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The Eleventh Fontana Book of Great

Ghost Stories

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INTRODUCTION

It would seem that ghosts haunt the most unlikely places and objects.

Houses I will accept. After all what are old houses for, but the perambulations of restless spirits, who moan, shriek, rattle chains and generally behave in the traditional manner? Therefore I can strongly recommend *Aunt Cassie* by Virginia Swain, who has Auntie chatting-up the dear departed and relaying their messages to the still-living – and doubting – relations. Nor could anyone take exception to *The Woman's Ghost Story* by Algernon Blackwood which is a nice quiet tale of a lady who finds the ghost in every room in the house. One could find worse things.

But *The Ghost of U 65* by G. A. Minto has an unquiet spirit making life unpleasant for the crew of a German submarine in the First World War. *Footsteps Invisible* by Robert Arthur relates the fate of a man dogged by ghostly footsteps in a busy street. And *Night Doings at Deadman's* by Ambrose Bierce really is a bit much. A haunted cabin where a dead Chinaman comes up from a hole in the floor, with the intention of getting his pigtail back.

In *The Earlier Service* by Margaret Irwin there is a haunted church! Really! Dorothy K. Haynes comes up with what I can only describe as haunted time in *Scots Wha Ha'e. The Whittaker Ghost* which I found in an old bound volume of *Argosy* dated 1879, has the apparition wandering around in the garden.

The Lonely Inn by Thomas Burke is not only lonely, but a ghost in its own right, and may serve as a warning to those people who go pub-crawling in strange places. *Lady Celia's Mirror* by Roger Malisson is – yes, you guessed right – concerned with a haunted mirror. This is a lovely slab of macabre from a new author and well worth reading more than once.

The Green Scarf is written by A. M. Burrage, who I am informed is no less a personage than Ex-Private X, whose stories *The Sweeper* and *Smee* were included in the last two collections. Here we have a haunted scarf. Wave it out of the

window, then stand back and wait for the invasion.

The House Of Desolation by Alan Griff is guaranteed to murder sleep and give the reader black day-dreams for a long time to come. However, I think that this one can be safely placed in the list of haunted houses.

In *The Man In the Mirror* by Sydney J. Bounds, we are presented with a haunted chess set and an eerie game with an invisible opponent. Never play games of skill with a ghost – you can't win.

The Woman In Black by Peter Hackett is the story of a man who is unfortunate enough to travel in a haunted railway carriage. I would advise you not to *lose your head* when reading this one.

Haunted Ground by Oliver la Farge! Yes, I'm afraid so. Haunted soil. Spirit-soaked earth. However, that cannot be accepted as an excuse for not digging the garden. We all have to take chances.

Travelling salesmen can be a nuisance. The one who knocks on the door of Snood Castle in *The Man Who Sold Ghosts* by Roger F. Dunkley is a menace. Who wants to buy a ghost anyway? This collection surely confirms the fact that there are plenty for everyone and a few to spare.

And so to my own contribution – *Matthew and Luke.* All about a haunted ego. Well – why not? It makes a change.

So – having read about ghosts that lurk in houses, submarines, streets, holes-in-the-floor, churches, time, gardens, inns, mirrors, scarfs, chess-sets, brains, trains, ground, and egos – don't bother to climb under the bed.

There's bound to be one there too.

R. CHETWYND-HAYES

JUSTICE

'The Gibsons'

The moving clouds let through occasional gleams of moonlight. Abel set out over the moor; its shapeless piles of granite were wreathed in tatters of white mist. The moorland path was the shortest way home. It was narrow and rugged, but Abel knew it well and could even distinguish a few mist-clad landmarks. He would soon be among the granite cairns.

The fitful moonlight made him stumble, and the path seemed to wind more than he remembered. How thick the mist was just here. If he lost the path he might go astray on the open moor – but what would that matter? A robust and sensible man such as he could come to no harm.

The moonlight made these rocks look rather horrible. Perhaps they were not rocks. This could hardly be the right path winding senselessly about like this. What was that awful sound like laughter? Yet what had he to fear if this place were evil – was he not an upright and godly man who held no traffic with evil? If wicked spirits had power over such men as he there would be no justice in it!

