wife looked pathetic. He remembered her as he had last seen her, asleep, passive and peaceful, and her whiteness, and her ignorance of the world, went to his heart. He suddenly blushed deeply at the thought of the letter he had written to her. He might go away, he now felt, with a lighter heart, if he had first explained everything to her. "Home," he thought, "where is thy sting? Married life, where is thy victory?"

He sat and looked down at the table, where a little coffee had been spilled. The while the sailors' talk ebbed out, because they saw that he was no longer listening; in the end it stopped. The consciousness of silence round him woke up Charlie. He smiled at them. "I shall tell you a story before we go home. A blue story," he said.

"There was once," he began, "an immensely rich old Englishman who had been a courtier and a councillor to the Queen and who now, in his old age, cared for nothing but collecting ancient blue china. To that end he travelled to Persia, Japan and China, and he was everywhere accompanied by his daughter, the Lady Helena. It happened, as they sailed in the Chinese Sea, that the ship caught fire on a still night, and everybody went into the lifeboats and left her. In the dark and the confusion the old peer was separated from his daughter. Lady Helena got up on deck late, and found the ship quite deserted. In the last moment a young English sailor carried her down into a lifeboat that had been forgotten. To the two fugitives it seemed as if fire was following them from all sides, for the phosphorescence played in the dark sea, and, as they looked up, a falling star ran across the sky, as if it was going to drop into the boat. They sailed for nine days, till they were picked up by a Dutch merchantman, and came home to England.

"The old lord had believed his daughter to be dead. He now wept with joy, and at once took her off to a fashionable watering-place so that she might recover from the hardships she had gone through. And as he thought it must be unpleasant to her that a young sailor, who made his bread in the merchant service, should tell the world that he had sailed for nine days alone with a peer's daughter, he paid the boy a fine sum, and made him promise to go shipping in the other hemisphere and never come back. 'For what,' said the old nobleman, 'would be the good of that?"

"When Lady Helena recovered, and they gave her the news of the Court and of her family, and in the end also told her how the young sailor had been sent away never to come back, they found that her mind had suffered from her trials, and that she cared for nothing in all the world. She would not go back to her father's castle in its park, nor go to Court, nor travel to any gay town of the continent. The only thing which she now wanted to do was to go, like her father before her, to collect rare blue china. So she began to sail, from one country to the other, and her father went with her.

"In her search she told the people, with whom she dealt, that she was looking for a particular blue colour, and would pay any price for it. But although she bought many hundred blue jars and bowls, she would always after a time put them aside and say: 'Alas, alas, it is not the right blue.' Her father, when they had sailed for many years, suggested to her that perhaps the colour which she sought did not exist. 'O God, Papa,' said she, 'how can you speak so wickedly? Surely there must be some of it left from the time when all the world was blue.'

"Her two old aunts in England implored her to come back, still to make a great match. But she answered them: 'Nay, I have got to sail. For you must know, dear aunts, that it is all nonsense when learned people tell you that the seas have got a bottom to them. On the contrary, the water, which is the noblest of the elements, does, of course, go all through the earth, so that our planet really floats in the ether, like a soap-bubble. And there, on the other hemisphere, a ship sails, with which I have got to keep pace. We two are like the reflection of one another, in the deep sea, and the ship of which I speak is always exactly beneath my own ship, upon the opposite side of the globe. You have never seen a big fish swimming underneath a boat, following it like a dark-blue shade in the water. But in that way this ship goes, like the shadow of my ship, and I draw it to and fro wherever I go, as the moon draws the tides, all through the bulk of the earth. If I stopped sailing, what would those poor sailors who make their bread in the merchant service do? But I shall tell you a secret,' she said. 'In the end my

ship will go down, to the centre of the globe, and at the very same hour the other ship will sink as well—for people call it sinking, although I can assure you that there is no up and down in the sea—and there, in the midst of the world, we two shall meet.'

"Many years passed, the old lord died and Lady Helena became old and deaf, but she still sailed. Then it happened, after the plunder of the summer palace of the Emperor of China, that a merchant brought her a very old blue jar. The moment she set eyes on it she gave a terrible shriek. 'There it is!' she cried. 'I have found it at last. This is the true blue. Oh, how light it makes one. Oh, it is as fresh as a breeze, as deep as a deep secret, as full as I say not what.' With trembling hands she held the jar to her bosom, and sat for six hours sunk in contemplation of it. Then she said to her doctor and her lady-companion: 'Now I can die. And when I am dead you will cut out my heart and lay it in the blue jar. For then everything will be as it was then. All shall be blue around me, and in the midst of the blue world my heart will be innocent and free, and will beat gently, like a wake that sings, like the drops that fall from an oar blade.' A little later she asked them: 'Is it not a sweet thing to think that, if only you have patience, all that has ever been, will come back to you?' Shortly afterwards the old lady died."

The party now broke up, the sailors gave Charlie their hands and thanked him for the rum and the story. Charlie wished them all good luck. "You forgot your bag," said the captain, and picked up Charlie's portmanteau with the manuscript in it. "No," said Charlie, "I mean to leave that with you, till we are to sail together." The captain looked at the initials on the bag. "It is a heavy bag," he said. "Have you got anything of value in it?" "Yes, it is heavy, God help me," said Charlie, "but that shall not happen again. Next time it will be empty." He got the name of the captain's ship, and said good-bye to him.

As he came out he was surprised to find that it was nearly morning. The long spare row of street lamps held up their melancholy heads in the grey air.

A thin young girl with big black eyes, who had been walking up and down in front of the inn, came up and spoke to him, and, when he did not answer, repeated her invitation in English. Charlie looked at her. "She too," he thought, "belongs to the ships, like the mussels and seaweeds that grow on their bottoms. Within her many good seamen, who escaped the deep, have been drowned. But all the same she will not run aground, and if I go with her I shall still be safe." He put his hand in his pocket, but found only one shilling left there. "Will you let me have a shilling's worth?" he asked the girl. She stared at him.

Her face did not change as he took her hand, pulled down her old glove and pressed the palm, rough and clammy as fish-skin, to his lips and tongue. He gave her back her hand, placed a shilling in it, and walked away.

For the third time he walked along the street between the harbour and the Queen's Hotel. The town was now waking up, and he met a few people and carts. The windows of the hotel were lighted. When he came into the hall there was no one there, and he was about to walk up to his room, when, through a glass door, he saw his wife sitting in a small, lighted dining room next to the hall. So he went in there.

When his wife caught sight of him her face cleared up. "Oh, you have come!" she cried. He bent his head. He was about to take her hand and kiss it when she asked him: "Why are you so late?" "Am I late?" he exclaimed, highly surprised by her question, and because the idea of time had altogether gone from him. He looked at a clock upon the mantelpiece, and said: "It is only ten past seven." "Yes, but I thought you would be here earlier!" said she. "I got up to be ready when you came." Charlie sat down by the table. He did not answer her, for he had no idea what to say. "Is it possible," he thought, "that she has the strength of soul to take me back in this way?"

"Will you have some coffee?" said his wife. "No, thank you," said he, "I have had coffee." He glanced round the room. Although it was nearly light and the blinds were up, the gas lamps were still burning, and from his childhood this had always seemed to him a great luxury. The fire on the fireplace played on a somewhat worn Brussels carpet and on the red plush chairs. His wife was eating an egg. As a little boy he had had an egg on Sunday mornings. The whole room, that smelled of coffee and fresh bread, with the white tablecloth and the shining coffee-pot, took on a sabbath-morning look. He gazed at his wife. She had on her grey travelling cloak, her bonnet was lying beside her, and her yellow hair, gathered in a net, shone in the lamplight. She was bright in her own way, a pure light came from her, and she seemed enduringly fixed on the sofa, the one firm object in a turbulent world.

An idea came to him: "She is like a lighthouse," he thought, "the firm, majestic lighthouse that sends out its kindly light. To all ships it says: 'Keep off.' For where the lighthouse stands, there is shoal water, or rocks. To all floating objects the approach means death." At this moment she looked up, and found his eyes on her. "What are you thinking of?" she asked him. He thought: "I will tell her. It is better to be honest with her, from now, and to tell her all." So he said, slowly: "I am thinking that you are to me, in life, like a lighthouse. A steady light, instructing me how to steer my course." She

looked at him, then away, and her eyes filled with tears. He became afraid that she was going to cry, even though till now she had been so brave. "Let us go up to our own room," he said, for it would be easier to explain things to her when they were alone.

They went up together, and the stairs, which, last night, had been so long to climb, now were so easy, that his wife said: "No, you are going up too high. We are there." She walked ahead of him down the corridor, and opened the door to their room.

The first thing that he noticed was that there was no longer any smell of violets in the air. Had she thrown them away in anger? Or had they all faded when he went away? She came up to him and laid her hand on his shoulder and her face on it. Over her fair hair, in the net, he looked round, and stood quite still. For the dressing-table, on which, last night, he had put his letter for her, was in a new place, and so, he found, was the bed he had lain in. In the corner there was now a cheval-glass which had not been there before. This was not his room. He quickly took in more details. There was no longer a canopy to the bed, but above it a steel-engraving of the Belgian Royal family that till now he had never seen. "Did you sleep here last night?" he asked. "Yes," said his wife. "But not well. I was worried when you did not come; I feared that you were having a bad crossing." "Did nobody disturb you?" he asked again. "No," she said. "My door was locked. And this is a quiet hotel, I believe."

As Charlie now looked back on the happenings of the night, with the experienced eye of an author of fiction, they moved him as mightily as if they had been out of one of his own books. He drew in his breath deeply. "Almighty God," he said from the bottom of his heart, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are thy short stories higher than our short stories."

He went through all the details slowly and surely, as a mathematician sets up and solves an equation. First he felt, like honey on his tongue, the longing and the triumph of the young man with the carnation. Then, like the grip of a hand round his throat, but with hardly less artistic enjoyment, the terror of the lady in the bed. As if he himself had possessed a pair of firm young breasts he was conscious of his heart stopping beneath them. He stood perfectly still, in his own thoughts, but his face took on such an expression of rapture, laughter and delight that his wife, who had lifted her head from his shoulder, asked him in surprise: "What are you thinking of now?"

Charlie took her hand, his face still radiant. "I am thinking," he said very slowly, "of the Garden of Eden, and the cherubim with the flaming sword. Nay," he went on in the same way, "I

am thinking of Hero and Leander. Of Romeo and Juliet. Of Theseus and Ariadne, and the Minotaur as well. Have you ever tried, my dear, to guess how, upon the occasion, the Minotaur was feeling?"

"So you are going to write a love story, Troubadour?" she asked, smiling back upon him. He did not answer at once, but he let go her hand, and after a while asked: "What did you say?" "I asked you if you were going to write a love story?" she repeated timidly. He went away from her, up to the table, and put his hand upon it.

The light that had fallen upon him last night was coming back, and from all sides now—from his own lighthouse as well, he thought confusedly. Only then it had shone onward, upon the infinite world, while at this moment it was turned inwards, and was lightening up the room of the Queen's Hotel. It was very bright; it seemed that he was to see himself, within it, as God saw him, and under this test he had to steady himself by the table.

While he stood there the situation developed into a dialogue between Charlie and the Lord.

The Lord said: "Your wife asked you twice if you are going to write a love story. Do you believe that this is indeed what you are going to do?" "Yes, that is very likely," said Charlie. "Is it," the Lord asked, "to be a great and sweet tale, which will live in the hearts of young lovers?" "Yes, I should say so," said Charlie. "And are you content with that?" asked the Lord.

"O Lord, what are you asking me?" cried Charlie. "How can I answer yes? Am I not a human being, and can I write a love story without longing for that love which clings and embraces, and for the softness and warmth of a young woman's body in my arms?" "I gave you all that last night," said the Lord. "It was you who jumped out of bed, to go to the end of the world from it." "Yes, I did that," said Charlie. "Did you behold it and think it very good? Are you going to repeat it on me? Am I to be, forever, he who lay in bed with the mistress of the young man with the carnation, and, by the way, what has become of her, and how is she to explain things to him? And who went off, and wrote to her: 'I have gone away. Forgive me, if you can.' " "Yes," said the Lord.

"Nay, tell me, now that we are at it," cried Charlie, "am I, while I write of the beauty of young women, to get, from the live women of the earth, a shilling's worth, and no more?" "Yes," said the Lord. "And you are to be content with that." Charlie was drawing a pattern with his finger on the table; he said nothing. It seemed that the discourse was ended here, when again the Lord spoke.

"Who made the ships, Charlie?" he asked. "Nay, I know

not," said Charlie, "did you make them?" "Yes," said the Lord, "I made the ships on their keels, and all floating things. The moon that sails in the sky, the orbs that swing in the universe, the tides, the generations, the fashions. You make me laugh, for I have given you all the world to sail and float in, and you have run aground here, in a room of the Queen's Hotel to seek a quarrel."

"Come," said the Lord again, "I will make a covenant between me and you. I, I will not measure you out any more distress than you need to write your books." "Oh, indeed!" said Charlie. "What did you say?" asked the Lord. "Do you want any less than that?" "I said nothing," said Charlie. "But you are to write the books," said the Lord. "For it is I who want them written. Not the public, not by any means the critics, but ME!" "Can I be certain of that?" Charlie asked. "Not always," said the Lord. "You will not be certain of it at all times. But I tell you now that it is so. You will have to hold on to that." "O good God," said Charlie. "Are you going," said the Lord, "to thank me for what I have done for you tonight?" "I think," said Charlie, "that we will leave it at what it is, and say no more about it."

His wife now went and opened the window. The cold, raw morning air streamed in, with the din of carriages from the street below, human voices and a great chorus of sparrows, and with the smell of smoke and horse manure.

When Charlie had finished his talk with God, and while it was still so vivid to him that he might have written it down, he went to the window and looked out. The morning colours of the grey town were fresh and delicate, and there was a faint promise of sunshine in the sky. People were about; a young woman in a blue shawl and slippers was walking away quickly; and the omnibus of the hotel, with a white horse to it, was halting below, while the porter helped out the travellers and took down their luggage. Charlie gazed down into the street, a long way under him.

"I shall thank the Lord for one thing all the same," he thought. "That I did not lay my hand on anything that belonged to my brother, the young man with the carnation. It was within my reach, but I did not touch it." He stood for a while in the window and saw the omnibus drive away. Where, he wondered, amongst the houses in the pale morning, was now the young man of last night?

"O the young man," he thought. "Ah, le pauvre jeune homme . . à l'œillet."

ROBERT W. COCHRAN

FOOT OF THE GIANT

THE sun was just showing in the east when a noisy Ford overtook me and stopped. I had walked all night and was dog tired and welcomed the driver's invitation to climb in.

Without looking at me, he asked, "Goin' south?"

"Yes," I said. "This is the right road, isn't it?"

He nodded slowly, and there was a dreamy, faraway look on his face as he put the car in gear. The back seat was piled with empty burlap bags. I thought the old man had probably been to Lexington with a load of produce. We bounced along, the silence broken only by the rattle and creak of the old car over the ruts. I could feel myself gradually dozing off.

He spoke again in his soft southern drawl. "People 'round here think I'm queer."

"Most of us are," I said.

He thought that over while we covered maybe a mile, and as though satisfied, he asked, "You been 'round much? Seen things?"

I wanted to make the right answer. At last I said, "Some."

His lips tightened as he steered around a bog hole filled with caked mud. Then, still without looking at me, he said softly, "Me, I ain't been 'round, but I've seen things. Folks 'round here don't believe me; most o' 'em call me queer."

"Some people won't believe anything they can't see for themselves," I told him.

His mild blue eyes gave me a grateful look. "There's them won't believe what they see with their own eyes." He wet his lips with his tongue, and I felt he was glad to have someone to talk to.

"No, sir," he repeated, "I ain't been 'round much; fact is, I ain't never been no farther'n Lexington, but I've seen things. Say, what's the biggest man you ever saw?"

"You mean the tallest or the heaviest?" I asked, not caring much what I said, just so long as he didn't get mad.

He half turned in the seat to face me. "Don't matter; put 'em both together."

I tried then to think, but decided that accuracy didn't matter, and answered, "I saw a man nine feet tall at the circus, and the fat man weighed six hundred pounds."

His head shook mournfully. "You won't believe neither. But you might," he added after a pause, his face brightening, "you've been places. I saw a man once more'n twenty foot from the top o' his head to the soles o' his feet."

I said, "Some man," and was wide awake instantly.

He nodded emphatically. "Yup, twenty foot from his heels to the crown o' his head. I marked him on the floor and measured it with a tape. It'd been more if I'd marked him sooner."

"On the floor?" I asked.

"Yup, he was lyin' on the floor. I took soap and marked all way 'round him."

"Was he dead?"

"No," he let the word out slowly, "you wouldn't rightly call him dead. I don't know as you'd call him dead now, but he's gone."

"Did anyone else see him?" I asked, and felt curiosity rise in me like a tide.

Again he shook his head. "If I c'ld only got someone to look at him, or maybe had a pitcher made of him!"

"Where'd he come from?" I thought I could befuddle the odd man easily enough.

"I never put no thought to that," he said innocently.

"Where'd he go?"

His placid face was perfectly serious as he said, "That's the funny part; he didn't go."

"But you just told me he was gone," I said.

"Yup, he's gone, but he didn't go. I was as close to him as I am to you right now."

I began to understand why the neighbors called the bizarre fellow queer, but as long as we kept traveling south I had no complaint. The man looked harmless anyway. His skinny brown hands were busy just keeping the car in the road.

"We're mighty nigh home," he said. "Better stop and have a bite."

The old bird was apparently crazy as a coot, and I hesitated. His long white hair gave him a saintly, angelic look that was anything but dangerous, and I was hungry; so I said, "O.K."

He turned off soon into a road even rougher than the one we had been on.

"It's just a long mile from here," he said, as though he

sensed my disgust at turning off the main road. "And I've got proof there, too."

"Proof of this man twenty feet tall?" I felt a tingling at the roots of my hair, he was so deadly earnest.

He answered quickly, "Yup, it's proof all right. I been keepin' it for nigh two year. Ain't many people seen it, them that did only laughed."

"How much did this man weigh?" I asked, still thinking maybe I could trip him.

He gave me a quick glance as he drove into a cart path that led to a cabin of rough boards. "Weren't no way o' weighin' him. I guessed him more'n a ton at first." Then, as though I had not appreciated the significance of his words, "A ton's a powerful lot o' man."

"I'll say it is," I agreed.

"But," he added quickly, "he must o' weighed more'n that at the commencin.' I've got proof; I'll show you."

We reached the house, and the two of us unloaded from the flivver.

"I live by myself," he said, and repeated, "the neighbors think I'm queer."

As though he was in a terrible hurry to show me what he had, he started off. "Down here," he said. "I've got proof, you'll see."

There were a lot of hotbed frames in a row. He went to the farthest of these, maybe a hundred feet from the house; it was covered with glass. I stooped over and looked down. At first all I saw was a deep impression in the ground, about twenty-eight or thirty inches long, all of a foot deep, and maybe ten or twelve inches across. Suddenly, I realized it could have been made by a human foot, an enormous foot.

The old boy was watching me, and he shouted gleefully. "You see it! You see it! I told you I had proof." Then he pointed to another of the same box-like frames off to one side, about five or six feet away.

I went over and looked. I saw plainly enough now that one was a left and the other a right imprint of a gigantic foot. Even the toes had made separate indentations in the wet dirt.

"That's where he lit," the old fellow said excitedly. "And them others," he pointed to the row of frames leading to the cabin, " 's where he walked to the house. The ground was wet. November."

I stepped off the distance between each print; it was about ten feet. These were not as deep as the first two, but topped with glass, like them, so they could be examined.

I tried to reason the thing out as we walked back to the cabin. I couldn't believe the old man was a fake; simple, per-

haps, or, as the neighbors said, "queer," but honest for all that.

"That's proof, ain't it?" He looked up at me anxiously.

I could feel the skin prickling along my neck as I walked beside him. "That's proof," I agreed, "of something," and wondered if perhaps I were a little crazy myself.

When we were in the kitchen, he began, "It's two year this comin' November day first. 'Twas a'ready dark, and I was sittin' here craunchin' my vittles when I heard a who-o-sh, like a tree fallin'; then a jar, not much, but I could feel it. Everythin' was still after that. I went to the door, but I couldn't see nothin, so I was finishin' my sow belly when I felt the house shake like somethin' had hit it.

" 'Fore I could get up, the whole side of the house was tore away and this man come in on me. He didn't walk; just crawled in. I tried to run by, and his hand, as big as the hind leg of a porker and all bloody, grabbed me. 'Most 'fore I knowed it, he'd broke both my legs. I reckon he didn't aim to do it, but they was broke just the same. Look!"

He rolled up his trousers and showed me the poorly set bones just below his knees.

"Ain't that proof?" he asked hopefully.

Then before I could answer, he continued, "This man kept pushin' me ahead o' him till he had crawled plumb inside. Chairs 'n tables didn't mean nothin'. He kept edgin' along slow like. I think now it was the heat from the he'rth he wanted, and seein' how it was November and him without a stitch on, I wasn't blamin' him.

"He kept sayin' things in a husky whisper to himself, and my legs felt like they'd been cut off at the knees. He knowed he had hurt me bad, and I heard him cryin' like a whupped rabbit, and his hand was still bleedin'. That first night was everlastin' torment. Every once in a while I flung a piece o' chair or table on the fire. That give some heat. I kept as close up ag'inst him as he'd let me; he never would stand for me touchin' him. The lamp on the shelf went out, and I lay there with two broken legs waitin' for mornin'.

"Come daylight, I got a good look at him, and I thought then he must weigh twenty-five hundred pounds, maybe more, but I wanted to be fair, so I called it a ton. His head was there jammin' the wall, and his feet was just 'cross the threshold, but his knees was doubled up. That mornin' he helped me set the bones in my legs the best he could. The blood had dried on his hand, but I was scared to let him more'n touch me, he was so big. All that day I lay there tendin' the fire. I made out to gather a few vittles that was left. He wouldn't eat nothin', seemed to be hurt inside; never ate nor drank a speck, just lay

there and watched me, sometimes cryin' like a whupped rabbit.

" 'Bout the third day I noticed somethin' mighty odd. His head had been jammed up 'ginst the wall, but now it was 'most a foot clear. So I took soap and marked all 'round him lyin' there on the floor. After a couple more days I tried fixin' the wall where he'd come in. I couldn't do much, me with two broken legs, but I fixed it some, and that night it rained. I set out pails and saved water.

"I was 'feared I was goin' to die. Sometimes I don't see a neighbor for more'n a month. I watched the road, hopin' someone would go by. I didn't see no one.

"By ten days he weren't more'n half as big as he had been, and I hated to drag my eyes from him as he lay there shrinkin', shrinkin', like a block o' ice in the sun, only he didn't seem a mite different, just smaller.

"When he'd been here three weeks, I could hop 'round on some crutches I made. He was little then, like a boy, and I was wonderin' what to do with him. I didn't want him to up and leave me like that. He wouldn't eat nor drink nothin', and kept edgin' closer to the fire. I throwed an old coat over him, but he flung it off, so in the end he lay there stark naked.

"I made shift to build shelters over his footprints and the place where he lit. The rain had washed them some, but not much.

"It was a month to the day that I heard a car turn off the main road and come this way. I looked at the funny feller. He was layin' there on the floor, about the size o' a chicken, and weighin' maybe two pounds. He never let me touch him, 'n I was in a muddle whether to try and take him with me or not, but I left him and went hoppin' down the lane on my crutches and hailed the car. It was Dave Carson, who does the preachin' in these parts. I hollered at him to come quick to the house. He turned in at the lane and I come hoppin' back.

"The man was still layin' there, only he weren't much bigger'n a robin. I hollered at Dave to hurry. He come right in behind me and the funny feller was still there, only he weren't hardly bigger'n a new-hatched sparrer.

"I said, 'Dave, look quick!' Dave looked where I was p'intin', and I looked, too, but there weren't nothin' there.

"I told Dave about him. Dave bein' a preacher, I thought he'd understand; but he claimed I broke my legs and was out o' my head. I showed him the footprints, too, but he didn't b'lieve 'em; said I made 'em."

The old man gave me a hard, searching look, then banged his fist on the table. "But I tell you I seen him! He was right here! I lived with him a month! And I got proof!"

"Sure," I said. "I believe you."

But his enthusiasm was suddenly gone, and he set about getting food from a low cupboard. Once he stopped and turned to face me. "You're like the others," he said bitterly, "you think I'm queer."

He put cornbread and cold meat on the table, and started a fire in the fireplace and hung a kettle to boil. He measured coffee from a can in a small, shell-like scoop that was different from anything I had ever seen. "That coffee scoop," I asked when he started to put it away, "where'd you get it?"

He looked bewildered for a moment, then his face lit up. "It's a mud turkle's shell; I dug it out o' the yard last spring. Pretty, ain't it?"

"What do you suppose gives it that funny color?" I asked, when he gave it to me to examine.

"I never put no thought to that," he said, and set a steaming pot of coffee on the table.

You can go there and see for yourself, and hear the tale, too. Just take the road south from Lexington, walk twenty miles, turn left at a bridge onto a dirt road, walk about thirty-five miles more, then left again and go a mile. You'll see the rough board cabin there in the field, and the funny-looking frames leading to it.

If you're still unconvinced, as I was, when you have heard the story, ask him to show you the scoop he uses to measure coffee. It might be, as he says, a small opaque turtle shell, or it could be a gigantic finger nail that was wrenched off when its owner tore the rough boards from the cabin with his bare hands.

I call it proof. I don't know what you'll call it.

JERRY WEXLER

I AM EDGAR

EDGAR closed the door behind him, strode to the desk in the front of the room, and deposited an armload of books. He turned his back on the class and chalked on the blackboard in large block capitals:

EDGAR BAKER, MR.

"THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE"

(ENGLISH 1203)

M-W-F 4-5

He faced the class again, standing. He was good-looking in the pre-Raphaelite manner: pale, with soft, classically regular features and large dark eyes. His black wavy hair, cut quite long, fell low over his ears in the old-fashioned style that had come into vogue again with actors and smart urban people. His suit was a dark blue drape model, and he wore a shirt with a soft unstarched collar, and a red and blue foulard bow tie. Edgar was conscious that his appearance differed greatly from that of his men students. They had round haircuts, and their clothing was a hybrid of government issue and *Esquire*.

Trembling, Edgar surveyed them and sighed.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "the information on the blackboard is germane to our happiness for the next fourteen weeks. I am Edgar Baker, not Edwin Baker, Edward Baker, or Edmund Baker. My rank in the faculty is associate professor, and I have a doctorate in American literature. I entreat you, however, not to address me as Doctor or Professor, modes of salutation which I am given to understand are common in this institution, but which are not, nevertheless, in good taste. Call me Mr. Baker, or Ed, if you prefer, but not Doctor or Professor."

He paused, but they only stared at him blankly. It was not the way he had planned it. Somehow, he had begun badly, hadn't struck the right note. His palms had started sweating. He wiped them with his handkerchief.

"Now, about the course," he went on, after a racking pause, "it is called, for reasons I can neither fathom nor attempt to clarify, 'The American Renaissance.' I prefer the more prosaic catalogue designation of 'English 1203, elective, prerequisites Freshman Rhetoric and English Literature I.' Your presence here is sufficient evidence for me that you have met those requirements. I am anxious, however, to ascertain your reasons for registering in the course, which, as I hope you know, will deal exclusively with the works of Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman."

The class stirred restlessly. One of the boys nudged his neighbor and whispered to him. The neighbor shook his head and shrugged.

Edgar opened the attendance book. "As I call your name, I'm going to ask you to tell me your major subject and your particular interest in this course. Please speak freely and without reserve. And I hope that you don't regard my interest in you as mere prying. Like most of you, I have been away from college for some time. This is my first class in three years, and, as you probably know, my first in this college. I want this hour to be a sort of orientation for all of us."

He paused, and for the first time, tried a smile. He looked from one student to the other, and in each face he read unyielding antipathy. An old fear scalded him through, and he shut his eyes. He stroked his temples with his fingertips as the first wire-fine twinges of migraine flared in back of his eyeballs.

He opened his eyes, and his glance fell on a girl in the far corner. She alone of all the students had understanding in her face. Her expression was an emphatic image of his own suffering, her fleeting smile and slight nod a message of kindred sensibility and encouragement. The pain and nausea abated somewhat, and Edgar managed a grateful smile. He called the first name in the attendance book.

"Mr. Arnold?"

A loutish-looking blond boy with the pink-skinned face of a baby pig flushed and mumbled that he was present.

"Mr. Arnold," Edgar said gently, "won't you tell us your major subject and your interest in this particular course?"

Stammering and blushing, Mr. Arnold revealed that he was in civil engineering, but he figured he'd ought to get in one or two cultural courses on his own. His dean had suggested this one, so he figured he might as well. . . .

Mr. Arnold's response set the pattern for the rest of the students. They were veterinary, or home ec, or agricultural journalism, and it seemed that they all yearned to get something cultural under their belts. Gradually, from their halting, semiliterate responses, a syndrome began to emerge for Edgar. It became patent that English 1203 was by tradition a snap course, an easy way of cinching three elective credits without undue strain on the intellect. One by one they made their confessions, some coy, some embarrassed, some bold with annoyance at the new teacher's strange manners and appearance, but all baffled by this unfamiliar first-day gambit to a college course in English.

All except the girl in the corner. Hers was the last name on the roster, and as Edgar went down the list he scarcely bothered with the hesitant testimonials of the others.

"Miss Willis," Edgar said, his voice hoarse, and the incipient migraine whispering behind his eyes. Helen Willis. Helen.

Her voice had a controlled vibrato, and the pitch changed with the sense of her words, and there were beat and measure in her speech. She did not sound like the others, the flat toneless ones whose persons imaged the featureless topography of their native plains.

"I am in arts and sciences, majoring in English," she said. "I write, and I'm especially interested in Poe as an artist and craftsman. I think I can learn something in this class."

Edgar was conscious of a crystallization in the class attitude. The girl's uninhibited words catalyzed the swirling, undirected resentment in the room. In an instant she had given them a peg for their outraged feelings; she had put herself beyond the pale with her statement of artistic purpose. Irrevocably she was with Edgar now, like him in kind, an aesthete, an intellectual, a freak. High courage filled him, and he was able to smile pityingly at the hate, the contempt, the mockery on the faces of the others.

"You have read Poe?" Edgar asked eagerly. "I don't mean only *The Gold Bug* or *Murders in the Rue Morgue*—I mean his poetry and stories like 'Ligeia'?"

"Oh, yes, and I'm especially fond of the verse and the stories of the supernatural."

"You know, Miss Willis, that there is a growing vogue for Poe these days?"

"Yes, I know. The Gothic revival, and perhaps even this new Existentialism business." She smiled. "I have just finished reading *Poe and the Romantic Tradition.* It's a marvelous book, Mr. Baker."

"Well! I thank you for that, Miss Willis." He turned to the

others. "Miss Willis is referring to my study of Poe, and I think it's only fair to warn you that the critics don't quite share her enthusiasm."

This overture they rebuffed with unblinking sullenness. Not one of them smiled. Chastened, but for the moment beyond their power to wound him, he smiled good-naturedly and gave them the names of the textbook and the collateral reading for the course. As they finished scratching the last name into their notebooks, the bell rang. They swept their books together and dashed toward the door with undisguised relief. Edgar halted the stampede.

"One moment please, if you don't mind. I should like to make an assignment. Will you please read Poe's poems 'Ulalume,' 'Annabel Lee,' and 'Israfel,' and write a brief interpretation of each, for next time."

"How many words do you want?" asked a beefy fellow wearing a leather flying jacket and officers' pink pants.

"I leave that to your discretion," Edgar said.

"O.K., but what's the minimum?" another asked, winking at the flyer.

Edgar stiffened. They were baiting him now.

"What is your name, please?" he asked coldly.

"Dodderidge," the baiter answered. He sounded less gay now. "Richard Dodderidge, Mr. Baker."

"Very well, Mr. Dodderidge, since you insist on a personal prescription from the teacher, suppose we make it a thousand words." He turned to the class. "The rest of you write as much as you feel impelled to."

A titter went up from the class. At the back of the room Helen Willis smiled. Dodderidge stood dumb struck, his neck and ears crimson.

"A thousand words, Mr. Dodderidge," Edgar repeated sweetly. "That will be all."

They went then, eager, he supposed, to sort and compare their impressions of the new English teacher in some place free of his presence, some place where students were at liberty to drink cokes and smoke and swear at teachers. Miss Willis lingered in the doorway, as the others went on out of sight. Edgar, busy gathering his books, was aware of her leisured passage through the room, and it was her pause that nerved him to speak.

"I want to thank you, Miss Willis," he said softly, his eyes lowered. Although he had come off well in the brush with Dodderidge, he felt that he had been too severe, giving the boy a task that was virtually impossible for him. He felt weak and drained; a shock reaction had set in. The stimulation Helen Willis had given him trickled away with the departing students

and left him without emotional prop. The migraine was sawing, rending, and he was acutely conscious of his viscera. He looked like a very ill man, an advanced tuberculosis sufferer, with the large black eyes burning febrilely, the chalky face high-lighted at the cheekbones with flaming disks.

She stared at him. "Why—it's an honor to be in your class, Mr. Baker. But—do you feel quite well? Is there something I can do?"

Not daring to look up, he shook his head.

"I'll see you next class meeting, then," she murmured. "Wednesday."

He managed to nod.

Eleanor was watching for him from the kitchen window of the small furnished bungalow they had rented. She ran to open the door when she saw him turn off the road on to the walk of their house. Anxiously she examined his face.

"Well, darling, how did it go?" she asked brightly after they had kissed.

"Oh, God."

"That bad, sweetheart?" she said compassionately. She led him to the sofa, sat down with him, stroked his head. "Was it the migraine again?" she asked softly.

He lifted his head and nodded, his eyes brimming. "I can't make it, Eleanor, I don't see how I can make it," he said miserably. "Maybe if I could try an eastern university again, but not here. Not here where they all have the same empty face, 'Engel's rural idiots.' They fear me because they don't know what to make of me, and because they're afraid they hate me."

"No. Edgar, how could they! It's all in your mind," she said. Then she felt him go tense as he pushed her away, and she saw his eyes fill with cold hate.

"Oh please, Edgar, I didn't mean it like that," she said, her voice shrill with despair. "I'm sorry, dear, we know you're perfectly well now so how could I have meant *that?*" Her words spilled out in a frantic cascade as she tried to mollify him. Then it became too much for her.

"What's going to become of us?" she cried, and broke down into a spasm of uncontrolled sobbing. The hate went out of Edgar's eyes, and he reached out his hand to touch her hair. Then the aura that had been building in him all day flared through his nerves in an unbearable golden burst and he lost consciousness.

"I'm sorry, darling," was the first thing he said. He was in bed, undressed, and she was sitting by, watching him. She smiled at him. The last rays of the winter sun slanted through

the window almost horizontally, bathing the room in a cold, yellow light. He felt dissociated and will-less, and when he spoke the words sounded like someone's else. By some trick of vision or light, Eleanor looked flat and one-dimensional, framed against the east window. With the dying yellow light on her face she looked like a Dali portrait of Gala, one that had always frightened him.

"Why don't you turn on the light, darling?" he heard himself say. "It's getting dark."

She patted his hand and got up and switched on the lamp. The room leaped into focus and the queerness slipped away.

"Can you eat, dear? I can have dinner ready in a minute," Eleanor said.

The languor was dissipating, and as reality returned, Edgar became acutely aware that he hadn't eaten since breakfast. "As a matter of fact, I think I'm ravenous," he said.

At dinner they cast about desperately for small talk, avoiding what was paramount. But the dissemblance became unbearable, and Edgar put down his fork and took Eleanor's hand.

"Eleanor, what did I say before?"

"When?"

"You know, when I came out of it."

"Why, I don't remember, dear." This too casually.

"Well I do. I said I was sorry. I'm not certain if I fully realized then what I meant."

"Edgar, you don't have to talk about it, dear."

"But I do. When I said I was sorry I meant more than just for tonight, for my idiotic resentment of your perfectly harmless and well-meant remark."

"But I never should have phrased it the way I did, Edgar. It was thoughtless, especially since you—weren't feeling well."

"No, Eleanor, I wasn't feeling well. And that's what I'm sorry about. You're saddled with a sick man, a neurotic on the verge of worse—"

"Edgar! You mustn't," she pleaded.

"I've been a drag on you too long," he went on, "and after today the prospect looks dimmer than ever. This was supposed to be the new beginning, the start of a new life. Teach in a quiet little cow college, live in a tranquil midwestern town, away from the city, out of the disturbing currents of the New York literary life. But just one day of it, and look at me! Look what happened the very first day of the new regime."

"All right then, Edgar, you tell me the answer," she said, crying quietly.

"First off, I couldn't get a teaching job again back east if I tried. And if I did, I'd be raving in a week. The same goes for

getting on a magazine. Maybe I need another three years in the sanatorium." He laughed bitterly, calmly.

"No, Edgar, don't," she protested, still weeping.

"Why fool ourselves any more, Eleanor?" He put his hand under her chin and gently lifted her head until their eyes met. "At best, this is going to be a temporary leave from the sanatoriums. That's the best I can hope for from here on—in for a long cure and out for a short furlough. Now is the time, while you're still young and have time to build a different life. I'll give you a divorce, darling. . . ."

He looked at her for a long timeless moment while the universe diminished, irised in from a world to a country to a college town to a house to a room to them to their eyes, their eyes were the only reality, the distillate of life. She leaned over and kissed him.

"No. No. I'm not leaving you, Edgar," she said. "We're going to give this place a fair trial. There must be something you can build on here. Some of your students will respond, darling; there's a great literary tradition out here—Cather, Anderson, Lewis—"

"Of course there is," Edgar said. "It wasn't those kids today, it was me. I came into the classroom with high intention. I was going to be friendly and cordial and sympathetic, get rapport right away. But what I said came out all wrong. Some perversity in me made me see them as clods, apathetic, insensible clods, instead of the decent, average, college class they really are. I was afraid of the situation—my first class since I came out—and I was trying to fail, trying to precipitate my own downfall."

"Did you make them very angry, darling?"

"I'm afraid I did. Except one. A marvelous girl."

Edgar told her about Helen Willis. They talked hopefully, well into the night, about his plans for winning over the class, about a possible new study of Poe, about the promising people at the faculty tea. It was happy talk, and they became quite excited, and before they went to bed Eleanor made cocoa and they drank it listening to a mystery program that was an old favorite of theirs. But when he was alone in the dark everything went bad again, and Edgar lay awake through the night, staring wide-eyed at the familiar creatures of his upset mind.

The next day, Tuesday, was an easy one, with only two classes in Freshman Rhetoric. Edgar went through the day in a gauzy haze, detached and remote, lightheaded from the sleepless night. After his classes were over, instead of going home he spent the afternoon in the college library, which he

found crammed with agricultural treatises, Department of the Interior reclamation reports, studies of the bot fly, and out-of-date works on the physical sciences. There was not one book by Fitzgerald, Kafka, Dos Passos, or Celine, a few of the names he chose at random to look for in the catalogue. Hervey Allen's *Israfel,* which he particularly wanted to read to help pass the afternoon, was also lacking. He settled for the Woodberry biography of Poe, which he had not looked at since his own student days. When he got home, he managed a cheerful mien for Eleanor. She was quite happy.

After dinner he retired to the bedroom to prepare some notes for his next day's lecture on Poe. In the living room Eleanor, who was reading Joyce straight through, occupied herself with *Stephen Hero.* After a few preliminary attempts, Edgar gave up trying to outline a lecture and stretched out on the bed. He could ad lib as good an introduction to Poe as anything he might prepare, he decided. He thought of the class, of Arnold the pig-faced boy, of the boy in the flight jacket, of Dodderidge of the thousand words. He made a mental bet that Dodderidge would cut class the next day.

And then he thought of Helen Willis. He found himself looking forward to the paper she would turn in on Poe's verse. Of course it would be far better than any of the others, but would it show freshness, originality? Better not to expect too much; the girl looked young, very young, despite her poise and seeming maturity. But he himself had written well and had a mature critical sense when he was a junior in college, so why couldn't the girl? Virginia Clemm was only thirteen when Poe married her, for that matter. If a girl of thirteen was old enough to be the wife of an Edgar Allan Poe, and this Willis girl, this Helen Willis, who was at least sixteen, and he was a leading Poe scholar—it might well be that she was what he needed. Instead of Eleanor.

Then his mind reeled, the earth cracked, and he saw himself astride the gap. There was an Eleanor on either side of him, pulling at his arms, the gap ever widening. Then he split in two. The two Eleanors drifted toward each other, coalesced into one Eleanor dressed in bridal white. But now there were two Edgars. One was standing with Eleanor, and the other was on the opposite bank of the chasm. They called to him, but he smiled sadly and shook his head. He pointed down into the chasm and their eyes followed his finger. Then Eleanor pushed him into the chasm and the earth closed in on him. Then the other Edgar, the one he had been trying to become for so long and now was, led Eleanor to a great castle that was surrounded by a moat and had a long jagged crack in one wall. He led her across

the drawbridge and down and down a winding staircase into a vaulted dungeon. He pulled on a bronze handle set in the wall and a silver casket lined in black velvet slid out. Eleanor got in the casket and he pushed it back into the wall. Then he left the castle and when it crumbled noiselessly into the moat it was a blue and white morning and he was in an endless flowered meadow. Helen was walking toward him.

Edgar was at his desk before the bell rang. As the students entered the room he examined their faces carefully, and he was satisfied that none of them knew. Then Helen Willis came in and smiled into his eyes when she said good morning and he saw that she knew. He was happy that that was the way it was. He called the roll, and they were all there but Dodderidge.

It went very well. He gave a sparkling lecture on Poe's "Poetic Principle" and then a brief sketch on the true things in Poe's life. Not everything, of course, because that would have to remain secret until the time came. Then he called on Helen Willis to read her assignment. She began with 'Israfel,' and Edgar was delighted that she chose it first. She blushed when he called her name, but when she read her voice was musical and unfaltering:

" 'Israfel', who was the most melodious of angels in the Koran, is probably Poe's most important poem in that it clearly gives his notion of the perfect poet. It states the theory by which every other poem of Poe's should be tried. Poetry must be music, but music rendered as pure and as exalted as possible. When Israfel sings, the music of the spheres is stilled so that he may be heard. Also, perfect poetry is not to be realized on this earth, for only in heaven are the perfect emotions experienced. . . ."

The class sat wide-eyed, their mouths open. Edgar was enchanted by her perfect understanding. And then 'Ulalume':

". . . Written on the death of his young wife. Poe created the names in this poem for their weird onomatopoeia. Although Virginia died in January, Poe substitutes the more musical-sounding October. The poem is an exercise in schizophrenia—the gloomy Psyche confronts the hopeful intellect with his destiny of doom, bringing him to the tomb of Ulalume. His hope of peace is destroyed. . . ."

And 'Annabel Lee': "Again he mourns the death of his wife. The supernal yearning is clearly expressed here, when he writes that they love 'with a love that the winged seraphs of heaven coveted her and me.' The jealous angels took her from this earth, and Poe thenceforth lies (in fantasy) 'in her sepulchre there by the sea.' When mortals infringe on the delights re-

served for heaven, then the penalty must be death. Again the principle of unattainable beauty, the dead woman as the incarnation of the most beautiful theme known to poetry."

Then the bell rang and the others fled even more precipitately than they had on Monday. They had been in terror of being called on to read aloud after Helen Willis, and they dropped their assignments on Edgar's desk and ran.

She came to him, and some lurking residue of caution kept him from the revelation, even though he was certain that she knew. It was not the time, somehow, not yet the time. So he only said, "Miss Willis, your paper on Poe is as scholarly and sympathetic an appreciation as I have heard."

"That's a great compliment, Mr. Baker," she said, "coming from you. I know what Poe means to you."

He looked deep into her eyes, past surface and mask, past reserve, past personality. "You do," he said. "You really know." Then it was the time and he made his decision, committing himself for all time.

"I have written a poem," he said. "I have written a poem for you."

"For me?" He was reaching in his brief case, and he didn't see the puzzled look in her face, the withdrawal. He handed her the poem, written in longhand. She read:

To Helen

Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy-Land!

The sheet of paper, the paper on which he had copied Poe's 'To Helen' word for word, trembled in her hand. Wide-eyed with dawning terror she looked up at him, and when she saw his gleaming eyes she understood.

"You—wrote this—for me?" she asked, edging slowly toward the door.

"For you, Helen." He smiled proudly. "I wrote it for you. Do you like it?"

She was in the doorway now, still facing him. "It's lovely," she said miserably. "May I have it?"

"Certainly you may, my dear. It's for you." He gathered his books from the desk and came toward her. Very tenderly, with tears of pure love in his eyes, he said, "And now, Helen, now that we understand, we have so many things to tell. There is a flowered meadow where—"

But she was gone, running down the corridor in panic.

By the time Helen Willis found the head of the English department and he found the dean and together they went to the president's house, it was well after dark. Helen told her story for a third time and then she fainted. They drove to the girl's dormitory and left her in charge of the house mother.

The shades were drawn at Edgar's house, and the house was dark save for a faint flickering glow in the bedroom window. Their knock was not answered, and they opened the door and went in. The bedroom door was open wide.

There were two tall tapers at the head and foot of the bed. He had dressed Eleanor in her wedding gown and crossed her hands on her breast. Her features were unmarred and serene, the death pallor on her cheeks accentuated by the lock of dark, glossy hair that escaped from the bridal veil.

Edgar was sitting in a chair beside the bed, a pad of theme paper in his lap. He was writing in pencil by the candlelight. He did not look up when they entered.

The head of the English department, the dean, and the president looked at each other. Then the president drew a deep breath and went around the bed to Edgar. He touched him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Baker," he said softly.

Edgar smiled up at the president with a look of amused tolerance on his face. "No," Edgar said. "Not Baker. My name is not Baker, you know."

The head of the English department and the dean peered over the president's shoulder at the theme pad in Edgar's lap. Edgar turned his head and smiled up at them.

"This will be one of my finest short stories," he said happily. "I don't as a rule care to show my work until it's in a completed form, but you may look at what I've done so far on this. I believe I establish a certain mood in the very first lines."

They looked at what he had written:

Ligeia—a tale by Edgar Allan Poe

I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia. Long years have since elapsed, and my memory is feeble through much suffering. . . .

THE CALLING CARDS

IT WAS the beginning of autumn, and the river steamer *Goncharov* coursed along an empty Volga. The chill of early morning enveloped the vessel, and an icy wind swept the Asiatic expanse of water and beat head on against the steamer. The wind whipped the flag at the stern, tore at the hats, caps, and clothing of the people walking the decks, wrinkled their faces and snapped at their sleeves and skirts. A single gull followed the ship aimlessly and dully—now drifting just astern of the vessel, a sharp-pointed crescent swinging in the air, now soaring away slantwise into the distance, as if it did not know what to do with itself in the emptiness of the great river and gray autumn sky.

The steamer was almost empty, too. There was a small group of peasants on the lower deck and only three passengers on the upper. The three walked back and forth, meeting and passing: the two from the second class, both bound for the same destination, always inseparable, always pacing the deck together, constantly talking about something in a business-like manner, and alike inconspicuous; and the passenger from the first class. The latter was a man of about thirty, a newly renowned writer, distinguished by his serious air—not quite sad and not quite angry—and also by his outward appearance. He was tall and robust—he even stooped a bit, as some strong people do—well-dressed, and, in his way, handsome: a brunette of that Russian-eastern type one met among the old merchant families of Moscow. He came of such a family, although he no longer had anything in common with it.

He walked alone, with a firm step. In his checkered English cap, black cheviot coat, and expensive, well-made shoes, he paced the deck, breathing deeply of the bracing air. He reached the stern and stood watching the spreading, running surge of river behind the vessel.

Then, turning sharply, he walked toward the prow once more, lowering his head against the wind that clutched at his cap, and hearing the loud, regular pulsation of the sidewheel as each blade lifted to shed its glass-like cascade of rushing water.

A cheap black bonnet rose above the stairs that led from the third class, and he stopped short, smiling stiffly. Below the bonnet appeared the thin, sweet face of a young woman, his chance acquaintance of the previous evening. He hastened toward her. She was also smiling as she came forward awkwardly, bent over to fight the wind and holding her bonnet in place with a bony hand. She wore a light coat and her legs below the coat were thin.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked loudly and cheerily as he approached her.

"Marvelously!" she replied, a shade too gaily. "I always sleep like a top."

He retained her hand in his large palm and looked into her eyes. She met his glance with radiant intensity.

"You overslept, my angel," he said familiarly. "Good folk should be at the breakfast table by now."

"I lay in bed dreaming!" she answered, with an animation quite out of keeping with her appearance.

"What were you dreaming of?"

"Just—things!"

"Oh, oh—watch out! Dreams can be dangerous," he said. "Breakfasting is better. Let's have some vodka and fish soup," he added, thinking: probably she can't afford breakfast in the dining salon.

"Yes, vodka would be just right!" She stamped her feet. "It's devilish cold."

They set off for the first class dining salon, walking briskly. She led the way and he, following behind, observed her almost greedily.

He had thought of her during the night. The previous evening he had struck up a conversation with her as the vessel approached a high black bank in the twilight. A scattering of lights shone at the foot of the dark shore. Later he sat with her on the long bench which went all the way around the deck, beneath the white shutters of the first class cabins. But they did not sit there long, and at night, alone, he regretted they had not lingered. That night he realized, to his surprise, that he wanted her. Why? Because of the customary attraction of a brief encounter with a chance traveling companion?

Seated beside her in the dining salon, clinking glasses with her between mouthfuls of cold black caviar and hot white rolls, he knew now why she attracted him, and he waited impatiently for the affair to reach its culmination. The fact that all

this—the vodka, her uninhibited bearing—was in strange contradiction to her normal self excited him the more.

"Well, another drink, and enough!" he said.

"It certainly will be enough!" she replied, in the same bantering tone he employed. "Excellent vodka!"

Of course, he had been touched by her confusion upon learning his name the previous evening. She had been astonished at thus unexpectedly meeting a well known writer. It was always pleasant to witness this confusion. It is usually enough to warm one toward any woman, if she is not absolutely ugly or stupid. Immediately a certain intimacy arises, one becomes daring in address, and somehow one feels a right to her. But it was not merely this that had stirred him: evidently he impressed her as a man, too—and he was touched by her very shabbiness and artlessness. He already had acquired a lack of constraint with admirers: he knew how to make a light and rapid shift from the first few moments of acquaintance to a free and easy, pseudo-bohemian manner, and from that to the studied simplicity of the questions: Who are you? Where are you from? Married or not? Thus had he questioned her the previous evening as they watched the varicolored lights of the forecastle reflected on the black water. The reflections stretched far out over the surface of the river. They could see the red glow of a bonfire on a river barge. "This scene is worth remembering," he thought. The smoke drifting up from the fire carried the smell of fish soup.

"May one ask your name?" he had said.

She told him her name and surname quickly.

"Are you on your way home?"

"I have been visiting my sister in Sviyazhk. Her husband died suddenly and—well, you understand—she was left in a terrible position. . . ."

At first she was embarrassed and looked away, gazing into the distance. Then she began to answer more boldly.

"Are you married?"

She smiled wrily. "Yes, I'm married—alas! This is not my first year as a wife."

"Why alas?"

"I was stupid enough to marry very young. One hardly has time to look about before life passes one by."

"It will be a long time before you need worry about life passing you by."

"Alas, not so long! And I haven't seen anything of life yet."

"It isn't too late to start."

Here she suddenly nodded her head, smiling. "I'm starting!"

"Who is your husband? An official?"

"Oh, he is a very good and kind man. But unfortunately not at all interesting. . . . The secretary of our rural district court."

"How sweet she is, and how unhappy," he thought. He opened his cigarette case.

"Do you want a cigarette?"

"Very much!"

She took a light bravely but clumsily, and then drew on the cigarette with quick, woman-like puffs. Pity for her quivered within him—pity for her confusion, and tenderness; and with all that a sensuous desire to take advantage of her naïveté and inexperience. The inexperience, he felt, would surely be accompanied by extreme daring.

Now, seated in the dining salon, he glanced impatiently at her thin hands, her faded features that were all the more pathetic for being faded, and the dark hair, done up somewhat carelessly. After removing her bonnet she had slipped her gray coat off her shoulders and over the back of the chair, revealing a dark cotton dress. She kept tucking back stray strands of hair.

He was moved and stirred by the frankness with which she had spoken of her family life and her lost youth, and now her sudden boldness excited him; she was saying and doing the very things that least became her. The vodka brought color to her face. Even her pale lips grew red, and her eyes took on a starry, merry brightness.

"You know," she said suddenly, "we were speaking of dreams. Do you know what my fondest dream was in high school? To have calling cards. We were quite poor then. We had sold the last of the estate and moved to the city, and there was absolutely no one to call on anyway, but how I dreamed of having calling cards! It was so silly."

He pressed her hand, feeling all the bones through the gaunt flesh. Misunderstanding completely, she raised her hand to his lips like an experienced coquette and gave him a languorous glance.

"Let's go to my cabin."

"Let's. It's so stuffy here, with all this smoke."

Tossing her head, she reached for her bonnet.

In the corridor he embraced her. She glanced back at him over her shoulder, proudly and ecstatically. He almost bit her cheek out of the hatred that comes with passion and love. Over her shoulder she presented her lips voluptuously.

In the cabin, hastening to please him and to take full and audacious advantage of the unexpected happiness that had suddenly fallen to her lot in the person of this handsome, strong, and famous man, she tugged at the buttons of her dress and stepped out of it, letting it fall to the floor. She remained in her light petticoat and white underpants, her shoulders and arms bare; and in the half light that entered the cabin through the

shutters she was shapely as a boy. The poignant naïveté of it all pierced him.

"Shall I take everything off?" she whispered, just like a young girl.

"Everything, everything," he said, growing sadder and sadder.

Obediently and swiftly she stepped out of her underwear and stood naked, her flesh gray-purple with that peculiarity of the female body when it shivers nervously and the skin becomes taut and transparent and is covered with goose pimples. She stood there in only cheap stockings, worn garters, and cheap black shoes, and she gave him a triumphant, drunken glance as she reached back to remove her hairpins. Chilling, he watched her.

Her figure was better and younger than one might have thought. Her collar bone and ribs were clearly outlined, as might have been expected from her pinched face and bony shins. But her thighs were large. Her belly was flat, with a small, deep navel, and the curving triangle of dark, beautiful hair below the belly conformed to the thick mass of hair on her head. She removed the hairpins, and her hair fell down her gaunt spine, with its protruding vertebrae.

She bent over to pull up her slipping stockings; her little breasts, with their cold, shrivelled brown nipples, hung like small pears, charming in their meagerness. And he forced her to experience the extreme of shamelessness, so unbecoming to her and therefore so exciting to his senses, rousing all his pity, tenderness, and passion. . . . Nothing could be seen through the slats of the shutter, but she kept glancing toward the shutter in rapturous fright, hearing the unconcerned voices and steps of people passing on the deck outside the window; and this exaggerated still more his terrible exultation at her depravity. Oh, how close these people stood talking and moving—and none of them would imagine what was going on in this white cabin, only one step away!

Afterward he placed her on the bunk. She lay as if dead, her teeth clenched, her eyes closed, and a sad sense of peace settling on her now pale and quite youthful features.

Toward evening, when the steamer docked at the stop where she was to land, she stood alongside him, silent, with lowered lashes. He kissed her cold hand with that love that remains somewhere in the heart for all one's life, and she, without looking back, ran down the gangway into the rude, jostling crowd on the dock.

—Translated from the Russian by Leo Gruliont.

WHIT BURNETT

THE NIGHT OF THE GRAN BAILE MASCARA

I AM kept in this place as a prisoner. I have lost track of exactly how long I've been held here. But that—does not very much matter. I am treated well and persons attend to my wants with courteous regularity and precision. What I fail to get is understanding. For the Spanish are a peculiar people; I doubt if they understand themselves—least of all me.

I am not a Spaniard, either, but was born in America. Though perhaps I am not wholly an American; maybe there is something other in me, something Russian, wilder, clearer. I do not know. But now and then, although I am still a young man, I have been able to see with a sharper clarity of vision than any others I have known, with a curious almost Fourth Dimensional eye. And I sometimes think that all the world is one great diseased mind, and only occasionally does an individual free himself from the compass of its illusions.

But this is aimless speculation. And not my story. For I want now to relate my experience, which has no duplicate in modern times.

It began in Toledo. Of that I'm quite sure. For, with my companion, an artist seeking picturesque spots for illustrative sketches, I had been in Spain not much longer than a week. From the French border, through Barcelona and Madrid, we had gone directly there, you see, seeking in the old towers and gates and castles bordering the Tajo some quickening of our feelings for all Spain. And the events I am to tell of occurred on the night of the *gran baile mascara,* for which the town, the day of our arrival, was garlanded, expectant, tense and alive.

Yet, perched on the top of an eminence overlooking the muddy curling snake of the river that swirls about its base on three steep rocky sides, Toledo affected me oddly as we passed

through its gates, and when I stepped from the conveyance that had brought us from the station, it was as if I had stepped into a kind of walled-up cage. But the sensation was very momentary and quickly dispelled in the noisy, moving bustle of the crowds in the old *plaza de Zocodover*, which was filling with its sauntering crowds of Spaniards who turn out to stroll and smile and amble along just before dusk each day.

As my friend, an Italian, was negotiating for rooms, I stood outside to watch the people: cadets in their bright infantry uniforms, *guardias civiles* in their dark blue capes trimmed with the blood-red dear to Spain; the old, shriveled men and women of other times and other generations; beshawled crones with sinewy faces and wide, swinging skirts; noisy, carnival-spirited boys with masks or blackened faces; blanket-carrying peasants; basket-laden matrons and maids with great water-filled earthern *botijas*.

One old man—not, indeed, so very old—impressed me singularly. Dressed in a blanket cape of black, which he held around his chest with one bony hand, frayed of boot and with a battered hat cocked over his left eye, he turned on me a fleeting, curious, bearded face, and passed on. His features were caught in a semilevitous mood, his crooked brow and sharp brown eye and great descending bulbous nose all combined with a general air to make him seem strangely unreal and realistic at the same time.

My friend came out of the little hotel.

"*Complet*," he said. "Rooms all taken for the ball tonight."

I hardly heard him.

"Just now," I said, "I have seen Menipo."

"Menipo?"

"Yes," I answered. "By Velasquez."

"Oh," he said, "Toledo is full of types. A person could spend a year here and never do them justice. You mean the old fellow, full length, in the panel that always seems to companion Velasquez's Æsop? Marvelous type!"

We went to another hotel. Also full. We were referred then to a smaller place, a *posada*, "for man and beast," and in a short time we had engaged two *habitaciones* in the Posada de la Sangre on the Calle de Cervantes, through the Arco de la Sangre off the public square and almost in the shadow of the great murderous-spired fortress of the Alcazar.

Although by this time it was late twilight, there was still a fair amount of visibility and my friend, throwing down his bags in his room, left the *posada* at once with his portfolio under his arm, planning, as was his custom, to make a quick survey of the locality at once so that in the morning, with better light, he might go directly to his subject.

And I was left alone in the ancient inn.

From the Zocodover I could hear the blended noise of the crowds of Toledanos, whose gay spirits were quickening with the approach of night. Across the narrow *calle,* a light had appeared in a window, and inside I could see a Spanish woman sitting in a corner sewing on a huge white cloth, unmarked and immaculate as a shroud. Her face was full of character, lined and reminiscent of life. Her silent, steady needle-plying fascinated me, and I stood watching her from my darkened little room a long time before turning on my light (for this Fourteenth Century hostelry, remodeled since the days of Cervantes and his squire and serf, boasted at least this much of modern convenience).

Tired as I was from the railroad journey from Madrid, my mind was far from fatigued, and as I lay resting on the bed, scrutinizing my narrow little whitewashed room, whose red flag-stones, worn by generations, sloped weirdly to the door and to the balcony overlooking the *patio,* I was suddenly moved by a great desire to enter into the spirit and activity of the town while in Toledo, to know these people, or at least to be with and a part of them.

What better opportunity could have been made to my order, I thought, than this very night, when all the town is masked and festive for the *gran baile mascara?*

I was stirred by the thought and hurriedly washing and brushing up, I decided to purchase a costume at once and make ready for the ball, which was to be held, the announcements said, in the Teatro de la Rojas.

I tugged at the huge old-fashioned lock on my door, which yielded with irritating reluctance only after I had had to put in the tremendous key upside down and turn it backward to disengage the latch.

I must describe briefly the Posada of the Blood of Christ, for it struck me so forcibly as a mad-house of architecture, or, more exactly, as a sane house that, through the weary acquiring of years, had fallen into architectural senility and despair. Its rooms, all narrow and cell-like as my own, were built three stories high around an open air court below, upon whose cobblestones were deployed the cluttery old carts and wagons of the guests, mostly peasants and out-of-townsmen. To the south, and off the main court, were the stables for the mules, the patient *burros* of Spain, and from these quarters came the strong and piercing smell of wet straw and manure.

Above me were the now clear stars, shining in a sky more deeply blue than the depths of a grottoed sea. A little light beside a water trough in the *patio* threw shadows behind the

antique columns supporting the balcony and made a few old benches lifelike as recumbent sleepers. Standing at the north balcony of the court, I was surprised at the angles of the floor I stood on; it sloped almost precariously to the wobbly pillars, and I smiled at the thought that not even the strongest *vino de Jerez* such as we had had at a café before entering the *posada* could have induced such reckless equilibrium in my mind.

Here had Cervantes stayed in 16-something, and written his "Novelas Ejamplares," centered in the square outside. Had he indeed, I wondered? Was this house then so sloped, so fallen in at the roof, so weak at the knees? Doubtless not. I stood musing, watching the walls around the *patio*, absorbing the unusual silence and black desertion of the place and staring at the opposite side of the balcony whose death-white surface was ribbed vertically with the shadows of the upright balcony railing. . . .

"I could go," I thought, "as a matador. But everyone goes like that. And there are so many masked balls always in Spain. Something different, now. . . . A pirate? Old-fashioned. A clown? Pierrot? A peasant? . . . How unimaginative the mind is," I concluded, "in a new situation."

I shrugged my shoulders and walked along the western side of the balcony to the doorway leading to the ground floor. I will wait and see, I decided, what I can find at a costumer's.

At the last step but one, the curious revelatory idea that is essential in an understanding of my plight, occurred to me.

"Go," said something deep inside me, "as Menipo!"

"I will," I said.

And, as if by some strange affiliation of will and chance, I walked straight to the water-trough near the doorway leading into the stables and took down from a huge spike a great, dark-hued blanket-coat that hung there, threw it round my shoulders, and pulled over my head some unknown owner's cold-banded hat.

I lacked now only a beard to be as Menipo.

I was exhilarated so disguised, suddenly, strangely let out of myself, in a manner none may understand except those who have experienced it.

As I stood at the entrance to the stables, which looked through the *patio* and out into the Calles de Cervantes, my mind was divided between the necessity of a beard for my disguise and with contemplation of the sudden activity in the street outside.

From the Gobierno Militar, passing up the narrow aisle-like *calles, guardias civiles,* in their great capes were moving in strange groups westward to the Arco de la Sangre that entered

onto the Plaza. There was nothing so strange in their going there, but it seemed that either they too were affected by the *mascara* spirit, or that something was wrong with my eyesight, for these usually so precise and dignified police servants were beyond all dignity now and lurched and swung along with an abandon I had never seen before. Three or four, appearing at intervals, even made light of their stature, apparently ridiculing the very build that had assured them a government post in Spain, for they had bent their knees nearly to the ground and were waddling away, their legs hidden under their capes so that they appeared like absurd dwarfs beside the others.

I could not help laughing as I stood there, safely protected from conspicuousness by my own new trappings. I walked across the court to the outer doorway, and at that instant, from the Zocodover came the sudden strains of band music, which drew more and more people through the channel of the street and thence through the arch and into the hidden crowds. Behind me, passed some peasants from the interior of the *posada;* but I did not turn around. A second or two later I saw even the proprietor himself, with his apron around his middle, go up the street. I then looked behind me, and found myself almost dreadfully conscious of complete isolation.

But, as I stared into the shadows behind me, I discerned one significant dark shape. It was a man. He was emerging from the stables. Wrapped like myself in a blanket cape, he came with appalling slowness toward me, slowly but directly, inevitably, like a heavily looming mountain.

Fearful that he might bump into me, I decided to step out into the doorway. His slow, determined stride came on. There was no avoiding a collision. His face was down, hidden by the angle of his hat. A weighty oppressiveness settled on me. He was assuredly bound to walk right over me. I could not move.

With great effort, I stepped, at last, to one side. But he did not pass. He lifted his head, and I saw the features of the man with the crooked brow and the great descending nose. It was Menipo!

"Buenos," I mumbled in greeting, and was for leaving.

He made no response.

Instead, he walked closer toward me until he was so near I felt his breath in my face. Then, muttering words or sounds I could not understand, he pushed me backward, slowly, grossly, with his bent arm beneath his cape elbowing at my stomach.

Backward I moved, unable, through surprise or something else, to offer any resistance. Further and further back I went, away from the door and into the shadows of the frightful court.

After a century of time, it seemed, I found my tongue and

what few Spanish words I knew that I hoped would cover the situation.

"What do you want?" I cried. "Stop this!"

He laughed, mumbled, and then talked, in a disordered, broken, high-pitched voice that rasped and scratched my ears. The man, I was convinced, was mad.

Could I offer him money, I wondered.

I made out one word here and there. And then:

"Pasaporte!" he said.

It was now my turn to laugh, if I had had the courage. *Pasaporte!* Passport, indeed. He was like the multitudinous officials that board the trains in and out of Madrid, seemingly at random, to scrutinize the documents of the entrants. This was Spain. The man was an official? Possibly. But where his uniform? The Spanish are a funny people. . . . My mind began to lag in thoughts, my body to fail to function quickly as I continued to back and back like a tired horse.

He was no official. He was a madman, and my very life in danger. I should spring at his throat, I thought. I should kill him, lest he kill me. I looked sidewise, hopefully, into the street. Deserted as the court. I was helpless. I had no weapon. What lay behind his own great coat, I could not tell.

Then, stumbling on a cobblestone, I fell backward on the uneven flooring and struck my head an astounding blow on the stones.

Fortunately, however, I did not lose consciousness, for I remember that even in falling I had the presence of mind to cry for help.

And I added, too, "a madman, madman! *Loco, loco!*"

That I did not lose consciousness was apparent to me as soon as I fell, for looking up from the cold stones at the man above me, I could see at his elbow something I had not observed before. He was standing near the outer entrance to the court, beside a little wall shelf, on which reposed an open ledger and beside it a bottle of ink and a couple of pens.

I remember, too, that this seemed unusual to me, almost as if the book were an American hotel register, and thus quite out of place in Spain where the guests must fill out little slips for the police instead of merely signing their names on the book.

Beside the ink-bottle there were three other objects. A hammer. A hatchet. And a small, yellow wooden barrel I assumed to be filled with tacks.

I took these objects into my mind in a glance. As I did, my frightful torturer picked up the hammer and the hatchet. I saw the keen blade shining in the dim light, and I felt as one must feel who stands on the edge of his own death.

If I could divert this maniac's attention—! How? My mind strove like a tugging animal.

"The tacks!" I screamed. "The tacks!"

He turned his bearded face to peer at the stand. Then he took from the tiny barrel one of the tacks. My plan was working! Renewed strength came into me, almost enough to enable me to lift my head. But not enough, it seemed. I sank back upon the stones, beside the smelly bristles of some dirty straw.

But his simple child's mind was occupied. I was glad. Perhaps he would spend time trying to drive these tacks, diverted from my case. And my cry for help would bring me aid. But when? Why did no one come? I listened, terrified, for some friendly sound in the street, some footfall in the house. But no sound came from the gloomy inn, none from the town but the misplaced music of the distant band in the Zocodover. These crazy Spaniards, with their *fêtes!*

He scrutinized the tack in his hand. He weighed it carefully and then pinched it in two fingers and lifted the hatchet in his right hand. Above the tack it poised an instant, and then descended.

No brittle metal sound came back. The tack bounced away and fell beside me, soundless, springing back weirdly into the air, and then was lost again on the ground where I lay.

The tacks were rubber!

I knew the tacks were rubber by no unusual faculty of mind. Who has not seen those insane products of the notion stores of America: ink blots made out of black celluloid to sell to juvenile minds for ten cents, cigars that explode when half-smoked, imitation flies to pin on one's lapel and amuse one's friends? Rubber tacks!

Betrayed as I was by this heinous trick of fate, I sensed then the utter uselessness of living further. Why not capitulate? Why not—for a tack's sake as for a woman's, or a country's, or a people's, for art's sake, Menipo's or for God's?

But it was strange withal, I mused, that they were really rubber tacks. Before I had reasoned out an action, I found I was on my feet beside the madman, absorbed with him in examination of these important objects.

He threw down the hatchet. It clattered on the stones. Then he tried to place a tack with the hammer.

The tack bounced away, and then, reaching again into the barrel, I saw him draw out of it half a dozen six-inch spikes, glistening with true steel. These were no rubber counterfeits. And then, ending all child's play at the shelf, he came at me, hammer in one hand, and these cruel crucifixion nails glistening in the other.