'That's true,' said a voice behind him, 'there isn't.'

AUNT CASSIE

Virginia Swain

It was odd, Edward Alden thought, as he struggled with his dress tie, how one little old lady, really very kind and well-intentioned, could so rub a whole family the wrong way that, after years of civilized communal life, it could let its nerves snap out into snarls like barb-wire released from a coil, and stage a scene that included loud vituperations, slamming of doors, hiccuping sobs from his daughter Eileen, and some exceedingly surprising language from his wife Mary, whose most intimate conversation could normally be repeated from the platform of the Darien Women's Club without causing a cheek to pale in the audience. All this, too, in front of a guest.

That the guest was only that nincompoop boy, Johnny Nesbit, whom Eileen thought she was in love with, made it worse, not better. Johnny's family hadn't much 'background', and Edward and Mary had maintained a gently patronizing manner towards him, in the hope that, since they could not make Eileen give him up, they could frighten him into abandoning her. And then in front of him, Mary had called Aunt Cassie an 'old idiot' and Eileen an 'hysterical little fool', and he, Edward, had shouted at them both to keep quiet, and when they wouldn't, had rushed out of the room and slammed the door.

Only Aunt Cassie had behaved like a perfect lady. She had come teetering on her dainty feet into the room where Eileen was entertaining Johnny and said in the careful diction acquired in 1865 at the Oxford, Mississippi, Female Seminary, 'Eileen, dear, your Great-uncle Horace is standing behind you there. He wants to tell you that in our family young ladies never sit up after ten o'clock with young gentlemen to whom they are not engaged.'

Eileen had given her one blank look and then begun to cry, and her parents, sitting in the back parlour, had come running through the open double doors. Mary, with a horrified look at Eileen, sobbing and crumpled on the sofa, had made

a lot of unintelligible clucking sounds, shot a glance of pure hatred at Johnny Nesbit, and turned to Edward in a way that showed she meant him to deal with this, Aunt Cassie being his aunt, not hers.

Aunt Cassie caught her look and turned to Edward too. 'You understand, Neddy, it's not my opinion – only Uncle Horace's. He's been trying for days to tell Eileen. But I met him in the linen closet yesterday and he said that since you were all too stubborn to see or hear him, I'd better tell her. He said, "Tell the girl that's not the way to catch a husband."' Her voice was sweet and low and she smiled with innocent affection upon them all.

It was then that Mary had called her an idiot and Eileen had stopped whimpering and begun bawling, and he had yelled at them all and gone out and slammed the door. He could recall how Johnny had sat, like an ugly gingerbread man in his brown suit, bolt upright at his end of the couch.

He was still annoyed with Eileen. It was embarrassing for the kid, of course; but she had been trained for twelve years in the proper way to deal with this crotchet of Aunt Cassie's, and she should have risen to the emergency last night. When Aunt Cassie came to live with them, Eileen was six, and they had explained everything to her. If Aunt Cassie spoke to someone who wasn't there, she was only dreaming, and you ignored it. If Aunt Cassie pointed out to you something that you couldn't see yourself, you said 'Yes,' politely, and remembered that old ladies live a great deal in the past and sometimes it makes them happier to pretend that persons who are gone are still around them.

Eileen had accepted it all like a good little sport, and together the three of them had weathered twelve years of Aunt Cassie. She was a decent old girl in every other way. She mended all their clothes and made spiced pickles and jellies, and kept herself attractive with nice old lace and rather coquettish dresses of grey and lavender. She had her own money – not much, but enough to pay her way.

He had to admit, pushing his starched shirt flat and watching it buckle out again, that she paid a little more than her own way. If she weren't helping with the household bills, he could not have afforded to buy that second-hand roadster for

Eileen's graduation present last June. Also, her doing the sewing gave Mary more time for her club work. But he acquitted himself of any mercenary motive for having Aunt Cassie in his house. He was fond of her, and she had done a good deal for him when he was young. But, by God, if she was going to upset Mary and Eileen – Suddenly his anger veered around. Eileen needed a good talking-to. She was a nice girl, but Mary had spoiled her rotten. She had no sense of responsibility and no gratitude. She'd been downright unpleasant about his taking her car tonight. He was going to take it regardless. With his own car in the shop and this insurance banquet twenty miles away, there was nothing else for him to do.