"Now you," he said. *"Su cabeza! Su corazon!"*

I got that much. My head whirled with the pain of my fall and with the excitement and fear of my plight. He was going to drive these nails into my head, into my heart! I knew this as well as if he had said it a dozen times. From his eyes to mine danced a message of terror that drained me of my elements, of reason, caution, hope and courage.

I crouched. I lay down. Flattened myself, as before, on my back. If I could worm away, I thought, from this towering oppressor! My hand touched the hatchet, and I hurled it with the crying speed of a cyclone.

It struck his head and the blood came. Rich and red as the Spanish flag, deep hued as bull's blood on a black hide.

And then occurred what frightens me now, but did not then.

I had not killed Menipo. He reached for the hatchet, fallen again on the floor. But when he lifted his head, I saw then a great change in the maniac. Though blood was on his face and his hair and beard were tangled in a wildness, unearthly and mad, there was a new clarity in his eyes. He looked at the hatchet in his hands with wonder and then down at me.

Now, I thought, it is over. With calm precision he will slay me, hammering my head into the cobblestones. But, I still have a voice. Ten seconds may save me.

"Loco, loco!" I shouted. "Help!"

And at that moment help arrived. I saw the white movement of the proprietor's apron as he turned the corner street to the doorway. But the madman had seen the movement, too. And on my chest I felt the hatchet fall. My fingers clutched it hopefully.

"Who called out?" roared the heavy voiced proprietor. "Who is a madman here?"

Who, indeed? I could not lift my head. Much time must certainly have passed with that great giant looming over me. I felt strangely relaxed, almost at home resting on the floor, like a worm, like a dog, smelling, with only half my consciousness, the ground, the chill stone and straw.

I lacked a beard, though, I recalled. That was it. If I had had the beard when starting out . . . I clutched at the straw on the floor and tucked some under my chin. At a *mascara,* you know, it is the quaintness that attracts. And one must be imaginative.

I looked up.

"Who," cried the proprietor, "started all this? Who is crazy here?"

I could not answer him in words that he would know. My Spanish took queer turns and starts. I mumbled all the tongues I knew.

And then I heard a voice by the register shelf that was like

the voice of myself, calm and well-poised as when I order dinner in a great place. And the voice was that of Menipo, the madman.

"There," he was saying, "is the madman. He is crazy—see him on the floor there, like a dog. I was passing by, on my way to the *gran baile mascara,* when the dog there sprang upon me with a hatchet. Look at my cheek here. Call a guard, and lock him safe in jail."

This is what I heard. Everyone heard it. Could I deny it? I clutched at the proprietor's apron.

"Look," I said, "at my beard here. *I* am the real Menipo. How could I have hurt that thing? He is a picture by Velasquez. You are idiots. You are all mad!"

And so they are, though no one will see this but myself.

MAY SARTON

THE SCREEN

IT was only when Dexter Randall found the train was late and he had, suddenly, a half-hour, an empty half-hour, before him that he had time to realize with distaste that this was to be a dramatic meeting. In so far as it was, he was unprepared. For he had lived in a state of acute anxiety for a long time and had grown accustomed to doing the next thing and not looking ahead, because to look ahead was too frightening. He stood now, an island of apprehension, in the middle of Grand Central while everyone else hurried about his business. No one could possibly guess, he told himself. He could be in no way conspicuous in his gabardine coat, dark gray fedora and good British shoes. He did not wear a sign saying "Wife taken to asylum, meeting only daughter for Easter holidays," but he could not have felt more conspicuous if a large bleeding heart had been pinned to his breast, just over his wallet. It was extremely unfair that he of all people should have to feel like this, lonely, betrayed, set apart from his fellow men.

As he walked deliberately out of the huge hall with its lost echoes of arrivals and departures, his walk did not suggest panic. But it was a flight.

Safe in the Oyster Bar, sipping a double martini, he only postponed the shock. It came as he pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his upper lip surreptitiously. The martini had made him sweat. He saw with perfect clarity that he was facing his daughter alone for the first time and that she would expect, would have every right to expect, love. But love was just what he did not feel and had never felt. Always before, Peggy, his wife, had stood between him and this daughter who looked so much like her, the huge dark eyes in the small narrow head, the wariness, the elegance, and a quality which both fascinated and repelled him of making the smallest things in life become major

hurdles and adventures. Always Peggy had arranged what they would do, the circus for instance, where Margaret had been sick all over the floor and had to be taken home in tears from overexcitement; or the Zoo where, it seemed, he had walked much too fast and overtired her. Peggy had bought the presents he would give her at Christmas or on birthdays; and Peggy, of course, had decided to send her to a progressive boarding school so that she would not suffer from "the tensions" at home. And now Peggy had left him in the lurch, had escaped into madness—no, not madness—but whatever it was, safe up there in the quiet and the sun while he had to meet the train and face Margaret alone for ten whole days. He was filled with resentment.

"Your wife seems to have a deeply rooted anxiety about money," the doctor had told him. "Of course this is only a symptom, but perhaps you can help us out."

He had been asked to delve for reasons. But all that came to mind was their bitter quarrels over the joint checking account, her demands for a new fur coat, for a box at the opera, for this expensive school, and then her periods of depression when she would have corned beef hash every night for a week "to economize," take back the fur coat she had just persuaded him to give her, and cry all night. Reason? The reason seemed to be simply that she insisted on living beyond their income.

What about me? he had wanted to shout at the doctor. What about my anxieties about money? I pay the bills. I take risks on the market I have no business taking to pay for that damned school.

"That damned school!" he said aloud to the martini, and then became purple with embarrassment. Who was listening? He looked craftily around.

"Another, sir?"

"No, thanks." He put down a dollar bill and fled. He was completely shaken. It was the first time in his life he had taken a martini at three in the afternoon, and he realized that it was not a good idea, after all. As he stood once more an island in the pushing throng coming up the ramp from the train, he was terrified that he would not recognize Margaret in time to make the appropriate welcoming smile. But he couldn't go on smiling idiotically into every face. There seemed to be dozens of pink-faced, cozy little girls at whom he looked with nostalgia.

"Here I am."

She was standing before him, followed by a porter with the air of a man delivering a card on a silver platter.

"There he is, honey. No cause to worry, as I been telling you."

"Why, hello. There you are." They stood looking at each

other gravely, bumped by the people thrusting their way forward. "Come along then. A taxi, porter!"

"Did you have a good journey?" he asked, noticing that she was carrying a large floppy doll in one arm and a red handbag in the other, so he couldn't very well take her hand. This was a relief.

"Yes, thank you." She looked at him, unsmiling, tense, faintly curious as if perhaps he had a queer smell.

"We'll go somewhere as soon as we've dumped the bags, somewhere grand, and have a grand tea. Chocolate eclairs, maybe. O.K.?"

"Yes, Daddy," and she gave him a faint relieved smile.

At Rumpelmayer's he noticed that her hands were black and was furious with himself for overlooking such a simple rite as the washing of hands in the few moments they had spent together in the apartment. But she had seemed so subdued, so close to tears, walking on tiptoe, that he could hardly wait to get her away. Now she responded to the attention of the people at the other tables by a flurry of nervous excitement and hilarity. She ate her eclair greedily and had a fit of giggles when he suggested that that was not a good idea. He asked her, tentatively, about school, what she liked best.

"Football," she announced rather grandly to the world at large. The two women at the next table laughed. "I like knocking people down," she went on, intoxicated by her success.

"What else do you like?" He felt a change of subject to be imperative.

"Well," she considered, cocking her head on one side, "history, I guess, because we do plays. Did you ever see a Greek play, Daddy?"

"Did you?" she insisted, apparently fascinated by him now, turning on him the full intensity of the dark eyes, so like her mother (as indeed this whole performance had been, for Peggy's only kindness to him had been a form of ecstasy, as her cruelty had also been only the symptom of pain) that he looked away.

"Yes, I did once—" he said patiently to his plate.

"Did you like it?"

"Well, frankly, it seemed rather loud to me."

"At school we're not allowed to yell. It must be an awfully funny Greek play you saw." It was clear that she did not believe him.

"It was *Medea,*" he said defensively.

She seemed delighted. "Ours is *Iphigenia.* I am not Iphigenia," she announced with a shade of bitterness. "There's another girl."

"There's chocolate on your mouth," he said irritably. It was

the wrong thing. She was dreadfully embarrassed and looked as if she were going to cry. She did not wipe off the chocolate and he knew he must not mention it again.

"What shall we do now, Daddy?" she asked plaintively. "I've finished."

As usual he had no plan and was terrified. He called the waitress over for the check and fumbled for change. Then he had an idea.

"I know what we'll do," he announced gaily because he was so relieved to have an idea. "We'll go and get a present for mother and maybe a holiday present for you too. How does that sound?"

Then he was thankfully helping her on with her coat, propelling her to the door, and at last out onto the pavement where he licked his handkerchief and rubbed the chocolate off her mouth. "There, that's better."

She did not look at him, but walked by his side, sullen or aloof, he could not read her face. She seemed absorbed in avoiding the cracks in the pavement, actually giving a queer little hop whenever they came to a line in the cement. That seemed odd in a child with such dignity, and indeed had little relation to her thoughts, as was clear when she spoke. They were at Fifth Avenue waiting for the light to change. Then she said:

"Why is mother away?"

He was prepared for the question. "She's just very tired, Margaret. She has to rest."

"Why can't she rest at home?"

The light changed and they scuttled across the street, awkward together because of their different heights and different lengths of step.

"Well, there's the telephone," he said cautiously. "She needs absolute quiet. Look. There's Schwarz's!" He took her arm almost roughly and pulled her toward the windows where a huge stuffed rabbit was pulling a little cart full of flowers, and stuffed ducklings walked near a glass pond. Margaret, he noticed, was not looking at these; she was staring at herself reflected in the plate glass.

"If we get mother a present can we take it to her?"

"I think we'd better just send it. We can write on a card. It will be a surprise."

"She might like a rabbit," Margaret said with sudden enthusiasm. That was not the present Dexter Randall had in mind.

"Suppose we get a rabbit for you and then go across the street and find something very special for mother," he said placatingly.

"No," came the stubborn voice.

"Well, then, let's go in and see." He could feel the tension taking hold of him, just as it did when he was with Peggy.

But Margaret behaved very well in the store. She asked politely if she could see a large white rabbit. She explained that it was for her mother who was very tired. The clerk treated her with respect and only a flicker of amusement. A very large rabbit was set down before her.

"He looks cheerful," she said approvingly. The rabbit held a flannel carrot in its paws. Dexter Randall turned the price tag over and saw that the rabbit cost twenty dollars. "This is the right one, isn't it, Daddy?" She turned up to him a radiant smile.

"Well, perhaps something a little smaller—" he murmured with a hopeful glance at the clerk.

"I like this one," she said. For an instant he had the illusion that Peggy was there in the store, so exactly did the flat determined tone of voice resemble hers. In a moment, he knew, it would rise and finally it would scream at him.

"It's too expensive," he said, shortly.

Margaret was gazing at the rabbit. She appeared not to have heard.

For so long his deepest feeling had been anything for peace, that he almost did capitulate. He was putting his hand up to reach for his wallet, when it suddenly came over him with the blaze of revelation (as the obvious often does at moments of crisis) that after all Margaret was not Peggy. He did not have to placate her at all costs. She did not have up her sleeve the multiple punishments Peggy could always draw out and use because he loved her too much. At a pinch he could take Margaret over his knee and spank her! The thought dazzled him. For the first time he turned toward her with something like gentleness and said,

"Your mother wouldn't really like such an enormous rabbit, would she, honey?" And then to the clerk. "You must have a smaller edition around somewhere?"

No one hearing the gentle polite voice could have guessed what a declaration of independence it contained. Margaret did not guess it.

"I want this one, Daddy—*please*—" She pulled at his sleeve.

"No. I'm sorry, Margaret, but you can't have it."

"You're mean," she said with emphasis. "I hate you," she said, glaring at him, her face pink with rage. In a moment there would be tears, screams.

"I hate you too," Dexter Randall heard himself saying quite cheerfully. As he said it, just as if it had been the magic phrase in a fairy tale, he felt a screen slide away, the screen that had always stood between them, the screen of politeness, the screen

of what he thought he should feel instead of what he did feel. The relief was so great that he chuckled and then laughed out loud.

"Honey, let's give up this rabbit altogether," he said, still chuckling. "You know as well as I do that what your mother really wants is 'Joy,' the most expensive perfume in the world. We can get that across the street." Then he felt himself hugging with one arm the stiff resisting little body beside him, and felt it yield. "Let's run, quick, before that clerk gets back here with middle-sized rabbits."

Margaret was laughing now too, breathless with laughter and this time they scooted across Fifth Avenue without waiting for the light, their dissimiliar sizes and length of stride somehow amalgamated into a father and his queer, maddening, beloved little girl.

ANGUS WILSON

TOTENTANZ

THE NEWS of the Cappers' good fortune first became generally known at the Master's garden party. It was surprisingly well received, in view of the number of their enemies in the University, and for this the unusually fine weather was largely responsible. In their sub-arctic isolation, cut off from the main stream of Anglo-Saxon culture and its preferments, sodden with continual mists, pinched by perpetual north-east gales, kept always a little at bay by the natives with their self-satisfied homeliness and their smugly traditional hospitality, the dons and their wives formed a phalanx against spontaneous gaiety that would have satisfied John Knox himself. But rare though days of sunshine were, they transformed the town as completely as if it had been one of those scenes in a child's painting book on which you had only to sprinkle water for the brighter colours to emerge. The Master's lawns, surfeited with rain and mist, lay in flaunting spring green beneath the even deep blue of the July sky. The neat squares of the eighteenth-century burghers' houses and the twisted shapes of the massive grey lochside ruins recovered their designs from the blurring mists. The clumps of wallflowers, gold and copper, filling the crevices of the walls, seemed to mock the solemnity of the covenanting crows that croaked censoriously above them. The famous pale blue silk of the scholars' gowns flashed like silver airships beneath the deeper sky. On such a day even the most mildewed and disappointed of the professors, the most blue and deadening of their wives felt impulses of generosity, or at any rate a freedom from bitterness, that allowed them to rejoice at a fellow prisoner's release. Only the youngest and most naïve research students could be deceived by the sun into brushing the mould off their *own* hopes and ideals, but if others had found a way back to their aims, well, good luck to

them!—in any case the Cappers, especially Mrs. Capper, had only disturbed the general morass with their futile struggles and most people would be glad to see them go.

The Master's wife, always so eccentric in her large fringed cape, said in her deep voice, "It's come just in time. Just in time that is for Isobel."

"Just in time," squeaked little Miss Thurkill, the assistant French lecturer, "I should have thought any time was right for a great legacy like that," and she giggled, really the old woman said such odd, personal things.

"Yes, just in time," repeated the Master's wife, she prided herself on understanding human beings and lost no opportunity of expounding them. "A few months more and she would have rotted away."

In the wide opening between the points of his old-fashioned, high Gladstone collar, the Master's protrusive Adam's apple wobbled, gulped. In Oxford or Cambridge his wife's eccentricity would have been an assistance; up here, had he not known exactly how to isolate her, it might have been an embarrassment.

"How typical of women," he said in the unctuous but incisive voice that convinced so many business men and baillies that they were dealing with a scholar whose head was screwed on the right way. "How typical of women to consider only the legacy. Very nice of course, a great help in their new sphere." There was a trace of bitterness, for his own wife's fortune, so important when they had started, had vanished through his unfortunate investments. "But Capper's London Chair is the important thing. A new chair, too, Professor of the History of Technics and Art. Here, of course, we've come to accept so many of Capper's ideas into our everyday thoughts, as a result of his immense powers of persuasion and . . . and his great enthusiasm"—he paused, staring eagle-like beneath his bushy white eyebrows, the scholar who was judge of men—"that we forget how revolutionary some of them are." He had indeed the vaguest conception of anything that his subordinates thought, an administrator has to keep above detail. "No doubt there'll be fireworks, but I venture to suggest that Capper's youth and energy will win the day, don't you agree with me, Todhurst?"

Mr. Todhurst's white suet pudding face tufted with sandy hair was unimpressed. He was a great deal younger than Capper and still determined to remember what a backwater he was stranded in. "Capper's noot so young," he said, ostentatiously Yorkshire. "Maybe they'll have heard it all before, and happen they'll tell him so too."

But the Master was conveniently able to ignore Todhurst, for red-faced Sir George was approaching, the wealthiest,

most influential business man on the University Board. A tough and rough diamond with his Glaswegian accent and his powerful whiskied breath, Sir George was nevertheless impressed by the size of the legacy. "Five hundred thousand pounds." He gave a whistle. "That's no so bad a sum. Though, mind you, this Government of robbers'll be taking a tidy part of it away in taxation. But still I'm glad for the sake of his missus." Perhaps, he thought, Mrs. Capper would help in getting Margaret presented at Court. How little he knew Isobel Capper, his wife would not have made the mistake.

"And this magnificent appointment coming along at the same time," said the Master.

"Aye," said Sir George, he did not understand that so well, "there's no doubt Capper's a smart young chap." Perhaps, he thought, the Board has been a bit slow, the Master was getting on and they might need a level-headed warm young fellow.

"Oh, there they are," squeaked Miss Thurkill excitedly. "I must say Isobel certainly looks . . ." But she could find no words to describe Isobel's appearance, it was really so very outrée.

Nothing could have fitted Isobel Capper's combination of chic and Liberty artiness better than the ultra-smart dressing-gown effect of her New Look dress, the floating flimsiness of her little flowered hat. Her long stride was increased with excitement, even her thin white face had relaxed its tenseness and her amber eyes sparkled with triumph. Against the broad pink and black stripes of her elaborate, bustled dress, her red hair clashed like fire. She was a little impatient with the tail-end of an episode that she was glad to close, her mind was crowded with schemes, but still this victory parade, though petty and provincial, would be a pleasant start to a new life. Brian, too, looked nearer twenty than forty, most of his hard, boyish charm, his emphasized friendliness and sincerity had returned with the prospect of his new appointment. He tossed his brown curly hair back from his forehead as, loose-limbed, athletic, he leaped a deck chair to speak to Sir George. "Hope so very much to see something of you and Lady Maclean if all those company meetings permit." Before the Master he stood erect, serious, a little abashed. "So impossible to speak adequately of what I shall carry away from here . . ." There was no doubt that Brian was quite himself again. His even white teeth gleamed as he smiled at the Master's wife. To her he presented himself almost with a wink as the professional charmer, because after all she was not a woman you could fool. "The awful thing is that my first thought about it is for all the fun we're going to have." With Todhurst he shared their contempt for the backwater. "Not going to say I wish you'd got the appointment, because I don't. Besides kunstgeschichte, old man! you and I know what

a bloody fraud the whole thing is. Not that I don't intend to make something useful out of it all and that's exactly why I've got to pick your brains before I go South." It was really amazing, Isobel thought, how the news had revived him—alive, so terribly keen and yet modest withal, and behind everything steady as a rock, a young chap of forty, in fact, who would go far.

Her own method was far more direct, she had never shared her husband's spontaneous sense of salesmanship, at times even found it nauseating. There was no need to bother about these people any more and she did not intend to do so. "Silly to say we shall meet again, Sir George," she told him, before he could get round to asking. "It's only in the bonny North that the arts are conducted on purely business lines." Todhurst, like all the other junior dons, she ignored. "You must be so happy," said Jessie Colquhoun, the poetess of the lochs. "I shan't be *quite* happy," Isobel replied, "until we've crossed the Border." "Of *course* we shall lose touch," she said to the Master's wife, "but I'm not so pleased as you think I am." And really, she thought, if the old woman's eccentricity had not been quite so provincial and frowsty it might have been possible to invite her to London. Her especial venom was reserved for the Master himself. "Dear Mrs. Capper," he intoned. "What a tremendous loss you will be to us, and Capper, too, the ablest man on the Faculty." "I wonder what you'll say to the Board when they wake up to their loss, as I'm sure they will," replied Isobel. "It'll take a lot of explaining."

And yet the Master's wife was quite right, it was only just in time for both of them. Brian had begun to slip back badly in the last few years. His smile, the very centre of his charm, had grown too mechanical, gum recession was giving him an equine look. His self-satisfaction which had once made him so friendly to all—useful and useless alike—had begun to appear as heavy indifference. When he had first come North he had danced like a shadow-boxer from one group to another, making the powerful heady with praise, giving to the embittered a cherished moment of flattery, yet never committing himself; engaging all hearts by his youthful belief in Utopia, so much more acceptable because he was obviously so fundamentally sound. But with the years his smiling sincerity had begun to change to dogmatism; he could afford his own views and often they were not interesting, occasionally very dull. Younger colleagues annoyed him, he knew that they thought him out of date. Though he still wanted always to be liked, he had remained "a young man" too long to have any technique for charming the *really* young. Faced by their contempt he was often rude and sulky. The long apprenticeship in pleasing—the endless years of scholarships

and examinations, of being the outstanding student of the year —were now too far behind to guard him from the warping atmosphere of the town. Commonwealths and Harmsworths were becoming remote memories, the Dulwich trams of his schooldays, the laurel bushes of his suburban childhood were closer to him now than the dreams and ambitions of Harvard, Oxford and McGill. Had the chair come a year later he would probably have refused it. He had been such a success at thirty-three, it would have been easy to forget that at forty he was no longer an infant phenomenon.

If Brian had been rescued from the waters of Lethe in the nick of time, Isobel had been torn from the flames of hell. Her hatred of the University and the heat of her ambition had begun to burn her from within, until the strained, white face with cheekbones almost bursting through the skin and the over-intense eyes recalled some witch in death agonies. It did not take long for the superiority of her wit and taste to cease to bother a world in which they were unintelligible, depression and a lack of audience soon gave her irony a "governessy" flavour, until at last the legend of Mrs. Capper's sharp tongue had begun to bore her as much as others. The gold and white satin, the wooden Negro page of her Regency room had begun to fret her nerves with their shabbiness, yet it seemed pointless to furnish anew, even if she could have afforded it, for a world she so much despised. She made less and less pretence of reading or listening to music, and yet for months she would hardly stir outside. Everything that might have been successful in a more sophisticated society was misunderstood here: her intellectual Anglicanism was regarded as dowdy churchgoing, her beloved Caravaggio was confused with Greuze, her Purcell enthusiasm thought to be a hangover from the time when the "Beggar's Opera," was all the rage; she would have done far better, been thought more daring with Medici, van Goghs and some records of the Bolero. She had come to watch all Brian's habits with horror, his little provincial don's sarcasms, his tobacco-jarred, golfey homeliness, his habit of pointing with his pipe and saying: "Now hold on a minute. I want to examine this average man or woman of yours more carefully"; or "Anarchism, now that's a very interesting word, but are we *quite* sure we know what it means?" She became steadily more afraid of "going to pieces," knew herself to be toppling on the edge of a neurotic apathy from which she would never recover.

It was not surprising therefore that as she said good-bye for the third time to old Professor Green, who was so absent-minded, she blessed the waves that had sucked Aunt Gladys down in a confusion of flannel petticoats and straggling grey hair, or the realistic sailor who had cut Uncle Joseph's bony

fingers from the side of an overloaded lifeboat. She was rich, rich enough to realize her wildest ambitions; beside this Brian's professorship seemed of little importance. And yet in Isobel's growing schemes it had its place, for she had determined to storm London and she was quite shrewd enough to realize that she would never take that citadel by force of cash alone, far better to enter by the academic gate she knew so well.

By January six months of thick white mists and driving rain had finally dissipated the faint traces of July's charity, and with them all interest in the Cappers' fortunes. The Master's wife, dragged along by her two French bulldogs, was fighting her way through Aidan's arch against a battery of hail when she all but collided with Miss Thurkill returning from lunch at the British Restaurant. She would have passed on with a nod but Miss Thurkill's red fox-terrier nose was quivering with news.

"The Cappers' good fortune seems to have been quite a sell," she yelped. "They've got that great house of her uncle's on their hands."

"From all I hear about London conditions Pentonville prison would be a prize these days," boomed the Master's wife.

"Oh, but that isn't all. It's quite grisly," giggled Miss Thurkill. "They've got to have the bodies in the house for ever and ever. It's part of the conditions of the will."

Boredom had given the Master's wife a conviction of psychic as well as pychological powers and she suddenly "felt aware of evil."

"I was wrong when I said that silly little woman was saved in time. Pathetic creature with her cheap ambitions and her dressing-up clothes, she's in for a very bad time."

Something of the old woman's prophetic mood was communicated to Miss Thurkill and she found herself saying:

"I know. Isn't it horrible?"

For a moment they stood outlined against the grey stormy sky, the Master's wife, her great black mackintosh cape billowing out behind, like an evil bat, Miss Thurkill sharp and thin like a barking jackal. Then the younger woman laughed nervously.

"Well, I must rush on or I'll be drenched to the skin."

She could not hear the other's reply for the howling of the wind, but it sounded curiously like "Why not?"

Miss Thurkill was, of course, exaggerating wildly when she spoke of "bodies" in the house, because the bones of Uncle Joseph and Aunt Gladys were long since irrevocably Atlantic coral or on the way to it. But there was a clause in the will that

was troublesome enough to give Isobel great cause for anxiety in the midst of her triumphant campaign for power.

A very short time had been needed to prove that the Cappers were well on the way to a brilliant success. Todhurst had proved a false prophet, Brian had been received with acclamations in the London academic world, not only within the University, but in the smart society of the Museums and Art Galleries, and in the houses of rich connoisseurs, art dealers, smart sociologists and archaeologists with chic that lay around its periphery. It has to be remembered that many of those with Brian's peculiar brand of juvenile careerist charm were now getting a little passé and tired, while the post-war generation were somehow too total in outlook, too sure of their views to achieve the necessary flexibility, the required chameleon character. Brian might have passed unnoticed in 1935, in 1949 he appeared as a refreshing draught from the barbaric North. Already his name was current at the high tables of All Souls and King's—a man to watch. He talked on the Third Programme and on the Brains Trust—Isobel was a bit doubtful about this—he reviewed for smart weeklies and monthlies, he was commissioned to write a Pelican book.

Isobel was pleased with all this, but she aimed at something more than an academical sphere however chic—she was incurably romantic and over Brian's shoulder she saw a long line of soldier-mystics back from Persia, introvert explorers, able young Conservatives, important Dominicans, and Continental novelists with international reputations snatched from the jaws of O.G.P.U.—and at the centre, herself, the woman who counted. Brian's success would be a help, their money more so. For the moment her own role was a passive one, she was content if she "went down," and for this her chic Anglo-Catholicism—almost Dominican in theological flavour, almost Jesuit Counter Reformation in aesthetic taste—combined with her spiteful wit, power of mimicry and interesting appearance, sufficed. Meanwhile she was watching and learning, entertaining lavishly, being pleasant to everyone and selecting carefully the important few who were to carry them on to the next stage—the most influential people within their present circle, but not, and here she was most careful, people who were too many jumps ahead; they would come later. By the time that this ridiculous, this insane clause in the will had been definitely proved, she had already chosen the four people who must be cultivated.

First and most obviously Professor Cadaver, that long gaunt old man with his corseted figure, his military moustache and his almost too beautiful clothes; foremost of archaeologists, author of "Digging Up the Dead," "The Tomb My Treasurehouse" and "Where Grave Thy Victory?" It was not only the tomb of

the ancient world on which he was a final authority, for in the intervals between his expeditions to the Near East and North Africa, he had familiarized himself with all the principal cemeteries of the British Isles and had formed a remarkable collection of photographs of unusual graves. His enthusiasm for the ornate masonry of the nineteenth century had given him *réclame* among the devotees of Victorian art. He enthusiastically supported Brian's views on the sociological importance of burial customs, though he often irritated his younger colleague by the emphasis he seemed to lay upon the state of preservation of the bodies themselves. Over embalming in particular he would wax very enthusiastic—"Every feature, every limb preserved in their lifetime beauty," he would say, "and yet over all the odour of decay, the sweet stillness of death." A strange old man! For Isobel, too, he seemed to have a great admiration, he would watch her with his old reptilian eyes for hours on end—"What wonderful bone-structure," he would say; "one can almost *see* the cheek bones." "How few people one sees today, Mrs. Capper, with your perfect pallor, at times it seems almost livid."

Over Lady Maude she hesitated longer, there were so many old women—well-connected and rich—who were interested in art history and of these Lady Maude was physically the least propossessing. With her little myopic pig's eyes, her wide-brimmed hats insecurely pinned to falling coils of hennaed hair and her enormous body encased in musquash, she might have been passed over by any eye less sharp that Isobel's. But Lady Maude had been everywhere and seen everything. Treasures locked from all other Western gaze by Soviet secrecy or Muslim piety had been revealed to her. American millionaires had shown her masterpieces of provenance so dubious that they could not be publicly announced without international complications. She had spent many hours watching the best modern fakers at work. Her memory was detailed and exact, and though her eyesight was failing daily, her strong glasses still registered what she saw as though it had been photographed by the camera. Outside her knowledge of the arts she was intensely stupid and thought only of her food. This passionate greed she tried to conceal, but Isobel soon discovered it, and set out to win her with every delicacy that the Black Market could provide.

With Taste and Scholarship thus secured, Isobel began to cast about for a prop outside the smart academic world, a stake embedded deep in café society. The thorns that surrounded the legacy were beginning to prick. She still refused to believe that the fantastic, the wicked clause, could really be valid and had set all London's lawyers to refute it. But even so there were

snags. It was necessary, for example, that they should leave the large furnished flat which they had taken in Cadogan Street and occupy Uncle Joseph's rambling mansion in Portman Square, with its mass of miscellaneous middle-class junk assembled since 1890; so much the will made perfectly clear. The district, she felt, might do. But before the prospect of filling the house, and filling it correctly, with furniture, servants, and above all, guests, she faltered. It was at this moment that she met Guy Rice. Since coming to London she had seen so many beautiful pansy young men, all with the same standard voices, jargon, bow-ties and complicated hair-do's, that she tended now to ignore them. That some of them were important, she felt no doubt, but it was difficult to distinguish amid such uniformity and she did not wish to make a mistake. Guy Rice, however, decided to know *her*. He sensed at once her insecurity, her hardness and her determination. She was just the wealthy peg he needed on which to hang his great flair for pastiche, which he saw with alarm was in danger of becoming a drug on the market. Mutual robbery, after all, was fair exchange, he thought, as he watched her talking to a little group before the fire.

"I can never understand," she was saying, "why people who've made a mess of things should excuse themselves by saying that they can't accept authority. But then *I* don't think insanity's a very good plea." It was one of her favourite themes. Guy patted the couch beside him.

"Come and sit here, dearie," he said in the flat cockney whine he had always refused to lose—it was, after all, a distinction.

"You *do* try hard, dear, don't you? But you know it won't do." And then he proceeded to lecture and advise her on how to behave. Amazingly, Isobel did not find herself at all annoyed. As he said, "You could be so cosy, dear, if you tried, and that would be nice, wouldn't it? All this clever talk's very well, but what people want is a good old-fashioned bit of fun. What they want is parties, great big slap-up do's like we had in the old days," for Guy was a rather old young man. "Lots of fun, childish, you know, elaborate and a wee bit nasty; and you're just the girl to give it to them." He looked closely at her emaciated, white face. "The skeleton at the feast, dear, that's you."

Their rather surprising friendship grew daily—shopping, lunching, but mostly just sitting together over a cup of tea, for they both dearly loved a good gossip. He put her wise about everyone, hard-boiled estimates with a dash of good scout sentimentality—it was "I shouldn't see too much of them, dear, they're on the out. Poor old dears! They say they were ever such naughties once," or, "Cling on for dear life. She's useful.

Let her talk, duckie, that's the thing. She likes it. Gets a bit lonely sometimes, I expect, like we all do." He reassured her, too, about her husband.

"What do you think of Brian?" she had asked.

"Same as you do, dear. He bores me dizzy. But don't you worry, there's thousands love that sort of thing. Takes all sorts to make a world."

He put her clothes right for her, saying with a sigh, "Oh, Isobel, dear, you *do* look tatty," until she left behind that touch of outré-artiness that the Master's wife had been so quick to see. With his help she made a magnificent, if somewhat over-perfect, spectacle of the Portman Square Mansion. His knowledge of interior decoration was very professional and with enough money and rooms he let his love of pastiche run wild. He was wise enough to leave the show pieces—the Zurbaran, the Fragonard, the Samuel Palmers and the Bracques—to the Professor and Lady Maude, but for the rest he just let rip. There were Regency bedrooms, a Spanish Baroque dining room, a Second Empire room, a Victorian study, something amusing in Art Nouveau; but his greatest triumph of all was a large lavatory with tubular furniture, American cloth and cacti in pots. "Let's have a dear old pre-war lav in the nice old-fashioned Munich style," he had said and the Cappers, wondering, agreed.

On one point only did they differ, Isobel was adamant in favour of doing things as economically as possible, both she and Brian had an innate taste for saving. With this aspect of her life Guy refused to be concerned, but he introduced her to her fourth great prop—Tanya Mule.

"She's the biggest bitch unhung, duckie," he said, "but she'll touch propositions no one else will. She's had it all her own way ever since the war, when 'fiddling' began in a big way."

Mrs. Mule had been very beautiful in the style of Gladys Cooper, but now her face was ravaged into a million lines and wrinkles from which two large and deep blue eyes stared in dead appeal; she wore her hair piled up very high and coloured very purple; she always dressed in the smartest black of Knightsbridge with a collar of pearls. She was of the greatest help to Isobel, for although she charged a high commission, she knew every illegal avenue for getting servants and furniture and decorator's men and unrationed food; she could smell out bankruptcy over miles of territory and was always first at the sale; she knew every owner of objets d'art who was in distress and exactly how little they could be made to take. No wonder, then, that with four such allies Isobel felt sure of her campaign.

Suddenly, however, in the flush of victory the great blow struck her—the lawyers decided that the wicked, criminal luna-

tic clause in Uncle Joseph's will must stand. Even Brian was forced up from beneath his life of lectures, and talks, and dinners to admit that the crisis was serious. Isobel was in despair. She looked at the still unfurnished drawing-room—they had decided on Louise Treize—and thought of the horrors that must be perpetrated there. Certainly the issue was too big to be decided alone, they must call a council of their allies.

Isobel paced up and down in front of the great open fire as she talked, pulling her cigarette out of her tautened mouth and blowing quick angry puffs of smoke. She looked now at the Zurbaran friar with his ape and his owl, now at the blue and buff tapestried huntsmen who rode among the fleshy nymphs and satyrs, occasionally she glanced at Guy as he lay sprawled on the floor, twirling a Christmas rose, but never at Brian, or Lady Maude, Mrs. Mule or the Professor as they sat upright on their high-backed tapestried chairs. "I had hoped never to have to tell you," she said. "Of course, it's absolutely clear that Uncle Joseph and Aunt Gladys were completely insane at the time when the will was made, but apparently the law doesn't care about that. Oh! it's so typical of a country where sentimentalism reigns supreme without regard for God's authority or even for the Natural law for that matter. A crazy, useless old couple, steeped in some nonconformist nonsense, decide on an act of tyrannous interference with the future and all the lawyers can talk about is the liberty of an Englishman to dispose of his money as he wishes. Just because of that, the whole of our lives—Brian's and mine—are to be ruined, we're to be made a laughingstock. Just listen to this: 'If the great Harvester should see fit to gather my dear wife and me to Him when we are on the high seas or in any other manner by which our mortal remains may not be recovered for proper Christian burial and in places where our dear niece and nephew, or under God, other heirs may decently commune with us and in other approved ways show us their respect and affection, then I direct that two memorials, which I have already caused to be made, shall be set in that room in our house in Portman Square in which they entertain their friends, that we may in some way share, assist and participate in their happy pastimes. This is absolutely to be carried out, so that if they shall not agree the whole of our estate shall pass to the charities hereinafter named.' And that," Isobel cried, "*that* is what the law says we shall have to do." She paused, dramatically waving the document in the air. "Well," said Guy, "I'm not partial to monuments myself, but they can be very nice, Isobel dear." "Nice," cried Isobel, "nice. Come and look"; and she threw open the great double doors into the drawing-room. The little party followed her solemnly.

It was perfectly true that the monuments could not be called nice. In the first place they were each seven feet high. Then they were made in white marble—not solid mid-Victorian, something could have been done with that; nor baroque, with angels and gold trumpets, which would have been better still. They were in the most exaggeratedly simple modern good taste by an amateur craftsman, a long way after Eric Gill. "My dear," said Guy, "they're horrors"; and Lady Maude remarked that they were not the kind of thing one ever wanted to see. The lettering, too, was bold, modern and very artful—one read "Joseph Briggs. Ready at the call," and the other "Gladys Briggs. Steel true, blade straight, the Great Artificer made my mate." Professor Cadaver was most distressed by them. "Really, without *any*thing in them," he kept on saying. "Nothing, not even ashes. It all seems most unfortunate." He appeared to feel that a great opportunity had been missed. No one had any suggestion to make. Mrs. Mule knew the names of many crooked lawyers and even a criminal undertaker, but this did not seem to be quite in their line. Lady Maude privately thought that as long as the dining room and kitchen could function there was really very little reason for anxiety. They all stood about in gloom, when suddenly Guy cried, "What did you say the lawyers were called?" "Robertson, Naismith and White," said Isobel, "but it's no good, we've gone over all that." "Trust little Guy, dear," said her friend. Soon his voice could be heard excitedly talking over the telephone. He was there for more than twenty minutes, they could hear little of what he said, though once he screamed rather angrily, "Never said I did say I did say I did," and at least twice he cried petulantly, "Aow, pooh!" When he returned he put his hand on Isobel's shoulder. "It's all right, ducks," he said. "I've fixed it. Now we can all be cosy and that's nice, isn't it?" Sitting tailor-wise on the floor, he produced his solution with reasonable pride. "You see," he said, "it only says in the will 'set in that room in which they entertain their friends.' But it doesn't say you need entertain with those great horrors in the room more than once, and after a great deal of tiresome talk those lawyers have agreed that I'm right. For that one entertainment we'll build our setting round the horrors, Isobel dear, everything morbid and ghostly. Your first big reception, duckie, shall be a Totentanz. It's just the sort of special send-off you need. After that, pack the beastly things off, and presto, dear, back to normal."

The Totentanz was Isobel's greatest, alas! her last, triumph. The vast room was swathed in black and purple, against which the huge white monuments and other smaller tombstones specially designed for the occasion stood out in bold relief. The

waiters and barmen were dressed as white skeletons or elaborate Victorian mutes with black ostrich plumes. The open fireplace was arranged as a crematorium fire, and the chairs and tables were coffins made in various woods. Musical archives had been ransacked for funeral music of every age and clime. A famous Jewish contralto wailed like the ghetto, an African beat the tomtom as it is played at human sacrifices, an Irish tenor made everyone weep with his wake songs. Supper was announced by "The Last Post" on a bugle and hearses were provided to carry the guests home.

Some of the costumes were most original. Mrs. Mule came tritely but aptly enough as a Vampire. Lady Maude with her hair screwed up in a handkerchief and dressed in a shapeless gown was strikingly successful as Marie Antoinette shaved for the guillotine. Professor Cadaver dressed up as a Corpse Eater was as good as Boris Karloff; he clearly enjoyed every minute of the party, indeed his snake-like slit eyes darted in every direction at the many beautiful young women dressed as corpses and his manner became so incoherent and excited before he left that Isobel felt quite afraid to let him go home alone. Guy had thought at first of coming as Millais's Ophelia, but he remembered the harm done to the original model's health and decided against it. With flowing hair and marbled features, however, he made a very handsome "Suicide of Chatterton." Isobel thought he seemed a little melancholy during the evening, but when she asked him if anything was wrong he replied quite absently, "No, dear, nothing really. Half in love with easeful death, I s'pose. I mean all this fun *is* rather hell when it comes to the point, isn't it?" But when he saw her face cloud, he said, "Don't you worry, ducks, you've arrived," and, in fact, Isobel was too happy to think of anyone but herself. For many hours after the last guests had departed, she sat happily chipping away at the monuments with a hammer. She sang a little to herself: "I've beaten you, Uncle and Auntie dear, I hope it's the last time you'll bother us here."

Guy felt very old and weary as he let himself into his one-roomed luxury flat. He realized that Isobel would not be needing him much longer, soon she would be on the way to spheres beyond his ken. There were so many really young men who could do his stuff now and they didn't get bored or tired in the middle like he did. Suddenly he saw a letter in the familiar, uneducated handwriting lying on the mat. He turned giddy for a moment and leaned against the wall. It would be impossible to go on finding money like this for ever. Perhaps this time he could get it from Isobel, after all she owed most of her success to him, but it would hasten the inevitable break with her. And even if he had the courage to settle this, there were so many

more demands in different uneducated hands, so much more past sentimentalism turned to fear. He lay for a long time in the deep green bath, then sat in front of his double mirror to perform a complicated routine with creams and powders. At last he put on a crimson and white silk dressing gown and hung his Chatterton wig and costume in the wardrobe. He wished so much that Chatterton were there to talk to. Then going to the white painted medicine cupboard, he took out his bottle of luminal. "In times like these," he said aloud, "there's nothing like a good old overdose to pull one through."

Lady Maude enjoyed the party immensely. The funeral baked meats were delicious and Isobel had seen that the old lady had all she wanted. She sat on the edge of her great double bed, with her grey hair straggling about her shoulders, and swung her thick white feet with their knobbly blue veins. The caviare and chicken mayonnaise and Omelette Surprise lay heavy upon her, but she found, as usual, that indigestion only made her the more hungry. Suddenly she remembered the game pie in the larder. She put on her ancient padded pink dressing gown and tiptoed downstairs—it would not do for the Danbys to hear her, servants could make one look so foolish. But when she opened the larder, she was horrified to find that someone had forestalled her, the delicious, rich game pie had been removed. The poor, cheated lady was not long in finding the thief. She padded into the kitchen and there, seated at the table, noisily guzzling the pie, was a very young man with long fair hair, a red and blue checked shirt and white silk tie with girls in scarlet bathing costumes on it; he looked as though he suffered from adenoids. Lady Maude had read a good deal in her favourite newspapers about spivs and burglars so that she was not greatly surprised Had he been in the act of removing the silver, she would have fled in alarm, but as it was she felt nothing but anger. Her whole social foundation seemed to shake beneath the wanton looting of her favourite food. She immediately rushed towards him, shouting for help. The man—he was little more than a youth and very frightened—struck at her wildly with a heavy iron bar. Lady Maude fell backwards upon the table, almost unconscious and bleeding profusely. Then the boy completely lost his head and, seizing up the kitchen meat axe, with a few wild strokes he severed her head from her body. She died like a queen.

Only the moon lit the vast spaces of Brompton Cemetery, showing up here a tomb and there a yew tree. Professor Cadaver's eyes were wild and his hands shook as he glided down the central pathway. His head still whirled with the fumes of the party and a thousand beautiful corpses danced before his eyes. An early underground train rattled in the distance and he

hurried his steps. At last he reached his objective—a freshly dug grave on which wooden planks and dying wreaths were piled. The Professor began feverishly to tear these away, but he was getting old and neither his sight nor his step was as sure as it had been, he caught his foot in a rope and fell nine or ten feet into the tomb. When they found him in the morning his neck was broken. The papers hushed up the affair, and a Sunday newspaper in an article entitled "Has Science the Right?" only confused the matter by describing him as a professor of anatomy and talking obscurely of Burke and Hare.

It was the end of Isobel's hopes. True, Mrs. Mule still remained to play the vampire, but without the others she was as nothing. Indeed, the position for Isobel was worse than when she arrived in London, for it would take a long time to live down her close association with the Professor and Guy. Brian was a little nonplussed at first, but there was so much to do at the University that he had little time to think of what might have been. He was now the centre of a circle of students and lecturers who listened to his every word. As Isobel's social schemes faded, he began to fill the house with his friends. Sometimes she would find him standing full square before the Zurbaran pointing the end of his pipe at a party of earnest young men sitting bolt upright on the tapestried chairs. "Ah," he would be saying jocosely, "but you haven't yet proved to me that your famous average man or woman is anything but a fiction," or, "But look here, Wotherspoon, you can't just throw words like 'beauty' or 'formal design' about like that. We must define our terms." Once she discovered a tobacco pouch and a Dorothy Sayers's detective novel on a tubular chair in the "dear old lav." But if Brian had turned the house into a W.E.A. lecture centre, Isobel would not have protested now. Her thoughts were too much with the dead. She sat all day in the vast empty drawing-room, where the two great monuments threw their giant shadows over her. Here she would smoke an endless chain of cigarettes and drink tea off unopened packing cases. Occasionally she would glance up at the inscriptions with a look of mute appeal, but she never seemed to find an answer. She made less and less pretence of reading and listening to good music, and yet for months on end would hardly stir from the house.

A faint April sun shone down upon the wet pavements of the High Street, casting a faint and melancholy light upon the pools of rain that had gathered here and there among the cobblestones. It was a deceptive gleam, however, for the wind was piercingly cold. Miss Thurkill drew her B.A. gown tightly around her thin frame as she emerged from the lecture hall and hurried off to the Heather Café. Turning the corner by

Strachan's bookshop, she saw the Master's wife advancing upon her. Despite the freezing weather, the old lady moved slowly, for the bitter winter's crop of influenza and bronchitis had weakened her heart; she seemed now as fat and waddling as her bulldogs.

"Did you get the London appointment?" she shouted; it was a cruel question, for she knew already the negative reply. "Back to the tomb, eh?" she went on. "Ah well! at least we know we're dead here."

Miss Thurkill giggled nervously. "London didn't seem very alive," she said. "I went to see the Cappers, but I couldn't get any reply. The whole house seemed to be shut up."

"Got the plague, I expect," said the Master's wife; "took it from here," and as she laughed to herself, she crouched forward like some huge, squat toad.

"Isobel certainly hasn't been the success she supposed," hissed Miss Thurkill, writhing like a malicious snake. "Well, I shall catch my death of cold if I stay here," she added, and hurried on.

The old lady's voice came to her in the gale that blew down the street: "No one would notice the difference," it seemed to cry.

WILLIAM B. SEABROOK

THE SALAMANDER

FOR WEEKS Artur had not left his rooms. Every day the janitor deposited outside his door the little food he required. Sometimes he opened the door after the janitor had gone away. Frequently he forgot. He had explained that he was working and did not want to be disturbed. No one else knew where he was, so he was secure from interruption.

But he was not working. He had not been able to write since he had come out of the hospital. He was waiting for the salamander. He knew that sooner or later the salamander would come to him, but he was not afraid. He knew that when it came, it would either transform itself into a demon woman who would glide out of the flames and consume him in her ardent embraces; or it would retain its natural shape, which is that of a small serpent-like lizard, and after communicating to him a certain spark of fire, would disappear by crawling back into the heart of the glowing coals.

Part of this Artur had learned from an old book of Rosicrucian mysteries, but most of it he had reasoned out for himself while he lay in the hospital recovering from fever. He was sure that the salamander's gift to him would be the divine spark, for already in his brain there smoldered a little fire which awaited only the serpent's breath to burst into pure white flame.

Sometimes his head ached and bright specks danced before his eyes. When this occurred, his brain played strange tricks. The interior of his skull became a vast arena, in an amphitheatre. In the center, on a tripod, flickered a tiny flame which was his soul. And locked in a death struggle before this tripod were a Woman and a Serpent, bright lithe limbs and brighter scaly coils interlocked and writhing . . . Woman and Serpent . . . Folly and Wisdom . . . Madness and Genius, contending there for his immortal soul . . . wrestling to the death in the amphitheatre of his brain.

Not often, however, was he obsessed by such phantasies. Most of the time his mind was logical and clear. He had only to wait patiently. The salamander would appear. And his high destiny would be accomplished.

So every night he piled wood in the open fireplace and kept vigil before the flames. When the embers turned gray at dawn he went to bed.

It was on one of these mornings, just before daybreak, when the embers were beginning to burn low, that he first saw the salamander. But the strange part of it was that the salamander was not in the fire. His rooms were in one of those old mansions still unrazed in the slums of lower Manhattan; dilapidated and dirty, fallen from their high estate and cut up into tenement apartments. Their worn doorways are sometimes of astonishing architectural beauty, and even the interiors, despite alterations and the wear and tear of time, often retain traces of their former dignity and grandeur. In the room where Artur sat the plaster was broken in places from the walls, and the ceiling was cracked and stained; but the room was large and the ceiling was high, higher than the ceilings are built nowadays in the finest modern apartments, and around this ceiling there still ran an elaborate old rococo cornice of white plaster—a formal design, in high relief, of swirling vines and scroll-like leaves.

Weary of staring for long hours into the fire, and convinced that the salamander would not appear that night (the dawn was already beginning to outline the high windows) he had thrown himself back in his chair and was watching the flickering lights and shadows as they played on the walls and ceiling, in and out among the curves and crannies of the cornice. Suddenly one of the curled acanthus leaves began to glow faintly and unfold. A luminous lizard wriggled from its depths and poised itself for an instant on the edge of the cornice. Artur stared—and it was gone. He had seen it. Of this he was sure. But he was not certain whether the salamander had seen him. At any rate, nothing more had happened.

Later, in the November dawn, as he lay sleepless on his bed, he began to wonder if the thing had not been a hallucination, or even something worse. Either there was a salamander hidden in the cornice of his room, behind the acanthus leaves, or he was going mad. One point, however, was clear; if the salamander were really up there in the cornice, it was useless to look for it any longer in the fire. But how could he make sure? If a salamander were an ordinary creature like a mouse or a rat, it might be possible to entice it from its hiding place . . . even to trap it. . . . After all, why not? Such a thing might be possible, if one knew how to go about it . . . seriously. . . .

Presently he fell into a broken sleep, dreaming of setting traps to catch salamanders.

The following afternoon he went out, for the first time in nearly a month, and returned with three packages wrapped in paper, hidden under his overcoat. The largest was a wire rat trap, a basket-like affair with a small round opening in one end, guarded on the inside with a circle of sharp barbed points, arranged so as to make entrance easy and exit impossible. The other two packages were a small box of absorbent cotton and a bottle of wood alcohol.

That night Artur lighted no fire in the hearth. Instead, he placed the wire trap on the floor in the center of the room, in the pitch-black darkness, baited with a tightly wadded ball of absorbent cotton soaked in alcohol, which he carefully lighted. After watching the bluish flame for a moment, he tiptoed into his alcove bedroom and with the curtains drawn lay down to wait. All day long he had been moving in a dazed fever of suppressed excitement, and it had not occurred to him to take any food. He was surprised now that he felt so lightheaded and weary. As he lay on his bed his body seemed to be floating motionless in space, without energy or movement. Now his mind was floating too . . . calm . . . light as a feather . . . floating . . . in space and silence. . . .

He was aroused by a sharp sound . . . a scream. From the other room, through the hangings, came a faint ruddy glow. He rose, trembling, and parted the curtains. In the center of the floor, with the glow radiating from it, was the wire trap. But it was strangely larger than he remembered it . . . it was as large as a bushel basket. And crouching, imprisoned in the trap, with the wire bars pressing tightly against her flesh, was a beautiful woman. Her body was rosy, luminous. The wires encircled her so cruelly that she could scarcely move. She was moaning piteously and begging in a voice of agonized sweetness to be released. Artur moved toward her—but stopped in terror, for he saw that her breasts were pressed against the pointed barbs, and that from the wounds, instead of blood, were trickling little streams of fire! She was not a mortal woman, but a demon. He knew that if he freed her he would be consumed to ashes in her fiery embrace. He knew that he must kill her, if he could, while she was still captive in the cage. She was struggling now, straining with all the force of her cramped body against the taut wires. He would have to be quick! He remembered that there was a long curved paper knife on his writing table. He moved toward it. But it was too late. The wires of the cage were turning red! They were bending . . . breaking . . . she was free!

Rising to her full height, terrible, naked, beautiful, with the little streams of fire still trickling from her breasts, she came with outstretched arms toward him. He could feel her breath . . . her arms reaching to encircle him . . . already his own body was on fire . . . her burning lips. . . .

Artur escaped from this fiery, erotic vision trembling and covered with perspiration. He was in a high fever. And the room was cold. Everything was in black darkness. From beyond the curtains, not a flicker of light. He groped his way blindly into the other room, found matches and a candle. The little wire tray lay empty in the center of the floor. The ball of cotton was burned to a charred crisp. The acanthus leaves in the cornice were cold, white, motionless.

The next morning he was still feverish and a little delirious. Yet it seemed to him that his mind was singularly clear. He realized now as he lay in bed, thinking, that he might be mistaken about the salamander. Perhaps there was no salamander in the cornice; no demon woman either. Perhaps it had all been an illusion of his distorted mind. Perhaps there were no such things as a salamander, no such thing as a divine spark.

Somewhere in the back of his brain an absurd sentence began to form itself, a sentence which he had long ago heard, or read, while seated (it seemed to him) with a Capuchin monk in the kitchen of a queen. "My son, I am fifty years of age; I am a bachelor of arts and a doctor of theology; I have read all the Greek and Latin authors who have survived the injury done by time and the evil done by men, and I have never seen a salamander, whence I reasonably conclude that no such thing exists."

As he lay and slowly repeated the forgotten sentence, he was seized by a spasm of rage. "God damn all bachelors of arts and doctors of theology!" he screamed aloud. "If salamanders no longer exist, it is because these men have murdered them!"

After this outburst he lay quiet for a while, pondering. If the bachelors of arts and doctors of theology were right—if they were right about anything—clearly it was useless to go on living. It required no genius to see that, quite independently of the question of salamanders. But was there or was there not a salamander in the cornice? It was absolutely necessary to know. But how? He was thinking quite sanely now, he believed, and presently he began to formulate a plan—a plan that was simple and could not fail.

That afternoon he went out again, and when he returned he carried two heavy cans of kerosene. He chose an hour when he knew the janitor would be in the basement. No one saw him leave or enter the house. He remembered that kindling and firewood were stored in the basement. It would be well to

bring up a few armfuls later, in case his furniture was not sufficient. Meanwhile he would lie down and rest. He was quite tired and ill.

A little after dark he arose, lighted the gas, and began to work. But it was nearly midnight before his preparations were completed. The fire mounted quicker and more fiercely than he had anticipated. The brightness and roaring frightened him a little, but he stood with his arms shielding the lower part of his face, steadfastly watching the acanthus leaves. The flames were licking the wall, running along the cornice, spreading over the ceiling. Now the acanthus leaves began to writhe and glow. His eyes were smarting painfully and the smoke was beginning to hurt his lungs. He was growing dizzy. He felt that in a moment he would fall. But there, out of the glowing foliage, out of the heart of the flames, the salamander was coming, coming to him at last. And with transfigured face, with outstretched arms, he went to the fulfillment of his dreams.

DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER

THE MURDER ON JEFFERSON STREET

WITH its low, bungalow-style, stucco cottages, and its few high old-fashioned clapboarded houses, Jefferson Street looked like any side street in the less expensive part of any American large-town, small-city. And it was like any one of them. Like all collections of human habitations, everywhere, its roofs sheltered complex and unstable beings, perilously feeling their way, step by step, along the knife-edge narrow path of equilibrium that winds across the morasses and clings to the precipitous cliffs of life.

Mrs. Benson, the slender, middle-aged, well-bred widow who had moved to Jefferson Street because it was cheap, was the only one of them—as yet—whose foot had slipped too far from the path for recovery. With her every breath since her husband's death, she had slid down towards that gray limbo of indifference in which all things look alike. She was lost and she knew it; but as she fell, she grasped at anything that could hold her for a little longer; till her daughter grew up. At fourteen, Helen, plain, virtuous, intelligent, charmless, needed all the help she could get, if she were to have even a small share of the world's satisfaction.

Although Mrs. Benson went through the normal manoeuvres of life, speaking, smiling, asking and answering questions, her secret aloofness from what other people prized was, of course, obscurely felt by the people around her. It was both felt and feared by the Warders, who were her next-door neighbors. It was one of the many things that made them feel insecure in Jefferson Street life. They felt everything, feared everything, started back at the snapping of a twig, all their senses strained like those of nervous explorers cautiously advancing, hand on cocked trigger, into an unknown jungle. For they were undertaking a hazardous feat compared to which hunting big game

or living among hostile savages is sport for children. They were moving from one social class to the one above it.

Their family (as far as Jefferson Street knew it) was made up of Bert Warder, his wife, their daughter Imogene and a brother Don, employed in a bank in Huntsville. But this presentable floe, visible above the white-collar surface was the smallest part of the tribe. Below it was a great substructure, sunk deep in the ocean of manual work—overalled uncles who were factory-hands, drab, stringy-necked aunts who "worked out," brothers who were garage mechanics, sisters who sold over the counters of ten-cent stores. Only Bert and his bank-clerk brother Don sat at desks with pens in their hands. Bert like most of the men who lived on Jefferson Street, was an employee of the great Stott McDevitt Electric Company. His desk there felt to him like a pedestal. His bungalow-home was another. To the occasional Packard car which, trying to locate a dressmaker or a trained nurse, sometimes purred into it and rolled noiselessly out, Jefferson Street looked plebian and small-employee-ish enough. For Bert Warder and his wife, brought up in tenement houses in a black brutally industrial city, Jefferson Street was patrician with its small lawns, its shade trees, its occasional flowerbeds, above all, its leisure-class tennis courts on the two vacant lots at the end. They could hardly believe that Bert's night-school-educated brains had lifted them to such a height. The watchful tips of their antennae soon told them that in the class into which they were transferring themselves it was considered no notable feat to live in a home with a yard, so they took care to speak of the street as other people did, with amused condescension for its humbleness; but in reality they all three worshipped it, admired, feared and tried to imitate its inhabitants, lived in dread that something from their past might cast them out from it, and did what we all do, passionately collected their neighbors' weak points as potential ammunition with which to resist attacks on their own. They would have fought to the death against a threat to their social standing on the street—as indeed they did, quite literally, when they felt themselves so threatened.

Tautly on the look-out as they were, they naturally felt that Mrs. Benson's pre-occupied good manners might be intended as a reflection on their own, and suspected that the Tuttles (neighbors on the other side) looked down on them and on Jefferson Street. There was nothing definite in Francis and Mary Tuttle around which this suspicion could crystallize. It was everything. In their every contact with the Tuttles, the Warders uneasily felt the need to make an effort towards more ease, pleasantness, reticence and quietness than was natural to

them. It was fatiguing. And they were never sure they had quite caught the new tune.

Yet, as a matter of fact, the Tuttles did not look down on Jefferson Street but were as glad to live there as the Warders. And, exactly like the Warders, had escaped to it from a life they shuddered to look back on. It was true, as Bert Warder's quiveringly suspicious nose for class differences told him, that both Francis and Mary his wife had been brought up in a house grander than any Bert had ever set foot in, and that Francis' youth (which he mentioned as little as Bert mentioned his) had been spent not with hired girls and factory hands but with Senators and Bank Presidents. But his past had something else in it—misery and failure, and a period of total black eclipse such as the vigorous Bert had never dreamed of. Francis thought of his past as seldom as possible. Till Mary had dragged him up out of the morass of self-contempt in which he lay, already half drowned, and set his feet beside hers on the knife-edge narrow path of equilibrium, he had taken for granted that his failure in life was inevitable, was because he was an all-around misfit. Living with her he had begun to hope that perhaps it was only his family he did not fit. He said—he thought—"family." What he meant was "brother." Away from Roger there might be a place for him in the world, after all, he began to hope.

When Mary thought of that past, as wretched for her as for Francis, it was to Francis' mother not his brothers, she cried, "Shame on you! Shame!" His mother had long been dead but no tombstone could hide her from Mary's wrath. In the old bad days when both sons were little boys, and the mother's favoritism was at its maddest worst, people used to say, if they noticed Francis at all, "It's hard on an ordinary boy, and rather a weakling at that, to have such a successful older brother. Doesn't give him a chance, really." But Mary knew that Roger was not the one to blame for the tragedy of their relation. She had thought him stub-fingered and tiresome, the sort of successful person who bores sensitive and intelligent ones; but living as she did—mouselike invisible poor relative—close to both of them, she had always known that Roger felt wistful and clumsy beside Francis' accurate rightness of taste, and that he had even a dim divination of Francis' exquisite undeveloped gift. No, part of Roger's exasperating rightness was that he had never accepted his mother's over-valuation. The older brother had steadily tried to be friendly; but Francis' mother had early conditioned the younger to see in any friendliness from anyone only a contemptuous pity for his own ineptitude. "You, *you!*" cried Mary ragingly to the woman in her grave. "Before your little poet-son could walk alone, you had shut him into the

black vault with your stupid admiration of Roger's commonplace successses, your stupid notion that Francis' fineness was weakness. And every year you added another padlock to the door. What strange hateful mania possessed you, you wicked woman with your mean perverted bullying . . . " Whenever another bitter adjective came into her mind she said all this and more to Francis' dead mother, ending triumphantly, "But *I* know what he is and I've always known—a poet, a spirit so fine and true that just to breathe the air with him lifts an ordinary human being to nobility! I, the little poor young cousin-drudge you never noticed, I married a broken man, and he's a whole man now—or will be soon. I've given him children who adore him, *who depend on him!* And I depend on him. He earns their living and mine. He's escaped from the rôle of defeated weakling you bullied him into. He creates happiness and knows it! He's coming to life. And every day I bury *you* a little deeper, thank God!"

Never a word of this did she say to Francis. He did not recognize personal resentment as one of the permissible elements in life. Not in his life. It belonged in a lower, meaner world than his. Mary had climbed through the keyhole of his vault, had triumphantly thrown open the door and led him out to happiness, without letting him hear a single reproach to his mother or brother at which his magnanimity could take fright. She knew magnanimity to be the air he must breathe or die. It was part of what she adored in him, part of what she loved in the world he shared with her. But she did not practise it in her own thoughts. Francis, she knew, would have cut his hand off before he would have admitted even to himself that the smallest part of his passionate delight in the twins came from the knowledge that Roger's brilliant marriage was childless, and that he had—at last—something that Roger envied. She felt no such scruples. Hugging her babies to her, she often revelled, unabashed, in happy savagery, "You dumb conspicuous go-getter, you haven't anything like *this* in your expensive empty house!" Sometimes in reaction from the loftiness of Francis' ideals she thought, "Why can't he *be* unfair like anybody, and hate Roger, even if Roger's not to blame? It's nature. Who but Francis could feel guilty—not over *being* unfair, but over the mere temptation to be not angelically just. It'd do him good to let himself go."

But she did not believe this. "He couldn't let himself go into unfairness like just anybody," she thought, "for he's not just anybody. He's a poet with a poet's fineness of fibre. And about the only civilized being on the globe."

So there was Jefferson Street; its low bungalows, its awk-

ward high older houses with the jigsaw ornamentation filled with people who day by day, set one foot before the other along the knife-edge narrow path that ran—for the Warders across a treacherous black bog, for the Tuttles along the face of a cliff with crashing breakers below, for the others here and there, high and low, as Fate decreed. Nothing happened. Mrs. Benson was the only one who had lost the path. And she sank but slowly towards here final fall. Three years went by. Her daughter was a Senior, getting high marks; unnoticed by the boys. Bert Warder had held his job, not yet realizing that he would never do more than hold it, would never get any higher; only beginning to feel aggrieved because other men were stepped up over his head. He had also, with what sweating pains and secret study nobody would know, learned to play tennis without betraying that he had never before held a racket in his hand. Imogene Warder had passed her examinations—well, nearly all—and was, with some conditions, a Senior in the high school, intensively noticed by a certain kind of boy. Francis Tuttle had not only held his job and had had two raises in salary, but had learned to grow roses. His June garden now made him catch his breath. And he had written a little shy and beautiful poetry. Poetry not verse. "Give me three years more," cried Mary his wife to Fate. "Give me only *two* more, and he'll be safe." The exquisite happiness Francis gave her and gave their children even softened her heart towards his mother. Once she thought—just once!— "Why, perhaps she was a victim too. Some one may have hurt her in childhood as she hurt Francis, hurt her desperately, so that her will to live was all warped into the impulse to hurt back."

Yes, just once, Mary had a moment of divination and guessed that the will to hurt comes by subterranean ways from pain and fear not from malignancy.

It was but a flash. A partial guess, so weak and new-born a beginning of understanding, that it had no more than an instant's universal life before Mary, frightened by a glimpse at the vicious circle of the human generations, seized it and made it personal, "Oh yes—horrors!—of course if Francis were still sick with that self-hating Roger-obsession, he couldn't help making the children wretched with it, one way or another. And when they grew up, they would pass it on to *their* children . . . ."

She looked across the room at Francis and the twins, wrestling together on the couch, wildly, happily, breathlessly laughing, and thought contentedly, "Well, there's *one* misery that won't be handed on. His hurt is all but healed."

Leaning on her sword she stood, negligently smiling, at the gate of the garden where Francis grew poetry and roses, from which she had walled his demon out.

II

And then, one day four years after the Warders had moved to Jefferson Street, Fate unheeding Mary's appeal for only a little longer respite, rode in on the bicyle of the evening newspaper boy, flinging up on each front porch the usual hard-twisted roll of trivial and ugly news. But this time, among the ugly items was a headlined statement about the arrest of one Donald Warder in Huntsville. He had been stealing from the bank he worked for, it seemed; had been playing the races; spending money on fancy women; he would probably get a long term in the penitentiary.

When Bert Warder walked across his front porch on his way home from the office that April afternoon, he was wondering resentfully why dumb-bells like Frankie Tuttle got one raise after another, while he with three times Frankie's pep just barely held his own, with frequent callings-down. "But I can beat hell out of him at tennis, anyhow." He applied his tried-and-true old remedy to his soreness and felt the pain abating. The evening paper was still lying in front of the screen door. He stooped, picked it up, glanced at the headlines.

Although the news took him so by surprise as to leave him stunned, his body acted as bodies do when left to themselves, in obedience to the nature of the soul dwelling in them. He rushed into the house, shut the front door, locked it and jerked down the shades of the front windows. His wife and daughter stared at him surprised. "Look here! Look here!" he said in a strangled voice, and beckoned them to read the headlines.

They read the news together, dropped the paper, looked at each other in despair. The same thought was in them all—if only they need never open that door, if only they could leave town that night, never again be seen by anybody on Jefferson Street. For they knew that as they stood there, all their neighbors up and down the street were opening screen doors, taking in the paper. And, knowing what their own exclamations would have been, had those headlines referred to some one's else brother, they cowered before the gloating, zestful comments they could almost literally hear, "Say, that must be Bert Warder's brother, Don. What-do-you-know-about-that? Well, *well* —maybe we'll have a little less kidding from Bert about our Harvey's being suspended from high school." "Why, look here, I see in the paper where Bert Warder's brother is jailed for stealing. What kind of low-down folks are they anyhow? And Bert so high and mighty about your mother's being divorced."

Imogene drowned out the twanging of these poisoned arrows by a sudden outcry, "I can't *ever* go back to school. Those mean kids'll just razz me to death. Helen Benson's so

jealous of me about the boys, she'll be tickled pink to have something terrible like this on me. Oh, I think Uncle Don ought to be *shot!*"

Her father and mother too had been thinking that Don deserved to be shot for wrecking their lives. For of course they could not run away from this disgrace. Of course they must, and the very next morning, appear before their neighbors with a break in their armor far worse than anybody's. Harvey Starr's suspension from high school, Joe Crosby's not getting his raise, Mary Seabury's divorced mother, Frankie Tuttle's weak tennis, Helen Benson's unattractiveness to boys—they had been held up by the Warders as shields against possible criticism of slips in their manners. But against the positive disgrace of a brother in the penitentiary! And of course, now everybody would find out about their folks—the aunt who was somebody's hired girl, the old grandmother who couldn't write her name. All that would be in the newspapers, now. "If I had Don Warder here, I'd . . ." thought his sister-in-law vindictively. But Don of course was in jail. "Safe in jail!" thought his brother bitterly. "*He* won't have to walk into an office tomorrow morning, and all the mornings, and face a bunch of guys that'll . . . " Like his wife, his mind was full of foreseen descriptions by newspaper reporters of his illiterate tenement-house relatives. He held the newspaper up to go on reading it. It rattled in his shaking hands. Imogene flung herself on her mother's shoulder, sobbing, "Mamma, you *got* to send me to boarding school. Every kid in school will be picking on me."

Behind the newspaper her father gave a choked roar of rage. Lowering the sheet, he showed a congested face. His jaws were set. "Boarding school! More likely you'll have to get out of high school and go to work." They looked at him, too stunned to ask what he meant. Still speaking between clenched teeth he told them, "Our savings were in Don's bank and I see in the paper here where it says the bank's on the rocks because of the money he stole."

With a wringing motion of his hands as if they had a neck between them, he crushed the paper, flung it to the floor, and turned on his weeping wife and daughter as if he would like to wring their necks too. "What's the good of standing there hollering?" he shouted at them. "Haven't you got any guts? Don't take it lying down like that! Stand up to them! Get back at them before they begin!"

He tramped into the next room and they heard him locking doors and windows.

It was true, just as the Warders thought, that the neighbors began to talk about them as soon as the headlines were read.

Helen Benson had taken her mother over to the Tuttle's garden to look at the newly opened tulips. Mrs. Tuttle, newspaper in hand, came out of their shabby tall old house, read out the news to them and they all said how hard it was on the Warders. "Oh, I bet there's some mistake," said Francis Tuttle. "The paper just says he's accused of it. There's no proof he's done it, you notice. I remember Don Warder very well, the time he came to visit Bert, last summer. He's not that kind at all. I bet when they get to the bottom of it that they'll find somebody's double-crossed him. Maybe one of the other men in the bank. I'm going to tell Bert Warder I bet that's what happened, the first time I see him." Thinking intently of the accused man's probable innocence, he was absent-mindedly fingering his sandy hair which, he had noticed for the first time that morning, had begun to thin a little.