When he had given up trying to keep his shirt front flat and had brushed his hair for the fifth time over his bald spot, he walked across to the chest of drawers, pulled out a whisky bottle from under a pile of shirts, and took a good long pull at it. Then he filled a flat silver flask and put it in his hip pocket, and put the bottle back in the drawer.

When he went down to the dining-room, the three women were standing there waiting for him. Mary, rather quiet and shamefaced, came across and hunched his dinner jacket up in the back over his collar, and patted him. Eileen looked sulky. She cast a young, disdainful eye over his gala costume and said, 'You be careful of those brakes, Dad. That car shouldn't be driven that far until they're fixed.' She snapped a blossom off the potted begonia on the stand beside her. 'There's ice all the way to New Canaan, and they haven't sanded it yet.'

'I'll be careful,' he said, looking at the decanters on the sideboard. It was going to be a cold drive, and if he took a little shot from one of those, he'd have his flask intact for the evening. No use paying sixty cents a drink at the hotel. He let Mary help him on with his coat and hand him his gloves. He even put his hat on, absently, in the house, in the presence of his three women.

He stiffened his knees and somehow that made his shirt front pop. But he walked masterfully to the sideboard and poured himself a drink. Mary usually nagged about his drinking when he had to drive, but tonight she evidently wasn't going to say anything. And Eileen was engrossed in snapping

off more begonia flowers. Sulky and frowning as she was, he saw from the tail of his eye what a pretty girl she had grown into. His heart warmed towards Mary too because she hadn't said a word about the whisky.

Aunt Cassie said, 'My goodness, there's Betsy.'

There was silence for a moment, except for the noise Edward made in swallowing his whisky suddenly.

'It must seem funny to you, Neddy,' said Aunt Cassie, 'to hear your mother called Betsy. I know that dam-yank preacher she married always called her Elizabeth. But down home she was Betsy.' She turned slightly away from him towards the doorway. 'Yes, Betsy. What is it?'

Again there was silence, but in the silence the three of them, Mary and Eileen and Edward, turned, against their wills, to face the door. After twelve years, you'd think they'd stop doing that.

Aunt Cassie was nodding her head, then shaking it. 'Yes, Betsy, I know. He's drinking too much spirits. It's bad for his blood pressure. And he ought to let the stuff alone when he's going to drive a car.' She paused. 'Yes, I know, you died before automobiles became common. Nowadays the police will arrest you if they catch you driving one when you've been drinking. Betsy, have you seen much of Mother lately?'

Edward set the glass down on the edge of the chest, so that it tottered and fell off, spilling a few drops of whisky on Mary's prized oriental rug.

He glanced at her and saw that she looked angry, but whether with him or with Aunt Cassie he could not judge. He seized his gloves again and went out in a hurry. He had to check his pace on the front steps because they were slippery. He flung himself into the roadster, noting the litter of cigarette stubs on the floor. 'That Nesbit puppy's been driving it,' he thought. 'I'm going to tell Eileen.' But then his temper softened. He remembered how graceful she had looked in her red house-gown, and how white her fingers were, snapping the heads off the begonias. 'Youth,' he thought in a surge of mellowness, 'youth!' As he stepped on the accelerator at the end of the main street, he smiled to himself. 'I understand Eileen better than Mary does. And she understands me. We're pals, all right.' If Aunt Cassie kept on annoying Eileen, she'd

just have to go and live with Cousin Robert, though she wouldn't like that, for Robert's house was ramshackle and he had a lot of young children. Still, he thought, youth must be served, and old age must learn to take a back seat.

The road wasn't so terribly slick. Once out of town he stepped harder on the gas and said to himself that there was no danger so long as he didn't have to use his brakes suddenly – and he wouldn't have to, for there was nobody else on the road. He had just time to make his appointment if he got up speed. He began to hum to himself.

He took a back road north of Darien which cut four miles off the trip. People avoided it because it was narrow and at one point crawled for some distance along the edge of a ravine. That made him laugh. He knew that road like a book, and he felt good and warm inside, and competent.