Mrs. Benson said, "It'll be a terrible blow to the Warders. We must be sure to show our sympathy for them. Helen, it'd be nice if you could think of something specially nice to do for Imogene." She had by now slipped so far from the narrow path trod by those who still cared what happened, that this like all news was no more than a murmur in her ears. But, that Helen might learn what is correct, she brought out the right formula in the right voice.

"Yes, indeed," said Mary Tuttle, in her warm eager way. "People's friends ought to stand close around them when trouble comes."

Mrs. Murray across the street, seeing the four of them standing close together, not looking at the flowers, knew what they were talking about and came over to say compassionately, "I could cry when I think of poor Emma Warder! She'll take this hard."

Helen Benson was awed by her first contact with drama. "My! Imogene must be feeling simply terrible," she said. "I wonder if she wouldn't like to be Vice President of our class. I'd just as soon resign. Mother, how would it be if I went right up now to the Warders and told Imogene . . . "

But Helen's mother said, her sorrow salt in her heart, "No, when people have had a blow it's better to leave them to themselves a little, at first. Don't you think so, Mrs. Tuttle?"

Mary, annoyed to see Francis once more passed over as if he were not present, said resolutely in a formula she often used, "Yes, that is what my husband always advises in such cases, and I have great confidence in his judgment."

But Francis had turned away. How like Mary it was to try even in little things to make it up to him for being a nonentity! But sometimes he thought she but pointed out the fact that he was. A little nettled, as any man might be (no, considerably

more than a man who had had in his past no nightmare nervous collapse), he walked along in the twilight towards the house. On the other side of Mary's wall his exiled demon kept pace with him, trying hard to reach him with old dark associations of ideas, thinking longingly how easy it would be to tear open that nearly healed wound if only these passing relapses could be prolonged. He succeeded in starting a familiar train of thought in Francis' mind, like a brackish taste in his mouth. "And now to grow bald!" he meditated moodily. "What Bert Warder calls my 'moth-eaten' look will be complete." His fingers strayed up to his head again to explore the thinning hair. Deep under the healthy scar-tissue forming over his inner wound, an old pulse of pain began to throb. Roger was getting bald too, he remembered, but of course baldness gave Roger dignity and authority, would actually add to his prestige. Francis, bald, would drop to a lower significance. "To him that hath, and from him that hath not—the motto of my life," thought Francis. His demon's eyes glittered redly in hope.

But Mary had built her wall high and strong. And inside its safe protection Francis' roses had struck down deep roots. The gardener came to himself with a smile at his absurdity that sent his demon scurrying away into outer darkness.

"Good gosh, only a thin place in my hair, and seeing myself bald a'ready!" he thought, amused. It had been through that mental habit as through a secret back door, he reflected, that many a dose of poison had been smuggled into his life. He stooped to straighten a drooping tulip. As he stood up, the evening star shone brightly pale in the eastern sky. The inner eye of his intelligence focussed itself to a finer accuracy: the world stood before him in its true, reassuring proportions. "Suppose I do get bald—bald as an egg—what of it!" he thought; and, loose, at ease, forgot himself to admire a young pear tree, its myriad swelling buds proclaiming with pride that, mere humble living cellulose that it was, its roots had found the universal source of growth. "And all amid them stood The Tree of Life," thought Francis, his eyes deeply on the miracle.

"Da-d-d-dy," came cautiously from the sleeping porch. The bars of the railing there were high and set close together because of the dangerous three-story drop to the cement-floored basement entrance below, but Francis could make out the twins in their pajamas like little bears in a cage. "How about a sto-o-ory?" they called down.

"With you in a sec," called Francis, running into the house.

The twins rushed out on the landing to meet him, hopping, twittering, and as he snatched them up, planting loud kisses on his cheeks, his ears, his nose. "Praise be to God who gave me life!" sang Francis' heart as he had never dreamed it could. On

the swelling tide of this joy, this thankfulness, he rode up with a surge to the highest point—but one—of his long struggle with himself. Quite effortlessly, quite naturally, he thought, "Too bad that Roger's wife can never give him children," and went warm with delight that he had wished his brother well.

III

Francis had meant to tell Bert Warder when he next saw him that he was sure Don had never stolen a cent, that somebody had double-crossed him. But the next time he saw Warder, he did not tell him that or anything else.

The morning after the newspapers had announced the arrest of Bert's brother, Francis stepped out to the border along his front-yard path to get some tulips for Mary to take to Emma Warder, Bert's wife. But there was something so beautiful on the first one he cut that he stood still to look at it, marvelling, forgetting the errand his sympathy had sent him on. Dew-drops clung to the flower, every tiny globe a magic mirror reflecting all the visible universe. Francis smiled dreamily down on the extravagance of this beauty. At first he remembered with amusement that he was the man who only last night had thought life hard to bear because his hair was getting thin. Then he forgot himself in contemplation of the divine playfulness that shrinks the great far blueness of the sky, the nearby intricacy of trees, immeasurable space itself, to ornament the white perfection of a flower. The doors of his heart swung softly open, as they do when a poem knocks and asks to be written.

Another door opened, the door of the next house. Through it —because he must—Bert Warder came resolutely out from the safety of his home to face the arena full of enemies waiting to spring upon him. The odds were against him now. He knew that. But he was no coward. He was no man to take things lying down. He was worn with sleeplessness, and half sick with dread of this first impact with a world echoing to his disgrace. But he did not lose his head. He remembered the plan for defense he had worked out in the long dark; he tried to keep clearly in mind the old rule of warfare that the way to head off attack is to attack first. But would he be able to carry out this plan? Cornered by Fate as he was, how could he reach anyone with a first thrust? He had no hope that he could, no hope at all; but he bared his teeth savagely with the desperation of the trapped, and would not give up. The instinct of self-preservation, feeling him appeal as if for his very life, responded with a wild rush of its inordinate stimulants to action. His eyes fell on Frankie Tuttle in the garden next door. He was mooning

over a flower he held in one hand, while the other hand in a mechanical gesture drew up the sandy hair over a spot at the top of his head. When a man's hand does that without his realizing it, he fears baldness. The instinct of self-preservation as it can when driven hard by fear, rose to genius, and showed the endangered man how to strike, in all safety, a first blow to ward off the attack he could not parry. He took off his hat, put his hand up to his head and walked rapidly along the sidewalk towards the Avenue, keeping his eyes on Frankie.

When Francis, his heart still unguardedly opened to its very depths by ecstasy, looked up from his tulip, he saw Bert Warder passing by on his way to the trolley, holding his hat in one hand. With the other he was ostentatiously patting and ruffling his abundant dark hair in uncouth caricature of Francis' unconscious fumble. As their eyes met, Bert let fly his arrow with all his might. His words were but trivial and a little common, but his panic tipped them well with the poison of the wish to hurt, and he put his back into the bending of his bow, his broad beefy back. Long before the meaning of the vapid pleasantry had penetrated to Francis' mind, the malignity of its intention was quivering deep in his opened, softened heart. "That's the way to do it, Frankie!" called Bert in a loud coarse tone, his fingers leaping about grotesquely in his hair, "You've *got* a clearing up there. Scratch 'em up into where you can get at 'em. Scratch 'em up into the clearing."

For a nightmare second, Francis, like a man who dreams he sees a friend run on him sword in hand, felt not pain so much as a wild incredulity. His eyes widened, his dumbfounded face was blank, his up-raised arm and fumbling fingers froze foolishly where they were. From his confusion a gleam of light shone into the other's darkness. The constriction around Bert's heart loosened. It might really work then, the system of attacking first. He'd sure knocked old Frankie cold, his first try. No man who looked like that, could collect his wits for taunts about jail-bird brothers. After the hours of helpless dread that lay back of Bert, his relief was exquisite. And the hope it gave! Hope! He might, after all, be able to defend himself. Drinking in greedily Francis' stunned expression and grotesque attitude, he burst in a yelling haw! haw! of triumph and clutching hope to his breast, ran on courageously to where a fellow-worker stood waiting for the trolley.

By that time the meaning of his words reached Francis' mind. He snatched his hand down from his thinning hair with a betraying jerk. Through the quiet morning air Bert's voice came, loudly repeating his joke to Joe Crosby, who remarked, turning back to look at Francis, "Why, I never noticed he has a bald spot." The trolley roared along the tracks and carried the two

men away to the office where Francis was at once to follow them.

By the end of that day everybody over in the Stott McDevitt works and out on Jefferson Street knew that the Warders didn't want to have anything said to them about this trouble. "Some folks take trouble that way," said their neighbors with sympathy.

So, since that was the way the Warders took it, nobody did say anything about it to them. And since it was never mentioned nobody knew exactly what was happening. People naturally took for granted that Bert's first thought had been of his brother's innocence, and that like Joe Crosby at the time of his sister's divorce, he was spending his last cent to pay defending lawyers. Since his face grew steadily more haggardly anxious, they supposed that his efforts were all in vain. They sympathized silently, and read without comment day after day the abbreviated accounts of his brother's trial in the local newspapers.

For they were both brief and colorless. Huntsville was far away in another state; one more revelation of the doings of a dishonest bank employee was hardly news; the reporters apparently found Don too obscure a thief to be interesting. No revelations about a grubby working-class family were ever printed. But the Warders saw in every newspaper mention of Don's trial plenty of other material for malicious satisfaction on the part of their neighbors. When finally Don was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years in prison Bert Warder said wildly to his wife, "Nobody need tell *me* what they're saying to each other. By God! I'd like to knock the words down their dirty throats." Drunk first with shame and then with anger—for two weeks after Don's conviction, the bank did fail and the Warders did lose their savings—he had a drunken man's glowering readiness to take offense at nothing. He snarled and hit out in response to harmless greetings; he started every conversation with an unprovoked verbal aggression; he protested every decision made against him at the North Side Tennis Club—as Jefferson Street people called the two vacant-lot courts; he took every happening in the office as flagrant and unfair discrimination against him. His neighbors, his fellow-workers knew that his snarls were cries of pain, and for a time—a short time—said to each other tolerantly, "Poor old Bert, no wonder he's got a grouch." But they had tempers of their own, grievances of their own, their tolerance soon wore thin, his unprovoked attacks began to strike sparks. Two could play as well as one, they reminded him forcibly, at being offensively personal. He was not the only one who knew how to give a nasty dig. Nobody of course dreamed of sinking so low as to throw his brother up

to him, Don now in stripes behind prison bars. In fact that story soon passed out of their minds. They had seen Don only once or twice. They were full of their own affairs, their own secret troubles and hidden disgraces. They did not mention the convicted thief, or remember him. But the convict's brother had not forgotten. He imagined in the turn of every exasperated retort a reminder that they had something on him, a threat that he would hear a thing or two about jail-birds if he went too far. So he did not go too far—with them. Every rough rejoinder to a brutal sally from him frightened him into choking down his ill-nature. A sort of approximate balance was found. After a week or so, a Jefferson Street maxim ran, "Anybody can get along with Bert Warder—all you got to do is to tell him to go to hell once in so often."

But there was one among them foolishly unable to return evil for evil. Or to defend himself from boorishness by being boorish. And Bert's first handful of mud had told him where he could fling more without having it flung back on him. Mary, annoyed to have Bert's ragging increasingly center on Francis, used to think, "If Francis only had more vanity! He'd get mad then at teasing instead of feeling ashamed that he's bothered by it; and he'd defend himself." But she was wrong. Against the blackguardism of the wish to cause pain, Francis now as in his youth could devise no defense that he was willing to use. The others on Jefferson Street and in the office snatched up whatever weapon came to hand, dirty or not. If a hit below the belt was what reached Bert's sensibilities most sharply, all right—sure—they'd hit below the belt—why not? But to Francis a choice between committing an ignoble act or suffering from one, was no choice at all. For him only one of those two alternatives was conceivable.

When in an idiotic pleasantry that became threadbare that summer, Bert came suddenly behind him, blew hard on the thinning spot in Francis' hair, rattling off with a noisy laugh, "Let-the-air-*blow*-on-the-head-the hair-will-*grow*-on-the-head," Francis only jerked away in a gesture of nervous annoyance, and then grinned apologetically for feeling sore. He was incapable of hitting back as the others did, with a jibe about Bert's pendulous paunch any mention of which, it was an open secret, made him wince, or about his big flat feet, or his bulging eyes, or his occasional bad grammar. He could not understand the idea the men around him had that hurting Bert Warder's feelings eased their own. Rather the contrary, it seemed to him. To find a festering wound in Bert's life and to press on it hard with a word well chosen for its power to cause him pain—how could that do anything but make a bad matter worse? A good deal worse. For Bert's uncouth tormentings caused him only

discomfort and annoyance. But it would be shame, as at a real disgrace, which he would feel, to spy upon another's unhealed sores and dash his fist into the one that looked as though it would hurt the most. From his shadowed childhood on, Francis Tuttle had never understood why, with all the unavoidable pain in the world, anyone could wish to add to it.

So he could do no more than try to hide under an apologetic grin the annoyance he could not help feeling when week after week Bert rang the changes about his looking moth-eaten, twitted him with his poor tennis, his mistakes in gardening, his inability to carry a tune. He even managed a grin, though a faint and weary one over a new stunt of Bert's which emerged in June, a strenuous imitation of Francis' tennis serve, winding up with grotesquely strenuous contortions to deliver at the end a ball of a lamentable young-ladyish feebleness.

But it was his watchful demon not he who grinned, when Bert in a chance remark, stumbled on one of the two secrets in Francis' life he was ashamed of. This was the lesser secret, the one he had thought he had quite outgrown. One Saturday afternoon in June, at the end of some doubles, as they were pulling on their sweaters, Bert Warder chanced to comment on the election of his daughter Imogene to be Vice President of her class in the high school— ". . . right over the head of Helen Benson, I understand. She's all right, Helen is, but kind o' slow. No S. A. as the boys say." The other men all knew that Helen had resigned to make place for the Warder girl and had insisted on her election. A self-conscious silence fell on the group. Sensitive to silences as a sick man to draughts, Bert went hot and cold with his usual reflex of panic—were they thinking that because Imogene was a convict's niece—he backed into his corner and bared his teeth.

But Joe Crosby thought of something to turn the conversation. "I never heard that sex appeal is what swings elections," he said.

The casual quality of the remark blew away Bert's suspicion. But his nerves had been shaken. They needed an outlet. A safe one. His eyes fell on Francis Tuttle. "Sure, S. A. is what settles elections!" he cried at random, giving Francis a great dig in the ribs. "That's why our own Valentino gets elected to all the fat offices in town."

Francis was astonished to feel a sharp twinge from old bitterness. He had not then, not even yet, left behind the boyish chagrin over all those elections in school, in college, when Roger again and again had been chosen to any office he would accept, and Roger's dead loss of a brother had never been so much as thought of. It was absurd that he still cared anything about that. But an involuntary quiver had passed over his face,

just one. It was enough for his tormentor. "Why for fair! Frankie, there's more truth than poetry in what I say. You never do get elected to anything, do you? Were you *ever?*"

This was the time of course, for Francis to tell him to mind his own damn business. But he could never tell anybody that, and now could think of nothing but a sorry shame that he felt even a last throb of that trivial adolescent hurt. He kept his eyes on the racket he was putting into its case; he fumbled with its fastenings; he was silent. He felt diminished and looked it.

As half-asphyxiated lungs strain joyfully to draw in a life-giving gush of fresh air, Bert felt his own painfully diminished self expanding in the other's discomfort. What suffocating man would hold his hand from the one window he can open? "Poor old Frankie!" he cried gloatingly. "Never had no luck with 'lections. Let's 'lect him to something right now. I nominate him to be Honorary Fly-Swatter to the Ladies' Aid Society. Haw! Haw!"

As they walked down the street together, he composed variations on this new theme. Mary, coming out to meet Francis, heard his horse-laugh, heard him as he turned in at his front walk bawl out, "I nominate Mr. Francis Tuttle to be score-keeper in the One-legged Men's Athletic Meet. Who will second my motion?"

"What's he talking about?" she asked.

Francis answered, "Oh nothing."

Sitting that evening over her accounts, Mary chanced to glance up at Francis, reading, and was startled to see an old shadow on his face. He wore the shrunken look that had always frightened her. She had not seen it for a long time now. His relapses in the last years had come seldom and were short; but they still made her almost as miserable as he. Adding up a total and transferring it to the next page she thought, "It is like an old tubercular lesion. Doctors tell you that even when they are healed—or almost—they feel strains that are nothing to normal tissue." Looking down fixedly at her column of figures but not seeing it, she fell for the hundredth time into a puzzled wonder at the inexplicable difference between what people feel about bodily and mental sickness. "If it had been a temporary breakdown in a normal lung, acquired in childhood by direct infection from the outside, now almost but not quite healed—why, we'd have told everybody about it, sure of their sympathy. We'd have given it as the natural explanation for the things Francis isn't quite well enough to do yet. There'd have been nothing to hide. Everybody would be interested, and sort of proud and encouraged when Francis recovered. But because it's a temporary breakdown of a normal personality he's recovering from—and yet that was forced on a sensitive mind

by a direct infection from the outside as much as any disease germ!—we have to hide it as though it were a disgrace. We can't even talk it over together, and plan what's best to do."

More than by anything else, she was worn by the need to appear unconscious of what was the center of her thoughts. Now, for instance, to be forced to cast about in the dark for a possible explanation of the recurrence on Francis' face of that old look of sickness. Not even to be sure she was not imagining it. What strain could have come into their safe Jefferson Street refuge that was just the same now as ever? Nothing had happened there to change anything. She did give one fleeting thought to Bert Warder's joshing. But he had always been a boor. And anyhow, he was only teasing. Teasing. The word brought up recollections of child play. And child play was always unimportant. The thought reassured her. She began to emerge from her concentration, set her pen down to the paper again, added 23 to 44, and thought in the phrase she had heard her elders let drop so often, "Oh, teasing's nothing." She shot a sidelong look at Francis again. He was reading. His face looked quiet. Yes, she must have been mistaken. It could be no recurrence of his old trouble, vague and dimmed as that was now. Perhaps his tennis had tired him. Presently the idea occurred to her that he might have a real worry, a present one, something at the office perhaps. No matter how bad that was, it would be less dangerous.

IV

She was right. It was a present worry. About a real danger. But not in the office. In his past, close to the foolish weakness uncovered by Bert's random thrust lay his other secret—the base and bad one. The two were woven together by a thousand connecting nerves. Bert's hammering on one had set the other a-quiver. Suppose—he thought, horrified, that some day, with a reflex reaction like this, some involuntary quiver of his face should betray his feeling about Roger. That he had such a secret to hide was his shame. That Mary might learn it, was his terror. Great-hearted as she was, she would never go on sharing life with him if she knew of his mean jealousy of Roger—fiercely suppressed, always festering in the dark hollow of his heart. He thought, as he had a thousand times in his boyhood, that there could be no depravity so low as this vicious ill-will towards his unconscious, blameless brother. He told himself once again that he was cheating Mary—he knew why she overlooked his personal insignificance, his poverty—it was because she had the illusion that he was true-hearted, above baseness. If she should learn that he was capable of this obscene resentment of the kind and generous Roger's superiority—she would turn away

from him forever. Was there any real difference—no, there was not—between such a feeling towards a brother and the upraised arm of Cain?

But Mary was looking at him! She had lifted her eyes from her account book! He had not seen when. How long had she been watching him? A man with a guilty secret is always terrified to be watched. Had she guessed? Had she read this thought in his face? He froze. And waited.

But Mary smiled. The room shone. The golden light around him brought Francis with a start out of his nightmare.

"Why, you've been asleep," said Mary.

"Yes, I must have dropped off a moment." He thought he had been having a bad dream. What a relief to be waked up!

Before he lay down to sleep that night, he stepped over to the twins' little cribs. Through the high railing of the sleeping-porch the barred moonlight shone on their round faces, bland in sleep. How safe they looked. And it was he who made them safe, their father. His heart grew great with love.

But after he was in bed Mary heard him draw the long sighing breath of disheartenment. "What is it, dear?" she murmured. He did not answer. Probably he was already asleep, she thought.

He was awake. His sigh had been of disheartenment. He had perceived that his love for his little boys was tarnished and sullied by satisfaction in his brother's childlessness.

The tide that had been sweeping in so strongly, had begun to ebb.

The two vacant-lot courts had never been so busy as that summer. Bert Warder made them the center of Jefferson Street life as much as he could. For there he knew success. By concentrating fiercely on his game, he had made himself one of the best players, and looked forward all through his uneasy days to the hour with his racket at the end, which was almost his only respite from misery. His big unused working-man's body grunted with satisfaction in the hard physical effort and the copious sweat: the strain of his fixed idea relaxed in a momentary forgetfulness of Don in jail: and his perpetual doubt of his equality with those about him fell with the ravening zest of starvation on the chance to inflict defeat.

He steered clear cunningly of the two or three men who could beat him. And naturally played a good deal with Frankie Tuttle. They did not work in the same department of Stott McDevitt, but he scarcely let a day go by without hunting up Francis, inviting him to play, and saying facetiously that he did hope *this* time he might get by Francis' cannon-ball serve and maybe score a few points against him: promising if he did, to campaign for Frankie's election to be town dog-catcher, or

chief reader-aloud at the Sewing Society. Day by day he scored more points.

Mary went up to watch the play once, and afterwards said, "See here, Francis, why don't you give up tennis for the rest of the summer? You're wearing yourself out." But the turn of her phrase, the quality of her voice showed Francis how pitiful he looked on the courts, going to pieces under Bert's ragging, trotting about, broken-kneed, like a futile old woman, unstrung, unable to command even his usual modestly competent strokes. If he stopped playing now after such exhibitions of feebleness there would be no limit to the joshing he would get at Bert's hands.

And by this time Bert's joshing did not so much annoy as frighten him. He was terrified at the thought that another chance lunge in the dark might lay open to Bert's rough handling the secret shame he was trying to leave behind. Bert had, so far, never twitted him with Roger, but at any moment he might try that line; certainly would if he guessed that to be a sore point. Francis' nerves tautened in vigilance if he even caught sight of Bert from afar. He seemed to feel Roger in the air, whenever Bert was present.

He was right in feeling that Roger's name was often in Bert's mind. The contrast between Francis' brother, distinguished, wealthy, well-known, and his disgraced convict brother was one of the sorest of Bert's stripes, the worst of all his envies. Glaring across the net at Francis, going forlornly and hopelessly through the complicated wind-up for his serve, he thought, (as he called out in his witty way, "Play ball, bald head,") "There's one sure thing, 'bo . . . . you'll never know from *me* I ever heard of that big stiff!"

Mary was rather troubled by the way Francis seemed to feel the heat that summer. But the hot weather would soon be gone. And wasn't he growing thinner? She'd have to start the evening hot chocolate and crackers again. He didn't seem to have the interest in his garden of other summers. Perhaps only that he hadn't much time left over from tennis. He hadn't written a line of poetry for weeks. But of course the wind of poetry blew fitfully. Was he enjoying the twins as much as he did? Or was that only a fancy of hers?

It was no fancy of hers. Coming in to his children after his daily defeat in tennis, worn out with standing guard over his threatened secret, it was soon borne in on him that he had been in a fool's paradise. Now, while his little sons were babies, yes of course, they were his, as other men's children were theirs. But they grew so fast. Over and over he lived helplessly through in imagination as if it had already happened, how they would turn from him. They would soon naturally be asked to visit

their Uncle Roger. They could not but be struck by the difference between the two homes. They would begin to compare their father with his brother. And then they would see how their father always took a back seat, never was consulted, never elected to any office, had no influence. As they grew, they would note people's surprise that a Senator—Roger would probably be a Senator by that time—had such a queer singed-cat of a brother . . . . "And now," Francis often thought, his fingers fumbling with his thinning hair, "Now a mangy singed-cat."

Twenty times a day it seemed to him, he was startled to find that without his knowing it, he was nervously drawing his hair up over the crown of his head.

He was even more startled to discover that he was not the only one to notice this involuntary reflex. "Have you hurt the top of your head lately, Mr. Tuttle?" Mrs. Benson once asked him. He was shocked and turned on her such a darkening face that she hurriedly excused herself, "I just noticed that you often put your hand up to it."

He snatched down his hand—to his amazement it was once more lifted to his head—and told her shortly, "No. I'm all right." As he moved away a strange thought came to him, one that soon became familiar by repetition. "It would be better if all the hair on my head would come out. And have it over with!" Sometimes he imagined for an instant between sleep and waking that this had happened. And it was a relief. He was sickened to find that he could not control himself even in such a little matter as fumbling with that thin place. How could he hope to hide his secret vice? Every time he found his fingers in his hair he thought anew, disheartened at his own weakness, that he would never be quick enough to hide what would come leaping up to his eyes at a mention of Roger.

V

But until now he had had Mary. As long as Mary was there . . .

Then early in August a tragic telegram took Mary away for a time. Her delicate sister, now a young wife, was lying at the point of death, her baby prematurely born. "Come at once. Florence calling for you," the telegram read. She telephoned the news to Francis who looked up the hour of the next train for her and hurried to draw the money from the savings bank to cover her expenses. Mary, wild with sorrow and alarm began to pack, interrupted herself to run over to ask Mrs. Benson to keep a neighborly eye on Francis while she was away, tried to

think what clothes the twins would need, stopped to telephone the cleaning-woman about getting Francis' meals, stood still in the middle of the floor and wrung her hands. When Francis came with the money, he was startled to see her so distraught. "If it were only time for my vacation, so I could go along to take care of the twins," he said.

"Oh, if you only could be there to take care of *me!*" cried poor Mary, weeping on his shoulder. "I'm scared to death to go by myself. I don't know how to face *any*thing without you now!"

The memory of this cry of Mary's, the thought of her need for him, Mary's real and actual need for *him* hung like incense around Francis as he stood on the station platform that evening looking after the train from which the twins' handkerchiefs still fluttered. It was a sweetness in the night air as he let himself into the empty house. He was breathing it in as he fell asleep, his arm on the pillow sacred to Mary's dear head. Mary had not yet wholly gone.

The next day, the first day since his marriage that he had wakened alone, he arrived early at the office. To his surprise Bert Warder was at a desk farther down the same room, among the apprentices. Francis wondered if this meant that Bert had been definitely put out of the drafting room. There had been some gossip about his mistakes there. Bert's eyes were roving about unhappily. He saw the surprise in Francis' glance. "You, damn you, with your rich brother and your pull! Of course you get on!" he thought, savage over the injustice of the world. To say something he called out foolishly, "Hey there, Francis, I got special orders to report here to keep the air blowing through your clearing." As Francis took out the papers from his drawer he heard Bert's loud unmodulated voice explaining the joke about "the clearing." "Have I got to go all through that again?" thought Francis shrugging his shoulders wearily. But the men near Bert thought the joke a flat one, found Bert's noise about it tiresome, and took no pains to conceal their impression. Smarting, humiliated, apprehensive, resentful, Bert drew glumly back into himself, waiting bodefully for a chance to pay Francis out for his rebuff.

At lunch he went out of his way in the cafeteria to sit at the same table with Francis, ostentatiously familiar with him and after work he let trolley after trolley go by the corner while he waited till Francis arrived. Knowing that he had been punished for being too fresh, he was impelled by the fatality that hangs over people who have struck a false note, to strike it yet more loudly. Francis had never found him harder to endure. As they walked up Jefferson Street together, he said peremptorily,

"Run on in and get your tennis things on, Frankie. We'll have a set before supper. Maybe if I try *hard* I can score a point or two on you."

"It's gosh-awful hot for tennis," protested Francis.

Bert's heavy eyebrows lifted ironically over his bulging eyes, he began a certain menacing one-sided smile which was the introduction to his worst joshing. It was uglier than usual, ominous and threatening. There was but one threat that Francis feared. It came instantly into his mind. He lost his head, "This is the time he is going to bring Roger up—and I have not yet thought what to say or how to look!" and said in a hurried panic, "All right, all right. Yes, let's play. It may do us good."

A couple of hours later he came in. He had lost one love set after another to Bert. Too tired to bathe and change, he sank down in a chair. The cold supper that was to be left for him every evening by Mary's cleaning-woman, faced him on the table. After a time he ate a little of it, and went stiffly to bed. But for a long time not to sleep. Out of the darkness white balls hurtled towards him. Every time he began to doze, he saw one like a bullet, driving straight towards his eyes, and starting to one side to avoid it woke up to find himself sweating, his heart beating fast, all his muscles taut.

The cleaning-woman, come in early by Mary's instructions to get Mr. Tuttle's breakfast told him, "You don't look so good, Mr. Tuttle."

"It was hot last night," he told her pushing his uneaten breakfast away.

It was hot all that day too. But in spite of it he lingered in the furnace-like office till the 5:20 trolley. To no avail. As soon as he stepped off the trolley Bert and a couple of others shouted at him to come and make a fourth at doubles. They played set after set, shifting partners in all the possible combinations. But defeat always came to the side that Francis was on. He could have told them that beforehand, he thought, playing more and more feebly.

When he went home he found two letters waiting for him in the hot shut-up living room. One from Mary. One from Roger. What could Roger be writing for? Looking at that letter with apprehension he opened Mary's. The twins were well, she wrote, her sister had recognized her but was not expected to live. The rest was love.'". . . take care of yourself, darling, *darling!* I miss you so! I need you, dearest. I love you. I love you." A murmur as from Mary's voice rose faintly from the paper. But died away in the silence coldly breathed out from the letter he had not read. He sat a long time looking at it, forgetting his dinner. But it had to be read. He tore it open.

Roger wrote to give Francis the news everybody was to see

in the newspaper the next day, that through a new business combine, he was now one of the Vice Presidents of the Stott McDevitt Company, as well as of his own. "We'll see to it that this means some well-deserved advancement for you too, Francis, old man," wrote Roger pleasantly. His letters were always kind. "It'll be fine to see more of you and Mary. We may even decide to become neighbors of yours. Nothing holds us here. And I certainly would enjoy getting acquainted with my splendid little nephews."

The darkness fell slowly around Francis holding the letter in a clutch he could not relax. He had not eaten since noon. His old inner wound opened slowly, gaping here and there, and began to bleed. No, no, he told himself shamed to the heart, it was nothing so clean and wholesome as bleeding; it was the drip of pus from a foul old ulcer. Well, a man was a leper, who could feel nothing but mortal sickness over his own brother's success.

The blackness deepened. Out of it, one after another, there hurtled towards him bullet-like revelations of his own pitiful abjectness. He had always known he was a dub at business, a dub at tennis, a dub at life—everybody's inferior in everything! But till now he had hoped he might at least grow into a harmless dub. But he was not even that. He was incurably vicious, with the mean vice of feebleness. The beast in his heart would not die, starve it though he might. It snarled and gnashed its teeth over every new triumph of Roger's and sprang up from its lair, rattling its chain in sordid hope every time a faint shadow came over Roger's life. He would rather die, oh infinitely rather die than have Mary learn that her husband could not kill that hope tighten his hold as he might around its filthy throat.

Through the darkness a voice in a loud snarl came to Francis' ears, "He'll never have any children. And I have two sons." Francis leaped to his feet. Who was there in the dark with him? He had thought he was alone. He snapped on a light and looked wildly around the empty room. He was alone.

Had *he* said that? Or had he only thought it so fiercely that it rang in his ears like a cry? His knees shook. Suppose Mary had been there? Suppose Bert Warder had heard him? Why, he was likely to betray himself wholly at any moment, even without the dreaded mention of Roger's name. How it would be mentioned tomorrow at the office, after everyone had seen the announcement in the morning paper! And he who could control his voice no more than his fingers—he found them again fumbling involuntarily at the crown of his head!

He turned off the light, undressed and sat down on the edge of his bed to think, to plan, to prepare himself for tomorrow's ordeal. Everyone would speak of Roger to him, not Bert only,

everybody. And he had only this one night in which to find the right look, the right intonations, the right answers.

Yet when it happened he was somehow equal to it. Tense and careful as a man handling a bomb, he thought he had come through safely. Everybody had said the proper thing about what good luck it was to have his brother one of the Company's Vice Presidents, and he had made the proper answers. At least they had sounded all right when he said them. Why did he still have this terrified uneasiness? Then he realized that his apprehension came from the fact that Bert Warder alone had not said a word to him. He, alone of all the men, had only nodded with a sardonic smile, and sat down silently to work. Francis' heart gave a frightened leap. Bert knew something. Somehow he had found out. Perhaps spying on him from a distance as he had doggedly answered the congratulations of the other men Bert had seen through the mask he had tried to keep closely clamped over his face.

All that morning Bert stuck closely to his desk. But Francis knew that he was not thinking of his work. As the hot morning went on, and Bert said nothing, did not so much as look at him, Francis was surer and surer that somehow he knew. But how could he have found out?

A few moments before lunch time Bert took his hat and without a word went out by himself. He was not at the cafeteria at all. In the alarm over this inexplicable variation from routine Francis suddenly knew how Bert had found out. He had been standing outside the open windows last night listening in the dark, and had heard that cry of evil joy in Roger's childlessness. Yes, of course, that was what had happened.

All that afternoon Francis covertly watched Bert. It was strange how easy it was to watch him without seeming to. Even when his back was squarely turned, he could see Bert continually leaving his desk to go from one man to another, whispering in their ears. And then not knowing that Francis could see them even though his back was turned, the listener would stare at him, nodding, nodding, his head with pursed-up lips, as Bert went on whispering, whispering, telling about the shameful secret he had heard as he stood listening in the dark.

Through the breach in Mary's wall the demon had stepped softly in, bringing blackness with him.

VI

Bert said nothing about tennis that day and went home early. Francis got off the trolley at Jefferson Street alone. Forgetting to look in the mailbox he let himself in to the unaired empty house. He did not go about to open windows. He sat down

heavily, alarmed to feel his legs shaking under him. He could not afford to be agitated. He must collect himself. His only hope lay in not losing his head. The situation was grave. Bert might even now be coming up the walk to . . . He looked out to reassure himself, and saw not Bert, but a shining limousine drawing up in front of the house.

Before he knew that he had recognized it was Roger's, his trembling legs had carried him in a wild rush of panic to the back of the house. The locked kitchen door halted him. If he went out there he would be seen. Where could he hide? Glaring around, he saw the closet where the mops and cleaning-cloths were kept. He flung himself into it. He was just in time. He had no more than drawn the door shut when the front doorbell rang, and it came to him sickeningly that he could not remember whether he had locked the front door when he came in. He had not breathed till now, when, his lungs almost collapsing, he gasped deeply and drew in to his last capillary the stench from the dirt of the damp mops, decomposing in the heat. The bell rang again. The noise found out his hiding place so accurately that for an instant he felt he was discovered, and gave up hope. He tightened his clutch on the doorknob. Even if they found him out he would hold the door shut, no matter how they pulled on it. He braced himself. A long silence. Had they stepped into the house? He tried to listen. The drumming of his pulse was the only sound. He stood rigid, clutching the doorknob to him, breathing the fetid air deeply in and out of his lungs. Presently from the street the sound of a starting motor came dimly through the closed door.

He waited a long time before he ventured to come out. This might be a trap to make him think they had gone. If he opened the door he might see some one's cold contemptuous eyes fixed on the door, waiting for him. But when he finally did cautiously turn the knob and look out, the kitchen was empty. He tiptoed to the front door, found he had locked it, that he had been safe all the time.

And then, coming to himself for a moment's respite he turned so faint in a revulsion of feeling that he could not stand. What in God's name had he been doing? But was it *possible!* It was so remote from anything he wished that he thought for an instant he must have dreamed it. He, Francis, had had no intention of hiding from Roger! Why should he? There was no reason. Suppose Mary had been there? What possible reason could he have given her?

The respite was over . . . *suppose some one had seen him!* A cold sweat drenched him. Some one had seen him, of course. Everyone! They all must have known what he had done. Everyone on the street must have seen him leave the trolley and go

into the house. They all knew Roger by sight. They must all have been looking from their windows, saying to each other, "But he's there. I saw him go in just now." Perhaps they had gone out to the street to tell Roger that. Tomorrow they would say to him, suspicious eyes boring into his, "Why in the world didn't you let your brother in yesterday?" What could he say?

He wrung his hands. "What can I say? What can I say?" Then he thought of a way out, It was simple. He could say he had gone at once to sleep, that he had not heard the bell. He would hurry up to the sleeping porch now and lie down so that if anyone came in he would be found there, his eyes closed. He raced up the stairs and flung himself down on the bed, clenching his eyelids shut. It was essential that he should seem to be asleep. Then he remembered that nobody could come in because the doors were locked. He opened his eyes. He tried to get up.

But he was by now exhausted. He fell back, his wide open eyes facing a new danger. He imagined Bert Warder asking him the next morning, "What were you up to yesterday that you didn't want your brother to catch you at?" He must think of an answer to that question. Perhaps if he went over it all now in anticipation, question and answer, he might be able to . . . Suppose Bert said suddenly, "What did you get into the mop-closet for yesterday, when your brother . . ."

Oh horror! He had forgotten to keep his eyes shut to prove to people who came in to spy on him that he really had been asleep when Roger rang the bell. He shut them hard. Then slowly remembered, no, no, that was not necessary. The front door was locked. No one could come in. He opened them again and stared out through the high railing of the sleeping porch.

He had been trying to think what he could answer Bert Warder tomorrow. But how could he hope to control his face to hide his secret when he had no control over his fingers—he snatched his fumbling hand down from his head—over his body—he felt himself cowering again in front of the foul-smelling mop. His desperate thoughts of how to ward off tomorrow's danger were cut short by a sudden cold divination of the present peril. Danger was stealthily closing in on him now, this instant. He felt it creeping up on him from behind. He had known what that danger was. He tried wildly to remember. Oh, yes. He was to keep his eyes closed so that people would think him asleep. He had forgotten that. He shut them tightly, and weak with relief, felt that he had been just in time.

He opened them in the morning, rose and under the cleaning-woman's eyes went through the motions of eating breakfast. He and Bert happened to walk into the office together. He was incapable of speech, all his vitality concentrated on being on his

guard. Bert looked pale and out of sorts and said he hadn't been feeling very well yesterday. But he was all right today, he said, goggling his eyes, "And how about some tennis?" Francis saw through this trick instantly. He knew Bert was lying, and why he was lying . . . to throw Francis off his guard. His plan was to wait till Francis was exhausted at the end of the tennis that afternoon and then suddenly to shoot his question like one of his cannon-ball serves . . . *"Why didn't you let your brother in yesterday?"* Yes, it would come to him like one of those fiercely driven balls he could not return.

All day he tried to invent a way out of the trap laid for him. But it was not till he was on the trolley with Bert that his inspiration came to him. The ride home was triumphal. He told Bert with a happy smile that he was going to change his clothes for tennis, and ran into the empty house. He stepped lightly, exultantly into the kitchen and putting all his weight against it, tipped the heavy refrigerator to one side. As it toppled he stooped, still smiling, and held his right hand under it.

VII

But of course the bandaged hand that could not hold a racket could not hold a pen or run a typewriter either. When he went to the office, he was sent home on sick leave. This pleased him. It meant he could lie on the bed all day, his eyes tightly shut to prevent the discovery that threatened him, that threatened Mary through him. The moment he opened them—as he must if he went down stairs to eat—Mary was in danger again, might at any moment be dragged in the filth of knowing what kind of man her husband was. But he had grown very clever in thinking of ways to protect Mary from that discovery. "I seem to be very sleepy," he said cunningly to the cleaning-woman. "The doctor who took care of my hand told me the accident might have that effect and wanted me to sleep as much as I could. Just keep some food on a tray for me, will you, outside the door. When I wake up I will eat it."

After this he need not open his eyes. He could lie, hour after hour, revelling in the pain of his mangled hand, glorious anguish with which he was buying security for Mary. He could, waiting till black night, grope his way into the bathroom, find scissors and razor blades by feel, and use them without looking. Without opening those tightly shut eyelids he could find the food left for him on the tray, and empty it out in the corner of his closet so that the cleaning-woman would think he ate it. Mostly he lay rigidly still, as still as if he were in his coffin. Now that there was no reason to raise his hand to his head his arms lay quiet at his side. What a heavenly rest! He was resting al-

most as well as if he were dead. And Mary was as safe as if he were dead. He was very tired, but infinitely proud of knowing how to protect Mary.

Sometimes his tense eyelids relaxed and he really slept. That was the best. Oh, that was the best . . .

VIII

Since he no longer knew whether it were night or day he could not judge of time. How long had he lain there keeping Mary safe? A day . . . a week . . . a year? The silence of the empty house seemed to be broken by voices. The cleaning-woman's. And—could it be—it sounded like Mary's! It *couldn't* be Mary's, could it, come back into danger when he was so sure he had made her safe? Not *Mary!* This must be a ruse of his enemies to frighten him into opening his eyes.

He sat up in bed, staring into the red blackness of his closed lids. Horrified, he strained his ears and recognized the children's voices. And that was Mary's step in the hall downstairs. His heart beat in time with it as with no other. Mary had come back, walking straight into mortal peril.

Once more he had failed. He had not saved her after all. For a moment he was undone with defeat, and trembling from head to foot sat dumb with stupid panic.

He heard the dear remembered step start up the stairs. With an effort greater than any in all his life, he summoned his soul to rise on the wings of love and be strong. And saw how even now it was not too late. Even now, though Mary's dear step was mounting the stairs, unsuspecting . . . Now, now was the time to play the man, once for all.

He flung himself on his love for Mary, and with one beat of its mighty wings it bore him beyond Destiny that thought to have him vanquished. Weak he might be—his love, immortal and divine, made him, at the last, mightier than Fate.

IX

Only after the excitement of the clearing of Don's name was all over, when the Warders were on the train going home from their exhausting week in Huntsville did they begin to understand all that the proving of Don's innocence meant to them. Their days in Huntsville after the melodramatic discovery of the real thief, were so crammed with raw emotion they had been bewildered. They had passed without a pause from their first incredulous excitement to incredulous joy and then indignant sympathy for their brother with all those months of undeserved wretchedness back of him. What a nightmare they

had all lived through, they said over and over to each other. They had wept together, and the tears had washed the poison out of their wounds so that now, in the train on their way home, they were faint in the sweet weakness of convalescense. Bert's heart that had been crushed shut by shame and fear, softened, opened and let him out from the bitter desolation of self-pity. His imagination that had been smothered under the consciousness of disgrace drew breath again. He forgot what he had suffered; his thoughts were for his brother. "Poor Don!" he said over and over. "Poor *Don!*" After what he had lived through, it was like dying and going to heaven, to feel love and compassion. He was proud with a noble and new pride that the loss of all his savings weighed as nothing with him compared to his brother's vindication.

The news had been in the newspapers. With headlines. Everybody must have read it. The Warders almost expected a congratulating delegation of neighbors to meet them at the station. But when they climbed heavily down from the dusty train and saw that the platform was empty, they thought at once that it was only uneducated working-class people who made a fuss in public, and laid the lesson humbly to heart.

There was no one to be seen on Jefferson Street, when they stepped from the trolley at the home corner. They set their suitcases down with a long breath, to look. There was their street! It was theirs, with its genteel lawns, its ornamental useless flower-gardens, its dignified parklike shade trees. There it stood brooding dreamily in the blue summer twilight, and welcomed them back.

"I'll carry the bags, both of them," said Bert to his wife, chivalrously. They trudged along towards their home, their own home, redeemed, shining, safe. They belonged here, they thought, with deep content. They were accepted by these refined people who took lawns and trees and flowers for granted. Their purged hearts swelled with thankfulness, with friendliness, with good resolutions. They must be worthy of their good fortune.

As they approached the Benson house they saw that Helen was standing on the front porch, looking at the newspaper. What a nice girl Helen was, they thought fondly. Imogene called, "*Ooh*-hoo, Nellie!" and skipped up the front walk. Stricken by Helen's face she fell back, shocked. "Oh . . . why . . . what's the *matter?*"

Two or three short sentences were all Helen had to say. Her news, whining ominously like a loaded shell, flew over her listeners' blanched faces, not exploding till long after it had passed.

They stood like stocks, stupidly listening to the sound of the words they could not understand. Then Bert said in a flat voice, "Not Frankie Tuttle! You didn't say it was *Frankie Tuttle!*" He took the newspaper from Helen's hand. Through the brooding summer twilight the headlines shrieked.

JEFFERSON STREET MAN GOES SUDDENLY INSANE
LEAPS FROM THIRD STORY TO DEATH.

The paper fell from his hand.

"This very morning," said Helen.

"That deep cement-covered entrance to the basement," began Mrs. Benson. "Right over the high railing around the sleeping porch. Mary had come home—you knew she'd been away with a sick sister—and she just started up the stairs."

The Warders, stunned, sank down on their suitcases. Bert's mouth hung slackly open.

Joe Crosby came over from across the street. His lips twitched. His eyes were red. He shook Bert's hand without a word. The Warders had been but bludgeoned into stupefaction by the headlines. They had not believed them. But this silence told them what had happened. Mrs. Warder and Imogene began to cry. A film came over Bert's bulging eyes. He got out his handkerchief, blew his nose, and took his hat off, holding it on his knee and looking fixedly down at it.

After a time when they could, they asked the usual questions. And had the usual answers. No imaginable explanation. His accounts in perfect order. His health all right—he'd hurt his hand of course, but that was not serious; the doctor said it was healing without any sign of infection. And everything going extra well with him, seems though—his brother just made Vice President of the company, the luckiest kind of a break, his brother thinking the world and all of him—came right over the minute he heard of this and took Mary and the children back. To make their home with him. Always. Said he'd always wanted children in his home. No, everything in the business end of his life was fine, couldn't be better. His brother kept saying there wasn't *any*thing he wouldn't have done for him. And no trouble at home, Lord *no!* He and Mary were the happiest couple on the street. Suspicious of their good faith, Bert said it seemed as if there *must* have been some warning. "No, there wasn't. He was just exactly the same as ever, the last time anybody saw him. He'd hurt his hand, you know—was that before you went to Huntsville? No, I guess it was afterwards—and that kept him away from the office for a while. It must have been while he was at home with that, that he . . . "

Bert Warder was shocked at a glimpsed possibility of un-

neighborly neglect. "For the Lord's sake, hadn't anybody gone in to see that he was all right?" he asked sternly.

Mrs. Benson defended herself hastily, "Oh yes, yes. Before she left Mary had asked me to look after him, and I went over there every day. Sometimes twice. But the cleaning-woman always said he was asleep. She told me the doctor had given him something to deaden the pain in his hand and make him drowsy."

Joe Crosby confirmed this. "Yes, every time I went in too, he was asleep. I went clear up to his room, several times. The shades were pulled down and it was dark. But I could see he was asleep all right." He answered the stubborn question in the other's face. "Yes, I know, Bert, I felt just the way you do, as if we might have done *some*thing, if we'd been any good. But you know there isn't anything *any*body can do when it's a case of . . . " he drew in a long breath before he could pronounce the word, "it was just plain insanity, Bert."

"Frankie wasn't insane!" rapped out Bert, indignant. "He was a *swell* fellow!"

Joe lowered his voice and with a dark shamed intonation and yet with a certain relish of the enormity he was reporting, said, "Bert, when they picked up his body they found he'd shaved his head. All over. Every spear of hair shaved off. Down to the skin. The way you shave your face."

This did stagger the questioner. He said feebly, "You don't *say* . . . ! Good gosh, his *head!* Why, what in the . . . what ever would make anybody do *that?*" and fell back into his stockish uncomprehending blankness.

Mrs. Benson murmured an explanation. "The doctors told his brother that's one of the signs of religious mania—the tonsure, you know. They told his brother that sometimes insane . . ."

"Oh, they make me tired!" cried Joe Crosby in angry sorrow. "They don't know anything about it. Why don't they keep still!"

Bert Warder agreed sadly, "I guess nobody knows anything about what causes insanity."

It came over him that this was no waking nightmare, was fact. But he could not admit it as fact. "It just don't seem *possible* to me!" he told them, his voice breaking grotesquely in his pain. "Why Frankie and me . . . why, I never *had* a better pal than Frankie Tuttle!"

FLANN O'BRIEN

JOHN DUFFY'S BROTHER

STRICTLY speaking, this story should not be written or told at all. To write it or to tell it is to spoil it. This is because the man who had the strange experience we are going to talk about never mentioned it to anybody, and the fact that he kept his secret and sealed it up completely in his memory is the whole point of the story. Thus we must admit that handicap at the beginning—that it is absurd for us to tell the story, absurd for anybody to listen to it and unthinkable that anybody should believe it.

We will, however, do this man one favor. We will refrain from mentioning him by his complete name. This will enable us to tell his secret and permit him to continue looking his friends in the eye. But we can say that his surname is Duffy. There are thousands of these Duffys in the world; even at this moment there is probably a new Duffy making his appearance in some corner of it. We can even go so far as to say that he is John Duffy's brother. We do not break faith in saying so, because if there are only one hundred John Duffys in existence, and even if each one of them could be met and questioned, no embarrassing enlightenments would be forthcoming. That is because the John Duffy in question never left his house, never left his bed, never talked to anybody in his life, and was never seen by more than one man. That man's name was Gumley. Gumley was a doctor. He was present when John Duffy was born and also when he died, one hour later.

John Duffy's brother lived alone in a small house on an eminence in Inchicore. When dressing in the morning he could gaze across the broad valley of the Liffey to the slopes of the Phoenix Park, peacefully distant. Usually the river was indiscernible but on a sunny morning it could be seen lying like a long glistening spear in the valley's palm. Like a respectable

married man, it seemed to be hurrying into Dublin as if to work.

Sometimes, recollecting that his clock was fast, John Duffy's brother would spend an idle moment with his father's spyglass, ranging the valley with an eagle eye. The village of Chapelizod was to the left and invisible in the depth, but each morning the inhabitants would erect, as if for Mr. Duffy's benefit, a lazy plume of smoke to show exactly where they were.

Mr. Duffy's glass usually came to rest on the figure of a man hurrying across the uplands of the park and disappearing from view in the direction of the magazine fort. A small white terrier bounced along ahead of him but could be seen occasionally sprinting to overtake him after dallying behind for a time on private business.

The man carried in the crook of his arm an instrument which Mr. Duffy at first took to be a shotgun or patent repeating rifle, but one morning the man held it by the butt and smote the barrels smartly on the ground as he walked, and it was then evident to Mr. Duffy—he felt some disappointment—that the article was a walking stick.

It happened that this man's name was Martin Smullen. He was a retired stationary-engine-driver and lived quietly with a delicate sister at Number Four Cannon Row, Parkgate. Mr. Duffy did not know his name and was destined never to meet him or have the privilege of his acquaintance, but it may be worth mentioning that they once stood side by side at the counter of a public house in Little Easter Street, mutually unrecognized, each to the other a black stranger. Mr. Smullen's call was whiskey, Mr. Duffy's stout.

Mr. Smullen's sister's name was not Smullen but Goggins, relict of the late Paul Goggins, wholesale clothier. Mr. Duffy had never even heard of her. She had a cousin by the name of Leo Corr who was not unknown to the police. He was sent up in 1924 for a stretch of hard labor in connection with the manufacture of spurious currency. Mrs. Goggins had never met him, but heard that he had emigrated to Labrador on his release.

About the spyglass. A curious history attaches to its owner, also a Duffy, late of the mercantile marine. Although unprovided with the benefits of a University education—indeed, he had gone to sea at the age of sixteen as a result of an incident arising out of an imperfect understanding of the sexual relation—he was of a scholarly turn of mind and would often spend the afternoons of his sea-leave alone in his dining room, thumbing a book of Homer with delight or annotating with erudite sneers the inferior Latin of the Angelic doctor. On the fourth

day of July, 1927, at four o'clock, he took leave of his senses in the dining room. Four men arrived in a closed van at eight o'clock that evening to remove him from mortal ken to a place where he would be restrained for his own good.

It could be argued that much of the foregoing has little real bearing on the story of John Duffy's brother, but modern writing, it is hoped, has passed the stage when simple events are stated in the void without any clue as to the psychological and hereditary forces working in the background to produce them. Having said so much, however, it is now permissible to set down briefly the nature of the adventure of John Duffy's brother.

He arose one morning—on the 9th of March, 1932—dressed and cooked his frugal breakfast. Immediately afterward, he became possessed of the strange idea that he was a train. No explanation of this can be attempted. Small boys sometimes like to pretend that they are trains, and there are fat women in the world who are not, in the distance, without some resemblance to trains. But John Duffy's brother was certain that he *was* a train—long, thunderous and immense, with white steam escaping noisily from his feet, and deep-throated bellows coming rhythmically from where his funnel was.

Moreover, he was certain that he was a particular train, the 9:20 into Dublin. His station was the bedroom. He stood absolutely still for twenty minutes, knowing that a good train is equally punctual in departure as in arrival. He glanced often at his watch to make sure that the hour should not go by unnoticed. His watch bore the words "Shockproof" and "Railway Timekeeper."

Precisely at 9:20 he emitted a piercing whistle, shook the great mass of his metal ponderously into motion and steamed away heavily into town. The train arrived dead on time at its destination, which was the office of Messrs. Polter and Polter, Solicitors, Commissioners for Oaths. For obvious reasons, the name of this firm is fictitious. In the office were two men, old Mr. Cranberry and young Mr. Hodge. Both were clerks and both took their orders from John Duffy's brother. Of course, both names are imaginary.

"Good morning, Mr. Duffy," said Mr. Cranberry. He was old and polite, grown yellow in the firm's service.

Mr. Duffy looked at him in surprise. "Can you not see I am a train?" he said. "Why do you call me Mr. Duffy?"

Mr. Cranberry gave a laugh and winked at Mr. Hodge who sat young, neat and good-looking, behind his typewriter.

"All right, Mr. Train," he said. "That's a cold morning, sir. Hard to get up steam these cold mornings, sir."

"It is not easy," said Mr. Duffy. He shunted expertly to his chair and waited patiently before he sat down while the company's servants adroitly uncoupled him. Mr. Hodge was sniggering behind his roller.

"Any cheap excursions, sir?" he asked.

"No," Mr. Duffy replied. "There are season tickets, of course."

"Third class and first class, I suppose, sir?"

"No," said Mr. Duffy. "In deference to the views of Herr Marx, all class distinction in the passenger rolling stock has been abolished."

"I see," said Mr. Cranberry.

"That's communism," said Mr. Hodge.

"He means," said Mr. Cranberry, "that it is now first class only."

"How many wheels has your engine?" asked Mr. Hodge. "Three big ones?"

"I am not a goods train," said Mr. Duffy acidly. "The wheel formation of a passenger engine is four-four-two—two large driving wheels on each side coupled, of course, with a four-wheel buggy in front and two small wheels at the cab. Why do you ask?"

"The platform's in the way," Mr. Cranberry said. "He can't see it."

"Oh, quite," said Mr. Duffy. "I forgot."

"I suppose you use a lot of coal?" Mr. Hodge asked.

"About half a ton per thirty miles," said Mr. Duffy slowly, mentally checking the consumption of that morning. "I need scarcely say that frequent stopping and starting at suburban stations takes a lot out of me."

"I'm sure it does," said Mr. Hodge, with sympathy.

They talked like that for half an hour until the elderly Mr. Polter arrived and passed gravely into his back office. When that happened, conversation was at an end. Little was heard until lunchtime except the scratch of pens and the fitful clicking of the typewriter.

John Duffy's brother always left the office at one-thirty and went home to his lunch. Consequently he started getting steam up at twelve-forty-five so that there should be no delay at the hour of departure. When the "Railway Timekeeper" said that it was one-thirty, he let out another shrill whistle and steamed slowly out of the office without a word or a look at his colleagues. He arrived home dead on time.

We now approach the really important part of the plot, the incident which gives the whole story its significance. In the middle of his lunch John Duffy's brother felt something important, something queer, momentous and magical taking

place inside his head. He seemed to feel a great weight rolling off his brain, an immense tension relaxing, clean light flooding a place which had been dark. He dropped his knife and fork and sat there for a time wild-eyed, a filling of potatoes unattended in his mouth. Then he swallowed, rose weakly from the table and walked to the window, wiping away the perspiration which had started out on his brow.

He gazed out into the day, no longer a train, but a badly frightened man. Inch by inch he went back over his morning. So far as he could recall he had killed no one, shouted no bad language, broken no windows. He had only talked to Cranberry and Hodge. Down in the roadway there was no dark van arriving with uniformed men infesting it. He sat down again desolately beside the unfinished meal.

John Duffy's brother was a man of some courage. When he got back to the office he had some whiskey in his stomach and it was later in the afternoon than it should be. Hodge and Cranberry seemed preoccupied with their letters.

He hung up his hat casually and said, "I'm afraid the train is a bit late getting back."

From below his downcast brows he looked very sharply at Cranberry's face. He thought he saw the shadow of a smile flit absently on the old man's placid features as they continued poring down on a paper. The smile seemed to mean that a morning's joke was not good enough for the same afternoon. Hodge rose suddenly in his corner and passed silently into Mr. Polter's office with his letters. John Duffy's brother sighed and sat down wearily at his desk.

When he left the office that night, his heart was lighter and he thought he had a good excuse for buying more liquor. Nobody knew his secret but himself and nobody else would ever know.

It was a complete cure. Never once did the strange malady return. But to this day John Duffy's brother starts at the rumble of a train in the Liffey tunnel and stands rooted to the road when he comes suddenly on a level crossing—silent, so to speak, upon a peak in Darien.

FELICIA GIZYCKA

FOREVER FLORIDA

UNDER this same palm tree, season after season, they took the sunshine together in their bathing suits. Every day, when he was well enough, they came out of their cottage, walking very slowly, as if they, too, were old. She waited patiently while he came, dragging his legs, and thrusting his canes ahead of him as though he were driving stakes into the beautiful white sand.

Mark and Olivia Davidson. When the young couple appeared on the beach all the old people smiled. When they settled under their palm tree, people came over to say hello. The gray and snow-white heads, the men in their little canvas hats, the wives in their modest bathing suits.

This was Lemon Grove, an old people's paradise, a suburb by the sea. It was quiet with restrictions, beautiful with gardens, and tiny stucco houses of many pale and different colors. Here old husbands and wives had come to rest at last and spend the long wonderful years in sunshine. Everybody went to the beach in the morning, chatted in their gardens at teatime, visited back and forth in the evenings. The wives went to lectures in nearby Tampa. Everybody went to bed at nine o'clock, or ten. A lot of problems solved, a lot of problems buried as unsolvable. All passion spent.

When the Davidson's came they poured a little life into Lemon Grove. They were young, so very young. He was forty, and she, in spite of a dried and maidenish look, was still in her thirties. They were both chatty and gay, and he laughed and joked about his pain. They made other people laugh. They made other people say, "Our lot is not so hard. Look at the Davidsons, young and with their lives blighted. So devoted. So unflinchingly devoted."

The Davidsons were their children, come here to stay for-

ever. Not like one's own children up North who were neglectful, busy with their own full, healthy lives. And secretly the Davidsons meant something else to the old people—something that was neither defined nor understood but which gave them excited pleasure, romantic and a little cruel. It was as though something lovely and airborne had fallen among them. A wounded swallow, a crippled butterfly, hopeless and beautiful, and theirs forever.

So that when Olivia Davidson did get away, when she up and ran away in the middle of the night, Lemon Grove was shocked and wounded in a way which went beyond mere scandal. The unforeseeable had happened, the impossible had occurred.

The old people searched their minds for an answer, and they could find none. Thus their anger against her did not cease. Their commiseration with Mark was endlessly exaggerated and prolonged. Mark, poor Mark. With that shocked white face, those legs, dragging again. After he had been walking so well. And it seemed he'd left Doctor Spreckels and gone to another doctor. And the rumor went around the beach that Doctor Spreckels was somehow involved in it all.

Everybody kept making Mrs. Swanson tell them the story over and over; the circumstances of that Wednesday night. She was the neighbor who heard the Davidsons' front door slamming, and Olivia's steps running on the walk.

She was their friend, knowing them the best of anyone. She ran out into the cool night, without bothering to put on a coat, because she heard the car starting up.

"I thought Mark was sick," she told everyone. "I called to her, 'Olivia. Is there anything I can do?' The car was there, with the door open, and the motor running. Then she was coming out of the house again, dressed for the train and carrying a suitcase and a coat. 'I really didn't take it in,' " she said to people. "And I'm afraid I said, 'Why, Olivia, where are you going?' And she smiled at me, sort of excited, the way people do when something's wrong. And she said, 'Well, if you want to know, I'm leaving.'

"I just stood there. I said, 'Well, I declare!'

"She put the suitcase in the car and said, 'Good-bye, Amelia,' just like that. Just as if she were going off for the week-end.

" 'But where are you going?' I said.

" 'To Tampa,' she said. 'Up to Tampa.'

" 'My dear, why don't you come to my house?' I said. 'Why don't you just spend the night with me?'

"She was in the car just waiting for me to finish so she could drive off. She said, 'Thank you, Amelia. You're very sweet. But I'm getting out of town.'

" 'But only this afternoon in my house,' I said to her, 'you

were having such fun! You in your new pink hat, and Mark walking without his canes, and watching you enjoying yourself. Why, I thought of it as a celebration for you two. And you were laughing and talking,' I said to her. 'Looking so happy. And Mark watching you.' But she gave me another queer, excited smile.

"She said, 'Good-bye Amelia. I'll be taking a train from Tampa, back to Cleveland. You know that's where I grew up. My sister still lives there. Well then, you know that my life is in Cleveland. I have to go back there.'

" 'I'm very sorry,' I said, 'to hear that you haven't been happy in Lemon Grove.' I guess I sounded put out.

"And then she leaned over, and actually gave me a little push. 'I'm going before Mark comes out,' she said. 'You've been a swell neighbor, Amelia. But I never want to see Lemon Grove again. And I never will. Here comes Mark now.'

"She started off just as Mark came out of the house. He was in his pajamas and still without his canes. He stood watching the car go off, and I don't think he saw or noticed me.

" 'Is there anything I can do, Mark?' I said.

"And then he saw me. He looked at me, and said, 'My wife has left me. She's going to get a divorce.'

" 'But surely,' I said, 'she can't be serious,' and I walked over to him. Oh, I just wanted to take him in my arms and hug him! He looked so distracted."

And everybody listening to the story could see little Mrs. Swanson, kind-hearted and chatty and good and now utterly bewildered, and with nothing to hold on to, no conclusion to draw in this awful state of confusion, standing there in her pale cotton dress in the cold (enough to give one a heart attack). And chatting away to Mark Davidson, saying a whole lot of kind and jumbled things in a sudden flood.

"He just shook his head at me," she told people. "He went right back in the house and shut the door. It was sort of final. He looked *final,*" she said, trying to make a special word to suit the occasion.

"If she doesn't stop running around the Grove, talking," people said, "she's going to have another heart attack. That'll be two things on Olivia's conscience."

"But people keep asking her to tell it," someone said.

"How do you know Olivia has a conscience?" someone asked.

And then people took that up, and said she had no conscience, none at all. Going off into the night smiling and gay, leaving a deathly sick husband. Had anyone wired to tell her he'd had a relapse? That he won't talk to anyone except his new doctor? Thus they chatted on, and their anger against Olivia,

caused by their terrible sense of loss, lasted as long as they did.

Olivia Davidson ran away on a Wednesday night. On Wednesday morning, the old people had looked down the beach, and seen her sitting with Mark, under that same palm tree near their house. They looked just the same as always, quietly together. It was true that at lunchtime, Olivia had gone right back to the house instead of walking down the beach with Mark to say hello. But that was such a little thing.

Besides, Mark had said, "My wife wants me to show off. She says I'm a big boy now." And he had smiled that sweet smile of his.

They had congratulated him with pride and affection. Their darling, their young and handsome sweet and good darling, who was getting well and strong, though never strong enough to really leave them. How could they know that this was the beginning of the end? And that the end would come that very night?

Olivia sat there with Mark, under that palm tree. The black palm shadows fell like great black hands stretching for an octave. He and she were like two muted keys, pressed down together into the white-hot antiseptic, everlasting sand. Here was this morning, dissolved and motionless among a thousand mornings. Here was the sky, forever the same, flat and shallow and endlesssly, tropically blue.

She leaned against the palm trunk sewing in the white brilliance and the black shadow, and Mark lay beside her, his poor legs stretched into the sun. They would stay here forever and ever. In Florida, in this fake landscape. Man-made white beaches and the polite water, so flat and pale as if inviting you to walk upon it. So deadly underneath, teeming with vivid devouring things. These polite flower gardens with the brilliant and vicious colors, and palms groomed especially for tourists, and everything potted and tended, planted and watered, to turn your eyes away from the sick interior, the dying palms, the rotting swamps, the miles of dry-sucked land with everything half dead upon it. She and Mark had no money to go away in the summer like most of the old people. They were imprisoned here forever, summer and winter, chained up together, man and wife.

But ah, this morning there was this little difference. This little hope. It was as Doctor Spreckles had said. "You can be free now, by his side."

Here was this tiny clue, his canes, lying on the sand. They did not lie within his reach but several yards away, and he could get up without them and walk without them, and feel no pain at all. And she stared at this space between him and his canes,

the way a prisoner might look at a ray of light from an opening door.

He lay pretending to be asleep. The little white canvas hat covered his face. Nevertheless he was watching her. He had the kind of clever peephole that you couldn't see, made with the cunning of the professional invalid, and the tyrant. At night he put his head under the bedclothes, and she could never see the little place he made. But the door had to be open into the living room, and she had to sit in that chair, under that certain lamp.

So that in the morning he was able to say, "You did not read last night, Beloved. Your mind was far away."

"I thought you were asleep," she would always say, feeling her face go stiff.

"My Darling Dear, I was watching you. I watched your thoughts. I could see every one of your little thoughts."

Now his voice came gently, but suddenly from under the little white hat. "Your sewing has dropped in your lap," he said. "Are you up to some mischief?"

She felt her face stiffening. I must get out of the *habit* of fear, she told herself. Her eyes swept over to his canes lying way off there in the sand, and she let her face relax and go soft, almost expressionless. Then she smiled carefully, the way she smiled for the old folks.

"You'll have to stop peeking at me," she said, and she accented the word peeking, making it arch and cute. "You're a big boy now," she said.

He sat up, and the hat fell. He looked at her, and she saw that he was actually surprised. He had a powerful torso, down to the waist. Filled out and powerful from dragging himself on crutches and canes for five years. His face was powerful, also, but long and sad, filled with the martyred lines of sickness.

She looked right at him. "I was just sitting here thinking how you're going to be all well soon. Almost as good as new."

He gave her the sickle-shaped smile which was always his answer. "Yes, My Love," he said tenderly. "Yes, I am getting well."

"You haven't had a bit of pain for a month," she said.

"No, Darling, I haven't," he said.

She got up and stood there. "I'm going to wade down the beach and go on home," she said. "You come along when you're ready."

For the second time he was caught off guard, surprised. "Aren't you going down the beach with me, to say hello, and show me off?"

She stood with her back to the sun, her sewing clutched tight in her hand. And although her face was strained and drawn, with her brunette even-featured good looks faded and

aged, even so her body was still smooth and young. Young and slim in the waist and tight in the breasts.

"It's no news that you're getting well," she said. "But you'll make quite a little stir, Dear, if you go walking around by yourself. That'll really show them."

"And you'll make quite a little stir yourself, walking along in that bathing suit," he said. "You'll be really showing them, too." He reached his hand out to her, to help him up.

She did not take his hand. She turned her back, and took off her sandals. "If you don't like this suit, why didn't you say so before?" she asked.

He stood up slowly and on his face now was that plaintive gentle whimpering look.

"Oh Darling, don't be mean just before lunch," he said. "In half an hour we'll have our lunch, and I won't be able to eat."

"Well, neither will I, so let's cut it out," she said. Astonishment filled her. She was holding out against him right to the end of this round. She smiled, waved her hand, and turned away from him.

Down the beach she went, like some wild animal long caged, now loose. It would take a long time for her to get completely free. To live by his side, in her new freedom. She would have to lift her mind out of this dismal, single groove. This mind enslaved to please, this night-and-day nurse mind. In the beginning she had tried to read to him and play good music to him, and once she had taken him to the theatre in a wheelchair, only to have him collapse later and lie weak and sick in bed. Everything that was not his particular way of thinking promptly made him very ill. He had a successful business mind and all else gave him pain. Thus she had narrowed her vision for him, tamed down everything to a postcard stillness.

But now she would speak out and keep speaking out and go to the concerts and plays down here, whether he liked it or not.

"You can live by his side and be free," Doctor Spreckels said. "It's hard," he'd said. "But it can be done."

She looked at the beach as she waded along. Really, it was a lovely day, with brown and golden children swimming and playing in the sand. A few young local mothers. No young tourists yet, it was too early. The young ones worked up North in the cold till some of them twisted up in sorrow and agony and crawled down here. Always, where the gaps were left each year some newcomer arrived, palsied in a chair, hobbling on a cane. The wife, the mother, pushing the chair, handing the crutches, with a carefully stiffened expression. Are they guilty, too? she asked herself. Guilty as I was?

"Mrs. Davidson, just what gave your husband arthritis in the first place?"

That from Doctor Spreckels, sitting there in his little surgery. His kind old horny face like a horse and buggy doctor's, his steel-rimmed specs. The question had felt exactly like a knife going into her. And yet it was the kind of thing, the right thing, for it opened up the hideous secret place and made her talk, and talk, and tell everything at last. So that he, Doctor Spreckels, was able to tell her the things she needed to know.

I must not feel guilt, she told herself now. And she almost ran through the water feeling so light and free. Feeling, indeed, at this moment that all punishment for sin was ended. That now she had but to start her new life, her own inner feeling.

"The drug is working wonderfully," Doctor Spreckels said. "I doubt if he ever has another twinge."

Not another twinge! she thought, recklessly, exultantly. How wonderful to be free. Free of all the pain.

He was down the beach, a small shape in a white hat, moving among the old people, making his martyr's jokes.

"My wife says I have to go out alone now. She's getting very independent." And that pleasant smiling wink to remove all sinister meaning.

Ah, let the old people laugh with him, back there in the shade. Let them love him, and gather around him. Let them pity Mark and herself. She was no longer tragic. She had served out her term, and freedom was here now, to be understood, adjusted to, and fought for.

She wanted to get out of the water, and run down the beach. But not with all their eyes on her. No. There were other, and better ways. She went fast, enjoying the swift speed of walking on the sand, down the hot white road to their entrance, and now along the curved pink sidewalk, whizzing past the over-green lawn, the bright impossible flowers, the sweet-sick tropical smell. She got in the house, and stood in the living room. The maid had left lunch on the stove and set the table pleasantly by the window, with two fresh azaleas lying on the lemon-colored cloth.

She saw herself in the mantel mirror, with the strong light coming in from over the sea.

What would Ian Macpherson think of her now, so sick and strained looking for all the world like a celibate, tending an old sick man? He would not love me any more, she told herself. That time is past. There would never be a conflict any more. In all these years you have not heard from him. He must be married. He could even be dead.

She took a shower, and put on a pale clean wash dress and sneakers. All right, she told herself. If Ian saw me now, if he were still free, he would still love me. He would love me and restore the bloom. I am still young, and capable of another life.

But I have made this choice. It is a free choice and therefore wonderful.

She heard Mark outside on the walk, and she ran to open the door.

"Well, that looks just fine," she said.

He came in and kissed her on the forehead. Then he sank into a chair and said, "Whew."

"They all praised me on the beach," he said. He let the canes fall carelessly, as if they were something unfamiliar and unimportant.

"Best of all, they praised you," he said. "Mrs. Swanson and the Vails and everybody. They said you were the most devoted wife in Lemon Grove. What do you know about that?"

"I love it," she said, laughing. "I love it. I'm going to get our lunch." And when she was in the kitchen, he called to her. "We're going to a party this afternoon."

"A party?" she asked him, coming back with the tray.

"Mrs. Swanson is having a great big cocktail party," he said. "And we're going. And your friend Doctor Spreckels is going to be there." He let this slip so mildly, no one else listening would imagine it was anything.

At once the words leaped into her mind: Don't be afraid. Remember what Doctor Spreckels said: It is he that is afraid. And she turned around now, smiling back at him.

"Doctor Spreckles was a great help to me when I went to see him," she said cutting all ground from under him at once. "I didn't tell you because I thought you'd fuss. You do fuss, you know, about things."

"Why should my wife go behind my back, to see my doctor?" he asked. "Why go in broad daylight, then, where all of Lemon Grove could see? Didn't you know someone would tell me, Beloved?" he ended very gently. "Naturally they thought I knew. Naturally, My Love!"

"Don't be childish," she said. "Come over here and eat your lunch. I went to him about the drug, of course. I didn't want to alarm you. He said the thing was sure. Sure cure. You're going to be as good as new. And we're going to readjust. We're going to have a wonderful new life."

He looked at her fully, listening to her. And she smiled at him, gaily. "It's going to be fun," she said to him. "We're *both* going to have a wonderful life."

"Did Spreckels tell you that?" he asked.

"Of course!" she said lightly. She smiled at him, so he had to smile back. "I'm going swimming," she said. "I'm not going to eat too much."

Out there, swimming in the pale, warm, flat sea, she thought

of the long past in Cleveland now gone forever. Of that time when she thought she could rid herself of this marriage. Go to Ian Macpherson and be like other women, happy, loving and free.

She swam slowly along, close to the shore, looking down at the snow white sand, upon which danced the golden wires of broken sunlight, rippled by water.

She thought about Mark's Cleveland house which had been as large as her father's, but more modern. And there she was, suddenly sitting in that living room, having a talk with her father.

"I don't know," he had said. "He's a gloomy cuss."

"But I can make him laugh," she said. She was young and innocent, full of confidence after the honeymoon.

"We laughed in Bermuda," she said. "You should see him laugh."

"He laughs with you, because that's what you want," her father said.

Don't scare yourself with old memories, she told herself now.

But she got out of the water and sat on the hot white beach, thinking of the past.

In those next years in Cleveland, Mark went out with her to theatres, concerts and parties. "I have nothing but my work," he said. "And you. I have made this money for you. Enjoy yourself." But he sat watching her, always.

And now, sitting here on the beach, she raised her hands, and put them in front of her face, for she seemed to be in that Cleveland house again, after her father's death. She was alone, being constantly watched. Ian Macpherson had come into her life, as if to save her. She loved him. This gave her courage.

"You'll have to go and tell him," Ian had said. And he had stood there, young and fair, strong and wise, and so normal, so healing for her.

"But Mark lives for me," she said. "His whole life is me."

"He lives off you. He sucks blood from you," Ian had said.

But he had left Cleveland, after Mark got sick. And her sister hadn't understood it, she could not tell her sister, and her father was already dead. And she had been alone, unable to resist the overwhelming force of guilt.

"You just stand up for your rights now," Doctor Spreckels had said to her. "Stand right up to him, and he'll collapse, you'll see."

And although Mark had fought her all morning, still she had won. And Mark's own blood and bones and body were on her side. He was healing up, and coming over to her side, as though some forgiveness, deeper than his conscious mind, were at work. Perhaps the very root of the evil could wither up and die

in the end. For if he got well, his mind could get well, too, with her devotion, her courage and her help.

At the party they crowded around Mark, the white and bald heads, cheerful, talking in the soft voices of old people.

"Look at him," they said. "Coming to a party, standing straight and tall."

"Olivia," said Mrs. Swanson, "this is my nephew, Alec Bridges, he's from Cleveland, too."

And then she dropped Olivia, left her standing there with Alec Bridges, while she said, "Hello, there, Peter" to Doctor Spreckels coming to the door. Then she took Mark by the hand, and put her other hand on Doctor Spreckels' sleeve. "You have only to look at Olivia to see that you've cured him," she said. And now Olivia was conscious of her new pink straw hat, her white silk dress, with the tiny dark design, her high-heeled shoes and new bag. All three of them watched her standing here with this nephew. She saw Doctor Spreckels, mild and tired from his work, wave his hand at her, and Mrs. Swanson smiling, brimming over with happiness for her and Mark. And last of all Mark, looking at her as though someone had just tapped him on the shoulder and suggested something for him to notice.

"Let's sit down," she said to the young man. It was only then that she saw he was very handsome and rather heavy, blond, even-featured, an athlete probably. He was gay, feeling in a gay mood about a fishing trip.

"You should come on the fishing trip," he said to her suddenly. "You *should* come, you'd be just the one." And he smiled delightedly at this, explaining about the other couple and how they were going to be gone three days.

She looked over and saw that Mark was sitting way back in his chair. "I don't think I can," she said. "But you must come over. We're right next door."

"Oh, could I?" he said. "That would be a relief." He looked around the room, and dropped his voice. "I love Aunt Amelia and all that, but golly. You know what I mean."

In this room he was conspicuous, a fair head among gray heads. He was young and strong, and compared to everybody else he moved so quickly, with the restless unthinking movements of youth, crossing his knees, lighting a cigarette for her.

"Do you know Ian Macpherson in Cleveland?" she asked him.

"Ian Macpherson?" he said, frowning and thinking back. And then his face cleared. "Oh yes, of course," he said. "Nice feller. He's moved back to Cleveland. Say! He's improving Cleveland. He's a good architect. He's got imagination besides

everything else. But he struck me as one of those lonesome fellows who does nothing but work."

Across the room Mark was sitting in a chair by himself, watching her. She caught his eye. She winked at him. And in a minute, she got up and said good-bye, and went over to him.

"Let's go now, Dear," she said.

"No," he said. "You're having a good time. I like to watch you having a good time."

"Come on," she said. "I'm the cook tonight."

And she laughed, pulling him out of the chair.

"Have you really got all you want now?" he asked.

"Absolutely. Come on," she said.

He was stiffened from sitting in the chair. He said good-bye, and they left the house rather slowly.

When they were back in their living room he sat down, even more slowly and carefully, in his own chair.

"Don't tell me," she said gaily, "that all those women wore you out."

"Olivia," he said, his voice so sudden and strange that her high mood was gone in an instant. "Oh, Olivia, it's no use. Why should I kid you? Why should I kid myself? I'm in pain, Olivia. I'm in pain."

She looked at him, but he looked down at the floor.

"Since when?" she said.

"Since always. In the beginning it was a little better. But it's come back. I've said to myself, 'I must get well for her sake. I must *be* well for her sake.' I—I walked around like that all day, pretending. But Olivia Darling. Oh, my Darling. I—I can hardly stand it now." He put his face in his hands.

She had a moment when she thought he was crying. He made fists out of his hands, holding them against his face.

She looked at him, and a strange warming softening thing happened. It happened very suddenly, coming from nothing at all the way a miracle might come to someone. She could feel love in her heart for him. The fight went out of her. Everything drained out of her except the full warmth of pity and love.

She went to him and sat on the floor by his chair. She put her arms around him. "Oh Darling," she said. "Oh Darling. I'm sorry. I'll call Spreckels right away."

"Don't," he said. "I still have those pills, get me my little pills. I can sleep now. Oh yes, I know I can sleep. I haven't slept —not for nights. Oh, Olivia, I've been lying very still for nights, breathing as though I were asleep."

She held onto him saying nothing. I'll do anything in the world for you. I'll never leave you, she thought.

His arms tightened around her and he held onto her, as if

he'd never let her go. "Oh Darling, I love you so," he said. "I hate so to—"

"Never mind," she said. "Come on, I'll make your bed. I'll get the pills."

"Get the pills," he said. "And let's stay here like this."

She got them, and when he had taken them she sat down on the floor beside him again. "How rotten," she said, sitting there, holding him. "What awful, rotten luck."

"I love you," he said. "I love you. Olivia, I love you, I love you."

"I love you," she said, astonished at hearing it, and then saying it again, "I love you."

His arms tightened around her and the hungry, desperate way he held her was something special, a sort of revelation through an embrace. No man, not Ian, not the boys in her youth, had ever held her like this. She felt that she was sinking down into his arms forever, down, down into his arms the way one might sink down into God and eternity, slowly and warmly and forever, after a long and terrible battle.

"But I should call Spreckels, Dear," she said, worried. "I really should."

"No, it's no good," he said. "I'll see him tomorrow. It's a little better now. Olivia, my way of loving you has been wrong. But I couldn't help it, don't you see? I could never help it. I made myself sick, I got myself like this—"

"Never mind," she said. "Never mind."

After about twenty minutes she could feel his body becoming soft and heavy.

"Now," she said, and walked with him into the bedroom, keeping her arm around him. After hot milk and crackers he finally fell into a light and restless sleep. But she knew what was before them. All night long he would wake up in pain.

And now, for the first time, she looked toward the phone, as if for help. Shouldn't she call after all? And yet she had a feeling inside her that something precious might be broken, the intruder's voice, the doctor, unsympathetic, matter-of-fact. He would perhaps suggest coming over to give a hypodermic. And it would be like shattering an over-expanded moment in time, like a spun glass globe, spun out too thin, ready to break in an hour, two hours. Before me lies slavery, she thought. Everything back again. But like someone enchanted by magic and sudden love, she did not care. I will be with him forever, she said. I will never leave his side, even for an hour. And she rejoiced in saying it. "I am a slave," she repeated, and her heart filled with light and sudden joy.

Finally, after she had eaten a sandwich in the kitchen, she did go to the phone and dial the number. Don't do it, she said to

herself even as she dialed. But he's in pain, she thought, I must.

"Doctor Spreckels," she said. "He's worse again. In fact," she said, keeping her voice low, and watching the closed bedroom door, "he says he's been in pain all along. He says in the beginning it was a little better, but the drug wore off, and now —now he's in terrible pain again, Doctor Spreckels," and she could hear her own voice, solemn and tearful and with that level, steady tone of accusation. "We were wrong about him, you see. The drug hasn't worked, and he's really been a hero. He's been—"

She stopped, as though he had interrupted her. Actually he had said nothing. There was a silence on the wire, and she was listening to it.

"He really has been driven into a corner," the rough, matter-of-fact voice finally said.

She could not bring herself to say, 'What do you mean?' For what was meant was immediately and terribly clear.

She hung onto the phone, listening. "Don't hang up," she said. "I have to talk to you. I have to wait—"

"I'm not hanging up," he said. "I'm right here."

"Well, I suppose I have to ask you, then," she said. "To tell me. So tell me."

Now she knew that Mark was not asleep. She went into the bedroom, and turned on the lamp by his bed.

"Yes, I've called Spreckels," she said. "That's right. That's it."

"I know," he said. "Of course I know."

He lay very flat on the bed; the expression on his face was careful.

"All right," she said. "Let's go back to the beginning. Let's start from the beginning. It is as before. You are not in pain. The drug is working. You have been just fine. For a whole month."

He didn't speak or look at her until he said, "There's the last hour we've had together. I've got that."

"I don't understand it," she said. "I was going to stay with you. We were going to work it out."

"You were beginning to leave me. Today, all day."

"No, I wasn't. I was going to stay. I was going to help us live together. The way we should."

"No, today all day you were leaving me. At the party, you saw another man. Everybody, even the old men, noticed you, in that straw hat. That young man will want you to come away with him. A fishing trip. And then other dates. And then he'll ask you to come away with him. If not this man, then some other. You would finally leave me. I am well now, you can

leave me. I told a lie. But you fell for it. You wanted to fall for it. For one whole hour you loved me. You loved me! And you know it!"

She got up from her chair, but she stood beside the chair staring across at him, not moving any nearer. He lay on his back, his eyes closed, his arms thrown out and his hands, palms upward, limp as though no longer able to make a fist or hold onto anything. It was the magician who at last says, See? These are all my tricks, you have seen them all now, shabby and poor. But I have cheated you because I am starving, dying, ready to die of hunger. And I had to cheat you to live and eat. For one hour you were enchanted and held by the light and golden magic. And yet I am giving you your money back, every cent of it.

She felt the terrible truth of this, and did not dare go near him. She imagined herself going there to the bed, lying down with him, having his arms come around her, with the magic strength of helplessness and defeat. The same way his arms had been around her an hour ago. And she would re-experience this compelling love, this sense of being bottomlessly possessed. And she would give him everything, her heart and her bones and her blood and her mind.

This is why I married him, she thought. This is what I wanted.

He opened his eyes and said, "I suppose I could have a cigarette."

She went over to him, handed him the cigarette and matches and returned to her chair. "I am going back to Cleveland," she said.

She looked right at him; he did not look at her, he was smoking, looking at the lamp.

She hesitated, choosing the next thing to say. "I won't take alimony," she said. "I'll take a job. I'll send the car back from Tampa. I'll leave it in a garage, and have them drive it back."

He smoked, looking at the wall.

"I'll pack up what I need now," she said. "I don't know how or when I'll get my other things. But it doesn't matter."

He propped himself on one elbow and looked at her.

"You do not dare stay in this house," he said. "You do not dare spend another night in this house with me." He said it in triumph and surprise, like a lover, who has just won new words of love, who has just kissed his girl, and heard her vows—and who stretches out his arms at last, to enfold her forever.

And these were the last words she ever heard him say. For when she hurried out of the house like someone desperate who has no time to lose, he was still in his room, still in his bed.

LOUIS CLYDE STOUMEN

THE BLOND DOG

MY Essex had a leak in its water pump and I wasn't ten minutes out of Hollywood before the radiator started to steam. Up in Laurel Canyon there are no gas stations. Since I couldn't afford a better car than the Essex, I couldn't afford a cracked block. The car needed water fast.

As soon as I topped the rise I shifted into neutral, coasted on the downgrade, and turned the wheels into the first private driveway I saw. It was narrow, curving road of smooth tarvia, enclosed on both sides by vine-covered stone walls at least six feet high. Momentum carried me rapidly around the curve toward a house.

I still don't understand where the dog came from. He couldn't have come through the stone walls, and I doubt he came over them. I didn't see him come down the drive ahead of me. There was a flash of white, and he was under my wheels before I knew it, screaming like a hurt woman.

The emergency brake threw me hard against the steering wheel, but I was out of the car before it stopped rocking.

The dog was a large Russian wolfhound, a beautiful silky-haired blond animal. He had been hit in the hindquarters, perhaps had his spine crushed, and now he struggled grotesquely five feet back of my car. He tried to get to his feet, but his hind legs and haunches lay limp and broken on the roadway, and he managed only to raise his great racer's chest onto his forelegs and to point to the sky his long blond snout in a soprano scream of agony.

The dog's terrible cry bounced from green wall to green wall in the narrow roadway, like a fire siren in a phone booth.

Hitting somebody's dog with my car was unpleasant enough, but the sudden sound of his pain was terrifying. I trembled so my legs could hardly hold me up. And as the sound continued, I

rushed about the road searching for a club or a stone to put the animal out of his misery. There was nothing.

I couldn't bear the dog's writhing and the sound of his screams. I jumped into the Essex and lunged it backward over the hurt animal. There was a soft bump under a rear wheel and then under a front wheel, and the pitch of the dog's scream lowered with each impact. I drove forward over the body once more. The cry stopped as if a blaring radio had been switched off.

I braked the car and my fingers were barely able to find the ignition key and turn it off.

Through the windshield I saw a woman come running up the driveway from the house. She was dressed in white play clothes, and her long blonde hair flashed in the sun. She ran like a professional sprinter—so fast that she banked on the turn.

"I saw you!" she shouted. She was hysterical. "I saw you purposely drive over my dog!"

Before I could answer, she flung open the door of the car and, with a strength surprising in one so young and slight, took my arm and pulled me from my seat out onto the driveway.

She slapped my face on one side then the other, and I stood there weak and shaken and took it. As she swung for the third time, I raised my arm to protect my face and took the blow on the back of my hand. The woman had long fingernails, and I felt them rip over my skin. I turned the hand and saw blood.

Then the woman was crying, and all the strength was gone out of her. Her shoulders hunched up and her hands covered her face and she sobbed, "Poor Prince Igor! Poor, happy, lovely dog!"

She raised her face to me again and said low in her throat, more as accusation than question, "Why did you do it?"

I explained about the Essex needing water, and how it had been an accident, and why I had run the car over the dog again.

She looked at me through tears, only half believing, then took two steps toward the back of the car and looked at the remains of the dog.

Her body trembled, and I saw her sway. I reached out and took her about the waist. She didn't faint, but she let me hold her and pat her shoulder, and she buried her face on my chest, sobbing again, uncontrollaby, like a child. I turned her about and walked her toward the house, still patting her shoulder comfortingly through its sheath of loose blonde hair.

It was a low one-story house of modern design. I noticed an entire wall of glass, some cement surfaces, and the use of redwood for the roof and doorway.

Inside, I sat her down on a fat chartreuse chair. She sank into

it limply, sobbing into her hands. I walked back through the house looking for someone to take care of her.

Two bedrooms, a library, a kitchen, two bathrooms, an open dining patio and an attached garage housing a new station wagon were all empty. Off the patio was a small swimming pool, and beyond that a bungalow that might have been servants' quarters.

I called, "Anybody home?" There was no answer.

When I got back to the living room the woman was herself again. She stood cool and lovely, only a little red-eyed from crying, by a black lacquer cabinet. She wore a white play skirt and a white bra, and she was pouring something from a silver decanter into two goblets of purple glass.

It was then I recognized her. I had seen her often on the screen. The long silver-blonde hair that waterfalled about her shoulders was her film trade-mark. I had admired her performances for some years.

She extended one of the purple goblets and I took it.

"Thanks," I said. "You know, I just recognized you. You're Lucy Warner—I've been a fan of yours for years!"

"Not too many years, I hope," she shrugged. "I loved Prince Igor. I've had him since he was a puppy. But I understand now how it happened. He was such a friendly dog, always running up the driveway to welcome anyone who drove in."

I lifted my glass to her, then drank. Scotch.

"Who are you?" she asked.

I fished a card from my wallet and passed it to her.

GRANT WILKINSON
Pretty Pictures
732½ El Caribao Drive
Hollywood 38 HO 9-2722

That "Pretty Pictures" pitch was my wife's idea. She thinks it's cute and helps me get trade. I think it stinks.

"A photographer?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What sort of work do you do?"

"Anything I can get. Babies, weddings, portraits, store fronts. I was just on my way now to deliver some architectural prints to a customer down the canyon. Pictures of his house." I told her the name and she knew it.

We chatted about ten minutes and each had a second drink. I told her how much I had enjoyed her work in pictures, and she liked that.

"About the dog," I said, "how much . . ."

"Never mind that. Prince Igor can't be replaced with money."

"Well, how about letting me bury him?"

"Thank you. But don't bother about that either. My gardener is due here later this afternoon. He'll do it. You've had enough unpleasantness for one day."

"I'm terribly sorry it happened," I said. "You've been swell about it all." I got up to go.

"Don't you want some water for the car?"

"Well," I said, "it can wait till—"

"It's no trouble. You'll want to leave by the other gate anyway. Bring the car to the door."

When I drove up, she was standing by the door holding a yellow oversize ceramic pitcher gracefully in both hands.

I took the pitcher from her, set it down, opened the Essex' hood and started to pour.

"Those pictures I mentioned are on the front seat if you care to look," I said. "Open the camera case. They're in an envelope on top of the camera."

She got the envelope, took out the 8 by 10s, and shuffled through them. "Oh, I *like* these," she said. "Such clean dramatic work."

"Thanks."

"You know, I'd like you to make some like these of my house."

"Sure. Anytime you say."

"The sun is fine now," she said. "If you feel like working after what happened."

I put down the hood. "OK," I said.

My fingers were still a little shaky. But I set the Graphic on a tripod and used a cable release.

The house was the most interesting I'd ever photographed. Large spacious rooms, with a view from each room. Clean low-slung lines. She told me it was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. I shot both sides of six holders as she stood by, watching and interested. In four of the shots I posed her in doorways and window areas.

"You've been very kind," I said when I was finished. "I'll mail you the prints by the end of the week." I jotted down her house number in my notebook.

She offered me her hand, and when I took it she smiled and wrinkled up the corners of her eyes in that friendly way she does sometimes on the screen. A lock of her blonde hair fell over her forehead. I drove out the other gate and delivered the architectural prints to my customer.

About two o'clock that morning my doorbell rang. I wasn't

asleep. I couldn't sleep that night. I eased quietly out of bed, trying not to wake Maria, and threw a robe over my pajamas.

At the door were two policemen.

"You Grant Wilkinson?" one of them asked.

"Yes."

"Go put on your clothes. You're under arrest."

"You must be looking for someone else," I said. "I haven't done anything. What's the charge?"

"You ought to know."

"I don't know, officer."

"Quit your stalling, Wilkinson," said the second cop. "You're wanted on suspicion of murder." He named her name. I almost fell over.

"Listen," I managed to say, "I was at her house this afternoon, but—"

"Save it," the first cop put in. "You'll have time to talk."

They didn't let me out of their sight. They followed me right into the bedroom and watched me get dressed.

"We're sorry, ma'am," one of the cops said to Maria. "Excuse us. Line of duty." Maria cringed in the bed, the blanket up to her black wide eyes.

"It's nothing," I told her. "There must be some other Grant Wilkinson in this town. You stay right here in bed; and, as soon as I set everything straight, I'll phone you."

When we moved to go, Maria hopped out of bed, with a little cry, and ran to me, not bothering to throw a robe over her night dress in front of the cops. She held on to me, and I had to pull away to follow the cops.

At the Hollywood station house on Wilcox Avenue they unlocked the handcuffs, took my fingerprints, and booked me for murder. Nobody there had any ears when I insisted they were making a mistake.

Handcuffs again and back into the radio car.

"Where are we going?" I asked the man I was chained to.

"You'll find out."

"It's all a mistake. There was a dog—"

"You'll have time to talk," he interrupted. "You're probably the only guy's made a mistake."

They drove around to the back of City Hall and took me inside. We went up in an elevator. Behind the door marked Homicide Bureau a soft-spoken detective in plain clothes told me the best I could do for myself was to tell the whole story and tell it straight.

I said that was exactly what I wanted to do. I told the whole story, truthfully just as I am now. A lieutenant in uniform listened in. A third cop took down everything I said on a small quiet black machine.

"Fine," said the plain-clothes man when I'd finished. "Only one thing wrong with your story. That big white dog is still the picture of health. But the dame is dead. The gardener found her body in the driveway, run over two or three times just like you said. A mess. The dog was nuzzling the body and whining."

For a moment I couldn't find words. I could hardly breathe. Then the words came in a rush.

"I can't believe it," I said. "There must have been a pair of those Russian dogs. I know I killed a dog, but you don't charge a man with murder for killing a dog. Someone else must have driven a car down that driveway later and struck her down by accident, the same way I struck the dog. That's it! She was out in the driveway looking at the dog's body again, and that's when someone else struck her down. That driveway is blind! It isn't safe! I know—"

"Why did you kill her?"

"I didn't! I—"

"This your card?" He unwrapped it carefully from a white handkerchief.

"Yes. Like I told you, I gave it to her when—"

"Beautiful woman, wasn't she?"

"She was alive when I—"

"What did you bang her on the head with before you carried her to the driveway?"

"I didn't! She—"

"Better talk now, Wilkinson. You're in bad trouble. The coroner's report hasn't come up yet, but it'll have the answers."

"No, I—"

"Why don't you make a statement? Tell us the truth. Tell us now what we'll find out anyway, and we'll let you alone."

"I told you what happened! I gave you my statement! I killed the dog, sure. Not her. She's a swell person. We talked. She gave me a drink. I made pictures for her."

"Sure, sure. You run down her dog and then she asks you in for a drink. Even has you take snapshots of her. *Where are those pictures?*"

"Home. At my place. I developed the negatives as soon as I got back, and before I went to bed I made the prints. They're on tins now."

"Whaddaya mean, 'tins'?"

"Ferrotype tins. They're thin sheets of chrome-plated metal you dry glossy prints on. Makes them shiny."

"Your studio is right where you live?"

"Yes."

The lieutenant lifted a telephone to his mouth, said, "Martinez," and put it down.

A large cop with a mustache came to the door. "Go to this

address," the lieutenant said, showing him my card in the handkerchief. "You'll find a woman there. This Wilkinson's wife. Ask her to show you where the picture tins are. Take the pictures off the tins and bring them back. Tell the woman we need them for evidence that might help her husband."

"They're not likely to be dry yet," I said. "Peel them off easy, or they'll tear. If they don't come off easy, bring the tins back with the prints on them."

"That's right," said the lieutenant.

The officer went out. I felt better. "She's in some of the pictures herself," I said. "She couldn't be dead and in the pictures, too. You'll see."

"Sure we'll see," said the man in plain clothes. "And what will that prove? Only that you were there. You couldn't have made the pictures and *then* killed her, could you?"

They walked me across Spring Street, in handcuffs again, to the Hall of Records building and put me in a cell of the county jail. One of the cells a few doors up on my side housed a "wino" who was singing the *Marine Corps Hymn* in a happy drunken voice. "Shuddup!" my jailor told him on his way out.

There were other sounds. Night sounds from the street outside. The whirring of rubber tires. The rattle of a loose fender. The distant laughter of a girl. Under me the iron cot squeaked. Somone in a cell across the aisle snorted suddenly in his sleep. From somewhere came the chirping of a bird (was it already dawn?). There was a fast muffled oppressive drum-beat. My pulse; I trembled with cold, though it was a warm night.

"All right! Let's go!"

It was my jailer. Somehow I had fallen asleep. I shuffled out the cell door and he followed half a step behind, holding my elbow the way a man helps a woman across a street. We walked down the corridor, turned a corner, and entered a long, narrow room. It contained a few chairs, a table, a battered metal desk and an overflow of cops.

Against the far wall was a bench, and set up on the bench, leaning against the wall, were my tins. The prints were still stuck to them. Three 18 x 22 tins with the white backs of four 8 by 10 prints showing on each of them.

"These the ones?" the plain clothes man asked me.

"Yes."

"Take them off."

"They don't seem to be dry yet," I said. "If—"

"Take them off!" said another cop. "This is a murder case."

I slid a fingernail under the corner of the first print. It peeled off without much trouble. It was a long shot of the back of the house taken from the swimming pool, one of the ones in which

Lucy Warner wasn't posed. One of the cops took it from my hand.

The second print stuck, but I pulled it off anyway, cracking the emulsion but not tearing the print. It was a closeup of the redwood front doorway, the one I had posed her in with her shoulder against . . .

But Lucy Warner wasn't in the picture! On the threshold of that open doorway stood the blond dog!

I wasn't able to take the rest of the prints off myself. The cops took them off and laid them out on the table in front of me. I lifted my head from the table and looked at the pictures. They were my shots all right. I'd recognize my style of work anywhere. They were my pictures just the way I made them, except that in the four shots in which I know I posed Lucy Warner, the dog stood instead. She was not in any of the pictures.

"All right, Wilkinson," said the plain-clothes man, "you can cut the bull now and start talking."

"I've told you everything."

"Why did you kill her?"

"I didn't kill her. I killed a dog. Just a dog!"

"How did you know she was alone?"

"I didn't even know she lived there. My car—"

"What did you crack her on the head with before you carried her to the driveway?"

"I didn't!"

"What do you know about that Black Dahlia murder last winter?"

"Nothing! I—"

"Do you know where the Twelve Palms Motel is on Sunset?"

"No."

"That's where that high school girl was found last week. Strangled. Remember it now?"

"No! No!"

"How did you get the dog to stand still for his picture?"

"I didn't photograph the dog. I photographed Lucy Warner."

"Why did you kill her? How did you do it?"

"I didn't do it!"

"How did you kill her?"

The State of California threw the book at me. There had been a series of unsolved murders in Los Angeles and the officeholders were hot on giving the newspapers a conviction to play with for a change. The state charged murder in the first degree and demanded the death penalty. In California it's the gas chamber.

I had no money to defend myself. But the judge appointed

an aggressive young lawyer who I thought fought hard and well for me. Main thing was, he believed in me.

Not that he ever exactly accepted my understanding of what happened that afternoon in Laurel Canyon. But I know he never felt me guilty of any crime. His first advice was that I plead temporary insanity, and he brought a psychiatrist to my cell to talk things over. We finally decided, on the basis of the psychiatrist's report, to enter a simple plea of not guilty.

The county district attorney was merciless. Plaster casts of alleged tire marks on the woman's body were entered in evidence, along with matching marks from the almost bald tires on my Essex. There were fingerprints from the purple goblets —both of them—and from my business card, the ceramic water pitcher, and the knob of the kitchen door. My prints, not hers.

The ex-husband of the actress testified. He was a handsome man wearing a black armband. The reason for their recent divorce, he said, was her insistence on living alone for occasional periods of several days at a time. She had once told him that to her the lens of a studio camera was the eye of fifty million people. After exposing herself to it during the shooting of each picture, she had said, she needed at least a week of complete solitude to regain her feeling of privacy.

The gardener testified in detail how he had found the body of the woman, with the dog nuzzling it and raising his snout to the sky in mournful whines.

The district attorney confronted me with the gardener and asked if I recognized him.

"No," I said.

"How did you know he was expected that afternoon? Did you wait outside on the highway and watch him discover the body?"

"No, I . . . she, she told me he was coming."

"That's all. Thank you."

The district attorney even had the blond dog brought to the courtroom. He led the dog on leash up to me as I sat on the witness chair.

"Is this the dog you say you killed?" he asked.

"It looks just like him," I said.

When I put out my hand the dog came to me. I was surprised at the unpleasant muttering that came from the packed courtroom when I patted the dog and fondled his ears.

"What is the dog's name?" asked the prosecutor.

"The name of the dog I killed was Prince Igor."

When I said the name the dog barked. A soft, friendly bark. There was a rumble of unpleasant murmuring from the specta-

tors, who crowded every seat in the courtroom. The judge rapped his gavel.

"How do you know his name?"

"She told me. Lucy Warner said his name when—"

"Witness dismissed. Thank you."

My lawyer did the best he could against this chain of circumstantial evidence. He began by admitting that my car had struck down the actress in her driveway. He even admitted that the evidence seemed to show my car had backed and advanced over the body after it had been struck down.

But he affirmed, eloquently, I thought, that the state had failed to establish any motive for murder, and that all the evidence the state offered to prove murder was entirely circumstantial. He told the jury that what had happened was plainly an accident. A simple case of involuntary homicide.

My lawyer got an expert mechanic to drive my Essex along the same Laurel Canyon route I had taken that day. On the stand, the mechanic testified that, though he filled my car's radiator full of water before he began the trip, the water pump leak was so bad that the car began to steam before he reached the actress' driveway.

How I knew the dog's name, and how I knew the gardener was expected that afternoon, were two more problems for my lawyer. He had told the jury I never spoke to the woman, that the accident happened as I first drove into the grounds.

A movie magazine came to my rescue on this. The lawyer and my wife, Maria, rummaged through the pile of magazines lying about my studio, and came up with a copy of *Modern Screen* published just a month before the actress died. If she did die.

This magazine had a color photograph of the actress and the blond dog on its cover. Inside was an interview with the actress in which the dog Prince Igor was mentioned by name. The story also reported that since her divorce the actress had been living in her "Hollywood home" (no address given) entirely alone. Her only servant, the article said, was a gardener-handyman who lived nearby and came over every afternoon to work, to run errands and to feed the dog when she was working at the studio.

I decided right after my arrest that my only hope was to tell nothing but the truth. During questioning by the police, and on the stand during trial, I never once lied or withheld information. So when my lawyer showed me this copy of *Modern Screen* and asked if I'd read it, I told him truthfully I couldn't remember having read it. Since the magazine had been in my studio for a month, as he and Maria assured me it had, I agreed

it was possible I had paged through it. But I could not honestly say (and did not) that I remembered reading it.

Nevertheless, my lawyer introduced the magazine in evidence the next day. Under his questioning I said again that I did not remember reading it, though I might have. I do read the movie magazines occasionally, mostly to study the current work of the studio still photographers.

The jury men and women (there were six of each) took the magazine with them that night to the hotel where they were quartered during the trial. The magazine may have done me some good. I don't know.

But the heart of my defense was the testimony of the psychiatrist my lawyer had first brought to my cell when he was advising that I plead temporary insanity. The psychiatrist spent altogether perhaps forty hours talking with me before the trial.

"Doctor Nicholson," my lawyer asked on the stand (Abner S. Nicholson, of Berkeley Medical), "please give your opinion as to the sanity of the defendant."

"It is my considered opinion that this man is rational and of at least normal intelligence," the psychiatrist said. "I found in his mind one limited area of a psychopathological pattern. But I would say, medically speaking, that on the whole his is the mind of a sane man. From the viewpoint of law, it is a mind capable of distinguishing right from wrong."

"Would you explain, doctor, just what you mean by a limited area of psychopathological pattern?" my lawyer asked. "How is it possible for a mind to be sane, both medically and legally, and still to exhibit abnormality?"

"In cases of true medical and legal insanity," the doctor replied, "the mind is afflicted with a basic pathology, some mania, delusion, anxiety, or obsession. This aberration is present in such a compulsive force that it channels the patient's over-all behavior into a pattern we know as madness.

"But such is not the case with the mind of Grant Wilkinson. The limited area of psychopathological pattern to which I referred is truly limited in Mr. Wilkinson's mind. It is compartmented off from the main stream of his consciousness. I found no clinical evidence that this aberration has contaminated his mind as a whole. It is, I repeat, a sane mind."

"Doctor Nicholson," my lawyer asked, "could you make a little clearer the difference between a true insanity and the limited aberration of which you speak?"

"I shall try. The basic distinction is perhaps one of origin, of cause. Your true manias and dementias have their roots deep in the patient's personal life. They go back in many cases to mal-

adjusted childhoods, unhappy homes, and basic sex disturbances.

"But there are other patterns of pathological behavior that are not so deep-rooted in poor childhood adjustments. Normal and sane minds are perfectly liable to reveal sudden pathologic symptoms as the result, for instance, of severe trauma of either a physical or an emotional nature. The most commonly known psychopathology of this sort is amnesia, or loss of memory. Amnesia can be caused by a blow on the head, by a sudden emotional shock, even by the high fever of malaria.

"No, I do not imply that Mr. Wilkinson is suffering from a simple amnesia. I do, however, testify that the limited aberration I found in Mr. Wilkinson's mind is of a nature somewhat akin to amnesia. I do testify that its cause is also similar—namely, a sudden accumulation of emotional shock."

My lawyer again: "Perhaps it would be easier for you to explain this, doctor, if you gave us your theory of just what happened, physically and in the defendant's mind, that afternoon in Laurel Canyon."

"I shall try," said the psychiatrist. "First of all, it is apparent to all of us here that a woman has died. The evidence shows, and the attorney for the defense admits, that she died under the wheels of the defendant's automobile. Yet the defendant himself affirms that such was not the case. He says his car struck down a dog.

"I am convinced that what Mr. Wilkinson has told us is, for him, the truth. I am convinced that Mr. Wilkinson wholly believes in his own mind that his car struck down the dog and not the woman. This, then, is Mr. Wilkinson's *idée fixe*, his fixed delusion, the limited area of psychopathological pattern of which I speak.

"Now let us consider what might have happened that fatal day. Suppose the defendant did turn into the driveway for the reason that his automobile was in urgent need of water. Let us further suppose that the deceased woman was at that moment walking down the driveway with her back to the oncoming automobile. It might well have been that she did not hear the automobile's approach, for it was coasting out of gear at the time. And Wilkinson might well not have observed her. Perhaps his eyes were at that moment fixed on the water temperature gauge on the—"

"Your honor!" The district attorney was on his feet. "Your honor, I object to this line of questioning by counsel for the defense. Supposition and deduction from the evidence is the duty of the jury. Its practice by a witness is clearly improper. This witness is competent only to give medical testimony."

My attorney made a good reply: "Your honor, a man's life

depends upon our establishing here the truth of what happened that day in Laurel Canyon. Not only the truth of physical events, but the truth of what happened in the defendant's mind. The qualifications of Doctor Nicholson as a medical expert are beyond question. And he feels, as do I, that he cannot give conclusive medical testimony without a discussion of the evidence."

The judge was silent for about ten ticks of my darkroom timer. Then he spoke: "The court will withhold its ruling. The witness may proceed with his testimony. If the testimony is found to be irrelevant, the court will instruct the jury to disregard it, and will order it stricken from the record."

Doctor Nicholson continued: "I have suggested how the accident might have occurred. I do not bear witness that it did happen that way. Or even that it was an accident. But, working backwards from the results in clinical evidence of my examination of the defendant, I have reached the personal conclusion that that is what happened. The accident occurred just as Wilkinson described it—except, of course, that the woman died and not the dog.

"Now let us look into Wilkinson's mind. When he stopped his car too late, jumped out, and saw what he had done, he must have been horrified. Just as you or I would have been horrified.

"Previous medical testimony by the coroner has established that the first impact of the automobile crushed the woman's spine at its base. Such an injury might well have resulted in paralysis of the legs and lower part of the woman's body. It would not necessarily have resulted in loss of consciousness. It would surely have meant extreme agony.

"Thus, you see, it could well have been that the woman screamed in her terrible pain and attempted to raise the forepart of her body upon her hands. This is precisely the behavior Mr. Wilkinson ascribes to the dog which he insists was the victim.

"We see the woman lying in the roadway and trying in her agony to struggle to her feet. The sight must have terrified Wilkinson and filled him with unbearable guilt. The woman's continued screams provided further auditory stimuli to Wilkinson's panic-stricken mind. Finally, it is possible that at this moment Wilkinson recognized the deceased as an actress of great fame—a further surprise and shock.

"As the woman's screams continued to reverberate in the narrow driveway, Wilkinson's mind neared its limit of shock tolerance. Probably feeling that she was dying anyway, he turned in desperation to the only available means of silencing her screams and ending her misery. His automobile. He backed

his automobile over her body and then ran forward over it once again, just as he related on the stand he had again driven over the dog.

"Now the full realization of what he had done came over him. There is a limit of emotional trauma beyond which a mind loses its balance. Wilkinson had reached his, and was on the verge of the same kind of hysterical madness which afflicts fear-driven soldiers on the battlefield.

"At this moment the dog Prince Igor might well have come running up the driveway in answer to his mistress' screams. Wilkinson's mind, casting about in panic for some means of maintaining its balance, immediately seized upon the likeness between the dog's white fur and the woman's white clothing and famous blonde hair, and transposed the two. His mind could not, this side of sanity, allow itself to believe what had actually happened. So it immediately accepted as truth the survival of the young woman and the death of the dog.

"Then," continued the psychiatrist, "still sane but with this one fixed delusion, he pacified the disturbed dog, made friends with it, actually believing the dog was the woman. He must have taken the dog to the house, found the liquor cabinet, and acted out the friendly gesture of having two sociable drinks with the deceased.

"But now some lingering awareness of what he had done must have struggled near the level of Wilkinson's consciousness. To lock this terror deep in his subconscious mind, he perhaps felt a need to perform some familiar and habitual act, to go through the motions of some normal activity so that his unreal understanding of the preceding events might also seem normal and true.

"Then it no doubt was that Wilkinson took up his camera and made the twelve photographs now on evidence in this court. Handling his camera was a familiar habit pattern. He made the pictures almost automatically. The customary work eased his mind, made him feel everything was all right.

"When he had finished his work, what would have been more natural than for him to place his business card on a table? This was another professional habit pattern. And then he drove off to complete the original errand which brought him to Laurel Canyon—the delivery of a set of photographs to a customer. He left by the other gate, a victim of his mind-made fantasy that he had killed only a dog."

The judge split hairs. He ruled that the psychiatrist's testimony was admissible. But he cautioned the jury to make its own judgment of its value and to distinguish carefully as to what part of it was the testimony of an expert medical witness and what part was simply opinion.

Next day, the prosecutor brought to the stand two more psychiatrists, who had also talked with me in my cell, but more briefly than Doctor Nicholson. They agreed that I was sane. But they said they found no evidence of delusion. The district attorney told the jury that this meant I had invented my delusion for the purpose of feigning insanity and saving my "criminal" skin.

He even dug back into the 1932 yearbook of Hollywood High School to show the jury that I had been president of the high school dramatic club and was therefore, so he said, a skillful actor. So I don't know what good Doctor Nicholson's testimony did me.

In his summation to the jury the district attorney used the quality of my own professional work against me. Brandishing my twelve prints of the actress' house in the faces of the twelve jurors, and then passing out one print to each of them, he asked them to observe how sharp and attractive my pictures were.

"It took a steady hand to produce photography such as this," he told the jurors. "Who except a man in full possession of his faculties could have produced photographs of such high caliber immediately after committing a deliberate and cruel murder? For this was murder. A cruel and cold-blooded crime of passion. The state has proven in this case that a crime of passion can be committed in cold blood. The state feels that you honorable ladies and gentlemen can only return with a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree.

"As you know, California law gives you the option of recommending either life imprisonment or the death penalty. So unusually cruel and deliberate was this crime that the state does not hesitate to expect that you will in good conscience recommend the death penalty."

Well, you read the papers. You know the jury is still out, after four days.

What do I think about the case now? I must admit it's still no clearer in my mind than when the police got me out of bed that morning.

The woman is dead all right. I saw a picture of her body in the papers. A closer, more terrible, view was on evidence in court. It was her body. She's dead.

The blond dog is alive, too. I saw him in court. My lawyer checked with the dog-license bureau, and found there are exactly eighteen more grown Russian wolfhounds in all of Los Angeles county. He and my wife Maria tracked down the owner of each dog, and saw personally that each dog was still alive.

All the evidence seems to indicate that what Dr. Nicholson said might have happened, actually did happen. My car struck

down the actress, and her screams and agony and the shock of recognizing her were all so terrible to me that my mind did a flip-flop and made me sure it was the dog I'd killed. Made me fool myself right up to now.

Yet against the weight of all evidence, a man must at last trust only the testimony of his own senses. *I know I killed the dog. I know I talked with the woman, and drank with her, and posed her when I made the pictures, and left her perfectly alive when I drove away.*

I also know that all three psychiatrists were right in agreeing I'm sane. I think clearly still. My conduct on the stand was reasonable. I love my wife in an achingly normal way. I'm perfectly rational. Hasn't the story I've just told you been straightforward? Has it sounded like the invention of a demented man?

There's only one bit of evidence left that I can't get myself to understand. Maybe it does mean I'm mad. Maybe, at least, I do have a fixed delusion.

You remember how I told you about the woman slapping me across the face after I'd killed the dog? She slapped me twice, and on the third swing I raised my arm to protect my face and got my hand scratched with her long fingernails.

Well, those scratches are all healed now. But the back of my hand still shows the scars. Here, look at it. See how long and deep and parallel those scratches were.

Well, I sit here wondering what the jury is going to do, and I keep studying those scars. They don't look to me quite like fingernail scratches. It worries me that they look almost like the claw marks of a dog.

JOHN METCALFE

THE CHILDISH THING

THE day they heard that Bella, their maid, had died in the hospital, little Dulcie, rummaging about the derelict shed in the wood lot, came upon something odd.

At the time, the two things were not very closely connected in her mind, but it is possible she had been prompted to her investigations, here and there, that evening by a vague idea that something of Bella's—some object of worth or interest—might have been left behind.

All afternoon there had been a faint depressed disturbance consequent on what had happened to Bella, whose young-man cousin had called with the news, and gone away again, after clearing up Bella's room, carrying a corded box. Father had been grumpy, and mother had pensively taken the trap into Wandleton to the labor exchange to try for a new maid.

Dulcie, aged eight, had not cared much for Bella, though now she half imagined, as was proper, that she had. Actually, Bella had been a rather sullen, ugly-pretty creature, addicted to cheap finery and attractive only to numerous undesirables, but Dulcie, then, was not to know that. Avoiding her elder brother Vic, she had loitered out alone, toward sundown, through the meadow and over the brook, and on into the little lost orchard beyond the spinney, where the disused shed was.

And there, poking around inside the shed, she had found the male doll.

This doll was not as other dolls. It was of dull leadenish-yellow wax, small but cleverly modeled despite a misshapenness of one leg, with a gray tuft of beard upon the chin and, circling the thin neck, a narrow band, it seemed, of gold.

Dulcie, in the failing light, stood looking at it queerly. It had been lying in a corner, not obvious, but swaddled underneath

a pile of litter, rags and sacking, as if hidden there. Just what inspired Dulcie to turn this rubbish over and discover it (except perhaps the general notion that, as the young-man cousin had, she was making sure that no stray belongings of the departed maid should remain ungarnered), she could not tell. And now that it was unexpectedly revealed she had a blankly disconcerted, puzzled feeling—not of delight and hardly, even, of excited curiosity or satisfaction, but of a slightly glum, unthrilled bewilderment. This doll, if it was a doll, was too different. It must, she thought dimly, *be* somebody, it was so lifelike. Vaguely, its lack of orthodox engagingness, its carelessness of the least effort to ingratiate and win her favor by an ordinary doll prettiness, affronted her. And it had startled her, too. Instead of *her* finding *it*, as she had, it was as if *it* had popped out upon *her* and taken *her* by a description of surprise.

She was still grasping the object gingerly when she swung around at the sound of footsteps. Vic, having tracked her to the orchard, stumped masterfully in.

"What's that?" he said. "*Oo* . . . whatever *is* it? Here, give it to *me*. Let's have a squint."

"No," refused Dulcie, with instinctive obstinacy, "No . . ."

At that moment he did not press his demand, and merely stood at her side, staring with her.

Together they marveled, but as yet, for some reason, with little spoken comment or conjecture.

"I'll keep it," announced Dulcie, a shade undecidedly. "I'll call it—I'll call it Oomosassoway. . . . It's *mine*."

"Oh . . . all right," conceded Vic. "You can have the old thing. For a bit anyway. Till—till I say."

She knew that he was only biding his time and holding what he thought his claims upon her in reserve.

For quite a while, after that, Dulcie used to play—desultorily, and when she chanced to think of it, and when mood and opportunity conspired—with the waxen manikin in the deserted shed. It did not by any means engross her, but she was conscious of it, almost uneasily, as of a rather mystifying and irritating something she did not entirely understand and was not entirely certain what to do about. This uncertainty, shared apparently by Vic, was reflected in the fact that Oomosassoway's existence continued hidden from her parents.

How had the thing got where it was, and why, in particular, had there been a pin transfixing its left leg? She had not noticed the pin till the day after the doll's discovery, and it was very small—one of those tiny pins that people use for fastening papers. But the pin had been enough to crystallize an attitude and to suggest a line of action, and, presently, to start her on a

train of further imitative prickings. She had no stronger strain of cruelty in her nature than most little girls—yet she did not really *like* the doll (which *was* only a doll after all), and to "torture" it in make-believe was fun. Oomossasoway, the red Indian chief of her private legend, had tortured captive pale-faces innumerable in the most horrible fashion, and now he was getting paid out. Anyhow, Bella, or whoever it was that had had him first, had evidently not liked the bearded doll either, and Dulcie was merely following an example. . . .

By and by, however, she grew a trifle tired of such pastimes. In a sense, because she could not discuss it or play with it openly, the doll was actually a sort of nuisance; and she had thoughts, occasionally, of just throwing it away. The jabbings, prickings, eye-gougings, and other "teasings" of the manikin—even to the accompaniment of "magic" rites and incantations—began gradually to pall; so that she was, at length, the less inclined to grumble when Vic, now and then, would grab it from her lap, or to dispute his right to play with it as well

Vic was two years older than his sister, going to school each day in Wandleton, while Dulcie, so far, merely had a morning governess, Miss Todd. He was interested in chemistry, and his designs on Oomosassoway were probably of the blackest; but, by this, Dulcie did not greatly care what happened to the puppet, which had suffered so many agonies and minor mutilations at her own hands already. She had, for instance, half lopped an ear, then stuck it on again by melting the wax, and once she had all but singed off the beard with lighted matches. . . . Even if Vic put an end to Oomosassoway entirely by "experimenting" or "exploding" him she would not deeply grieve. Indeed, it would be almost a relief.

On the September afternoon when she at last resigned the midget to Vic's tender mercies, Dulcie was to be driven in to Wandleton by Mummy. Before she raced off to the cobbled side yard where the trap was waiting, she and her brother had been down there together, in the orchard shed.

He was standing by the narrow cobwebbed oblong of cracked glass slats that served for window, his blond curls catching the dusty light. Though he did bully her she was fond of him, with the uneasy and aggrieved devotion that was a tribute to his power to hurt.

"He's *mine*, remember, old Oomo is," she adjured him, in a formal assertion of continued ownership. "You be good to him, mind!"

Vic grinned. "Oh, *I'll* be good to him!" he answered, ironically and with a glint in his eye that boded, on the contrary, every variety of ill to the forsaken manikin. "I'll—" He broke off, all at once, resuming darkly in a lower tone, "I—I *believe*

I know—what it *is*. . . . *You* don't, do you? You're too little and silly. . . ."

Dulcie pretended not to hear him. His voice had a funny "hinting" and uncomfortable quality. She hoped, queerly, that he would not go on, but he did.

"And I know what *that* is too." He pointed to the circlet of yellow metal round the figure's neck. "It's a *ring*—someone's gold ring, and—"

Again, she pretended to pay him no attention, and this time he also fell silent. She had felt, at his words, a sort of shame and disquiet, touched by the vaguest possible breath of fear.

"Well, you be good to him!" she repeated flatly as she ran out of the shed.

She had set off, however, on her drive to Wandleton light-heartedly enough. The air, though warm, was crisp, and the sun rolled along with them, over the trees and hedges. Susie, the chestnut mare, had soon disposed of the three miles.

But they had been rather late in starting, and Mrs. Hewson, Dulcie's mother, had barely done half her shopping when it was time, they felt, for tea. "We'll have it with the Candys," Mummy informed Dulcie. "And then I'll park you there with them just for a few minutes while I finish my marketing. You won't mind, will you?"

"Candys?" Dulcie queried dubiously. "Who are they?"

"No, you don't know them yet, do you? Except for Mrs. Justin, who was a Miss Candy. They're quite nice. Bella used to work for them—or, actually, for old Major Candy—before she came to us."

"Oh . . . Bella . . .," said Dulcie. A cloud had gathered; and she was silent and subdued when she was introduced to the Candys and while she was having tea with them, even although Mrs. Justin, whom she liked, happened to be there as well.

"Father's not quite up to joining us," explained a Miss Laura Candy. "It's his leg again, chiefly. Such a time of it he's had lately, with one thing after another. . . . But I'm sure he'd love to see Dulcie and show her his curios, now she's here."

So, while Mummy was completing her purchases in town after tea, Dulcie was shepherded upstairs to Major Candy. "I'll run down again and leave you two to yourselves," Dulcie heard Miss Laura saying directly. "Father'll show you his African assegais and heads, and you can tell him all about the farm and your drawing lessons from Miss Todd. . . ."

In truth, Dulcie had been in too much of a daze to catch more than a word here and there of Miss Laura's sprightly chatter. She, Dulcie, was staring, in an utterly electrified manner, at Major Candy. A shiver of astonished suspicion had

darted through her the moment she entered the room and saw him, and now she could not keep her eyes away from him or her mouth from gaping.

"How do you do?" the Major had said, but she had not answered. Miss Laura had gone, and he looked at Dulcie with a puzzled and rather wry expression. "Well, young lady," he said dryly, "you'll certainly know me again! What is it? Haven't I washed my neck, or what?"

Acute embarrassment added itself to Dulcie's other emotions. "No. I—" she managed to stammer. "I . . ." She forced her gaze downward to the carpet.

"Shy, eh?" said the Major. "Don't be that. I like little girls and I don't bite 'em. So if people tell you I do bite 'em, just don't believe 'em, what?"

"Yes," said Dulcie. "I know. I . . ."

By an effort, she listened to him, as, hobbling, he wandered to and fro, taking down spears and other weapons from the walls, showing jewelry and trinkets he had brought back from the natives, and horned or antlered heads of animals that he had shot. But all the time, dreadfully, she was peeping at him and covertly considering him. Yes—he *was* . . . he *was*. . . . His lame leg was the left leg. His beard was gray and pointed. An ear—the ear she had snipped off and then stuck on again—was plastered over. Oh, *dear*, she thought. Oh, *dear* . . . She almost wanted, absurd though that, she realized, would have been, to touch him and see if he felt waxy.

"There!" said the Major, panting. "You'll excuse me if I sit down. Not so well as I used to be. Falling to bits, eh? First a big toe drops off and then a little finger, what? Put 'em in the curry next day for dinner, eh, and eat 'em, and pretend I *like* 'em, eh?"

But horribly near the truth as this grim jesting sounded, Dulcie was scarcely attending to what he said. A wheel chair stood in one corner of the room, and to this he now retired, laying aside his crutch stick as he sank into it. He uttered a slight groan.

"Ah well," he murmured presently, "Mustn't be in the dumps, must we? Never do, that. When I—But you're not listening!" he broke off in testy accusation. *"What* in the name of fortune *is* it?"

A faint communication or reflection of her own terror seemed gradually to alter his expression to one of genuine alarm. "Of her own terror," yes, for Dulcie had been putting two and two together, and recalling Vic! What *she* had done to Major Candy's simulacrum was quite bad enough, but in comparison with what Vic had in mind. . . .

She heard herself speaking, agonizedly. "I—Oo, I must go, quick. You're—oh . . . You're going to be blown up."

A pained look was imprinted on the Major's face. As she began to back from him toward the door he tried in vain to rise from his seat and to detain her. "Here, wait a bit! Don't be in such a hurry. What's all this? If—"

But Dulcie had already darted from the room. Not only did she wish, if possible, to save the Major, but she had no desire to be involved, and at so close a range, in what might be his fate. Dashing down the stairs, she found Mummy in the hall, just returned from her shopping. "Oh, Mummy, let's go—let's go quick, *quick!*"

There was astonishment on all sides of course, hand liftings and a mild consternation. However, it was concluded by the Candys that father's assegais and skulls must have frightened Dulcie, and she had better have her way. After the hastily apologetic leave-takings, Mummy, putting Susie to a brisk trot, wanted to know more about it, but Dulcie did not tell her. She had heard, without contradicting it, the Candys' conjectured explanation of her conduct and was glad to seize on it and pretend to agree with it. Mrs. Hewson was surprised. Dulcie had never shown such timidity before. It was very odd. But it would be wiser perhaps not to press her, and she desisted from her questionings. Dulcie meanwhile gazed ahead imploringly at Susie's rhythmically swinging rump, as if imploring could have caused it to swing any faster. "Oh, *get* on!" she prayed. And as soon as they were home Dulcie bolted to the shed.

Thank heaven she was in the nick of time. Her brother, as she raced in, was busy with something on a low trestle table, in the middle of which, on a small mound of blackish powder, the effigy was lying. From the recumbent manikin, and attached about his waist, led what looked like a length of orange-colored cord, its free end hanging over the table's edge, where Vic held a lighted match.

"Stop!" cried Dulcie. "Don't! Don't! . . . It's Major Candy! I've just seen him, and it *is!*"

Frowning, and for a while incredulous, Vic took his match from the fuse, reluctantly blew it out, and listened to her tale.

Dulcie's visit to the Candys had the effect of ushering in an entirely new era so far as the history of the waxen puppet was concerned. Her previous barbarities had been sins of ignorance, but now that she was aware of the doll's "identity" her treatment of it must need be very different. She trembled to think how narrowly Major Candy—or at least his proxy—had escaped a sulphurous extinction, and, having plucked him from it as a brand from burning, she would make up to him for all

the errors of the past. It should be as much fun, or almost, to be good to him for a change, and pet him and get him strong and fit as to clip off his ear or singe his beard or let him be destroyed by gunpowder.

In this humaner, more enlightened, point of view Vic finally concurred, though not, his sister sometimes fancied, too enthusiastically. Short of the explosively dramatic curtain of which he had been cheated, he regretted, she suspected, a number of missed opportunities of an alternative and minor but still fascinating character. If the flesh-and-blood Major Candy *had* to be allowed to stay alive at all (he might hankeringly have thought), it would have been considerably more interesting and amusing to watch him—following the application of a suitable and nicely graduated stimulus—develop wattles and a comb, or suddenly come out in spots, or grow a horn, than merely, unexcitingly, to keep him *well*. . . .

As to the actuality of the link between the effigy and its original, Vic would not commit himself. His was a curious, discreetly probing, and in some ways rather "cagey" mind, old for its years, and Dulcie was never quite sure what his real opinion was. It had been he who, prior to her Candy visit, had arrived at a comprehension of the doll's true nature, and it was he again who now additionally supplied her with several further facts regarding Bella—one of the daughters, it appeared, of a reputed local "witch." Bella herself, moreover, had been dismissed from Major Candy's service, after some offense, "without a character"—a circumstance with which her subsequent employer, Mrs. Hewson, had been remiss in failing, earlier, to become acquainted. "And of course," Vic had judicially concluded, "she had a grudge. . . . That was old Candy's ring she stole, I'll bet, round the thing's neck. Still *is* his ring, I s'pose. If you can put in anything the fellow's worn, or bits of him—his nail parings or teeth or hair—the spell works stronger."

Dulcie shivered. What had Bella been like, more exactly? What had she said and done?—Memories of the dead girl came back to her, now haltingly, now sometimes in a rush.

And then, from thinking of Bella, Dulcie would look at the manikin, lying on top of the pile of sacking where Bella, it seemed plain, had hidden it before having to be whisked off in a hurry to the hospital.

"Oomosassoway . . . ," Dulcie murmured, dubiously. But the doll was Oomosassoway no longer. It was revealed as of a stuff considerably more sinister than that.

None the less, for a while, it could scarcely be denied that Major Candy bloomed and blossomed under the new regime. The mere respite from tweakings and prickings must, alone,

have been enough to gladden him, and when, to this, were added embowerings in rose petals, gentle fomentations of fern, sprayings and sprinklings with perfume, immersions in lollipop tea, and finally his decoration with the George Cross for "heroism," his bliss can have had no bounds. Such reports of him as came to hand indicated him as much improved in health, in quite a flourishing condition and indeed positively thriving. So there you were! The spell could be reversed. Bella's odd legacy of hate was turned into an instrument of good, the only pity being, Dulcie often thought, not without conscious virtue, that Major Candy could not guess who were his benefactors.

Not that the course of therapy proceeded minus incident or interruption. The puppet survived various hazards. Once the cat got him, sniffing and pawing him suspiciously, though—able, after an experimental lick and nibble, to make nothing of his wax—quickly abandoning him. Once he was dropped into a water butt; and once—a narrow shave—he was all but carted away with rubbish on a general clearing-out and cleaning of the shed.

This last and barest of escapes had emphasized the permanent, still abiding nature of the problem and raised, in Dulcie's mind, a serious difficulty. What should she do with Major Candy's effigy *eventually?* Surely she could not keep and cosset it *forever*—yet, if she didn't, what would happen to the Major? Vic (who had diligently extended his researches into the whole subject) had informed her, gruesomely, that if the doll were buried, or were set to melt at a slow fire, its human counterpart must pine and die of "wasting sickness." And so on . . . What should she do? The implied, and rather accidentally assumed, responsibility for Major Candy's welfare weighed on her. It was too grave and onerous a trust. If there had but been any means of simply nullifying the connection, without doing more, and, as it were, thenceforward leaving the good Major to his own devices, that would have been ideal—but *was* there such a means? She could find no solution to the puzzle.

"Oh, put it in a bank," Vic suggested, flippantly, knowing perfectly well that of course she couldn't. Vic, as an ally in the matter, was increasingly half hearted. He had lost interest, she divined, in the affair, and perhaps that was scarcely to be wondered at. Dulcie had twice, and Vic three times, observed the Major, apparently fully recovered, in the streets of Wandleton; but there was hardly enough in these occasional peeps of him, satisfactory as they were, to nourish and sustain a genuine devotion to his cause. Even Dulcie, too, had to confess that, failing fresh developments, the business was beginning to grow just a trifle stale and wearisome.

"Or post it to him," Vic had absently gone on. Post it. . . .

Yes, that was better. Dulcie had been shy of repeating her visit to the Candys, but posting—yes, that *might* be a way out of her quandary. The Major's fate would then be in *his* hands, and, if he were sensible, he could give himself no end of treats. . . .

"And he'd get back his crest ring then too," said Dulcie. "He'd like that. I wonder if he'd wear it again or let it stay round Oomo's neck."

Now and then, at odd moments, they discussed the plan, but somehow, as yet, without putting it into execution. Nearly a year had flown since Dulcie had found the doll, and a host of other exciting matters competed for attention. Vic, to his curious joy, was off to boarding school, and presently Dulcie would be going to school as well. They were both growing up, and possibly, belief in Bella's magic was not so firmly unassailable as once it was.

For the time, at any rate, nothing was done, and the manikin, remembered less and less frequently as the days slipped by, still reposed hidden and almost neglected under its shrouding sacks and mildewed old horse blankets in the shed.

But about three months later, toward the end of Vic's holidays and just before his sister was to start *her* first term, the puppet was recalled. This dilatoriness, Dulcie rebuked herself, could not continue, and the effigy *must* be got rid of somehow. She was not certain, now, that posting it to the Major *was* such a brilliant notion after all—it seemed a bit 'little-kid'-ish and might merely annoy him—yet this scheme of disposing of the incubus *had* been agreed upon ages ago and in her mind acquired a sort of fixity and "momentum of inertia" simply by virtue, so to speak, of its longstandingness. Anyhow, she could think of no alternative procedure.

Accordingly, despite considerable misgivings, and in a hurry with all the packing and other preparations for St. Osyth's, she placed the manikin in a stout cardboard box, which she committed to Vic for posting, when he had the chance, in Wandleton. No note of warning or "directions" was enclosed, though she originally had meditated an explanatory label. "This is you" or words to that effect. But clues of this kind had been quite unnecessary, besides being liable (since Oomosassoway *was* something of a caricature) to misinterpretation as a piece of rudeness. The ring, if nothing else, would surely set the addressee on the right scent and tell him who the puppet was supposed to be.

Driving to the station with Mummy, she passed near the Candys' house and speculated, fleetingly, on the Major's probable reaction to the parcel, mailed to him by Vic the previous day. *Had* there, she mused, been anything in it—in the whole

rigmarole of waxen images, and spells, and evil eyes? It all sounded more and more incredible—one of the "childish things," spoken of in that passage Daddy had happened to read yesterday at prayers, that people should outgrow and "put away." And yet—it could not *only* be coincidence. She thought, frowningly, of the Major's plastered ear, and of his lameness. For every point where she, or, earlier, Bella, had misused the manikin there was a scar or some disfigurement or answering disability.

But she was in far too great an eager-anxious flutter and increasing mental turmoil over her new beginning life at school to ponder such a relatively unimportant matter more than a few moments.

It was not until her first term had been survived, and even not until several days of the ensuing holidays had sped by too, that she again recalled the doll.

"Vic," she said suddenly conscious of a slight stab of guilt at her forgetfulness. "Oo, I wonder how old Major Candy's getting on?"

Vic's school had broken up almost a week before hers, so he had the advantage of her as regards local news. They were strolling in the orchard, near the shed. He glanced at it now, and an odd expression crossed his face.

"Oh," he said. "I thought you'd heard. He died, you know."

"Died?" asked Dulcie blankly.

"Yes. Well, he was pretty ancient, really. But he—he burned himself. There was a—fire. Quite a lot of their house was burned out too."

"How did it start?" She had a sick feeling, half guessing. "How did the fire start? Was it because of—of what we sent him?"

"Well, yes, it *was*, in a way. When he opened the box he was so angry—and so disgusted just at the silliness of it I suppose—that he must have got into one of his tempers and chucked the thing in the fire. He was always a peppery old boy, they say. Of course, with the wax, there was a tidy blaze. His clothes must have caught alight or something and—when they found him he was just—just lying down. . . ."

"Oh . . . oh, *dear!* How *horrid!*" wailed Dulcie. She was crying. "Oh *dear!*"

Vic looked undecided whether to be annoyed with her or afflicted by her tears. "Well, I shouldn't worry too much if I were you. Why, you only saw him once in your whole life—to speak to, I mean. It's not *your* fault, anyhow. And all that about images and spells and magic is sheer bosh. . . ."

"But it—it's spoiled everything. And it kept on being true,"

said Dulcie, gulping. "Even *then,* right to the finish! When the wax man was burned so was *he . . .*"

"Oh, *don't,*" implored Vic. "*Don't* be so silly. I'm sorry for the old chap of course. But it was an accident, pure and simple. And if he hadn't been so furious about how ridiculous the *superstition* was it wouldn't have happened. That was *it,* don't you see? I can just picture him cursing at the parcel when he'd opened it."

Dulcie, unconsoled, did not answer, for this line of reasoning seemed somehow to defeat itself and only to lead back to the enigma. She gazed up at the evening sky where a piled rack was driving. Amber and rose and amethyst were in it, as the clouds reeled smoothly on like gliding figures in a carnival procession, drawn as if on rails invisible to the land's rim, spilling their glowing cores and endlessly toppling there, a stately ferment of every burning hue.

"*Cheer up,*" Vic insisted. "*You* did the best you could. The trouble *was* that you *believed* in it too much, I think. . . ."

He put a hand on her arm, urging her to the house, away from the orchard. But before she left it she threw one glance behind her at the shed, dark and wizened in the gloaming, knowing that, if she could help it, she would never go there again.

—Continued from opposite page

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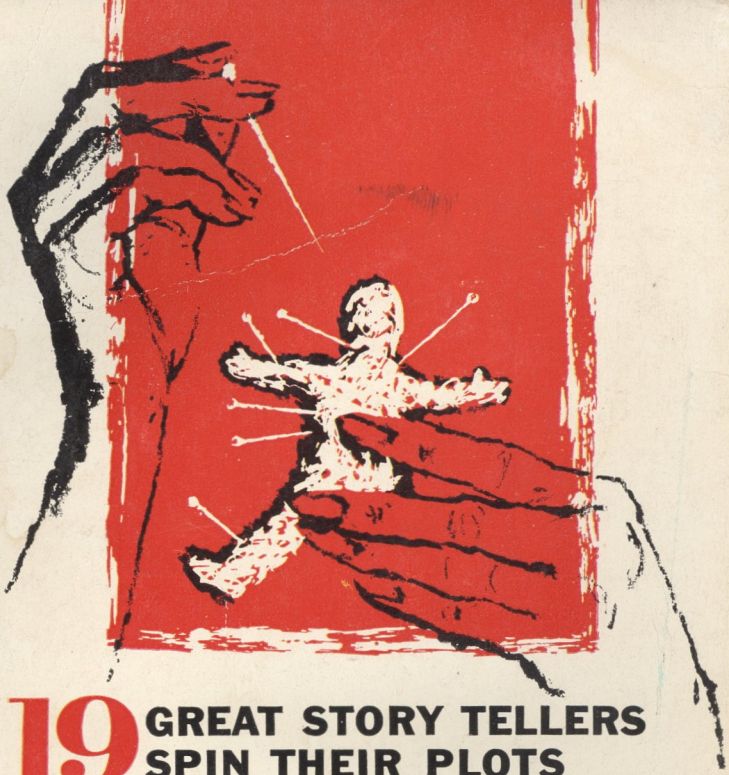

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