His headlights cut a brave swath in front of him. This going was wonderful – smooth as glass, where the ice covered the ruts he had met there the last time. He was going to get to his banquet on time.

The blinding lights that cut across him from the curve ahead could have come from no automobile in this world. Of that he was convinced as the roadster jerked, waltzed, skittered, and dropped into space. As it turned over once and then again, he was framing a bill to be presented to the legislature at Hartford, to make the use of million-candle-power headlights on the highway a felony.

When, later, he pulled himself out from under Eileen's wrecked flivver, his first thought was to notify the state police that somewhere on the south Connecticut roads an engine of death was rampant, with lights out of solar space harnessed to its fenders. There ought to be a law against it. The guy hadn't even stopped.

He made his way back home. He was dry enough. At least he felt dry – perhaps because his clothes were frozen. Even his shirt had stopped popping and stood out like a balloon in front of him. During the last mile, when he was really beginning to feel somewhat light and giddy, he steadied himself by thinking, 'Eileen will have a fit, seeing me come in looking like this.'

But he was so glad when he turned into his street and saw

his home that he forgot the ruined roadster in the gorge, the criminal carelessness of the fellow who had pinned those suns on his fender, even the lurking suspicion that if he had not taken those two big slugs of whisky on an empty stomach, he could have checked the crazy dancing of the flivver.

He climbed the steps and went into the house. The hall and front parlour were dark. The women used the back parlour after dinner, Mary busy at her needlepoint, Eileen poking tunes out of the piano, Aunt Cassie darning socks or reading beside the gas-fire.

He tried to shrug off his outer coat, but it would not leave him, and when he reached up to take his hat off, he remembered that his hat was icebound somewhere in a hollow between Darien and New Canaan. He struck numb, stiff hands against his shirt front and saw that they made no impression on it. All right then, he'd go into the back parlour as is. Wait till they heard what had happened to him. He'd have to buy Eileen another car – only fair, when he had ruined hers.

As he went through the front parlour he thought of last night and Johnny Nesbit, and wondered why he had let it perturb him. There was nothing to worry about. Mary loved him, Eileen loved him, two delightful women, who made up his life.

From behind the double doors he heard conversation. 'It was mean of him to take my car tonight. He knows Johnny and I always go to the movies on Saturday night.'

Then Mary said, rather feebly, he thought, 'Well, he did have to go to that dinner.'

Edward took a step forward and stood in the wide doorway. The women were at the other end of the long room. For a moment he thought that Eileen had seen him, but she couldn't have, because she dropped her eyes calmly again to her hands lying listless in her lap. There was only one lamp burning in the room, beside Mary's chair.

He felt deflated because nobody had looked up and cried out with horror at his battered appearance. He crept into the shadowy end of the room and sat down close to the dull glow of the grate. But still they did not notice him. Mary spoke again. 'You mustn't blame me, darling, for what happened last night. It's your father – he *will* have her here, and I

haven't a word to say about it.'

His daughter jumped up from her chair and began to pace the rug. 'Yes, I know. It's only what *he* wants that counts in this house.' She was coming towards him now and Edward put out a hand to her in supplication. She didn't see him. She was absorbed in her own discontent. She turned back to face her mother and said, 'Why couldn't you have picked me a better father, Mother? You must have been darned attractive when you were a girl.'

He turned in an agony to look at Mary. But she wasn't looking shocked or angry, only puzzled and a little sad. 'Well, Eileen, it may surprise you, but he was considered very attractive too, when he was young. And – ' with a little smile – 'I couldn't foresee Aunt Cassie, you know.'

He could bear no more of this. He sprang from his chair and strode towards them into the circle of the lamp light. 'Mary,' he cried, 'Mary! I'm here. I had a wreck, but I wasn't killed. I got home all right!'

Nothing happened. Eileen went on pacing up and down, and his wife did not raise her eyes from her embroidery.

There was a light tapping of feet on the hardwood floor outside the parlour door. Oh God, he thought, how like her to come barging in at a moment like this! He had to talk to Mary. 'Aunt Cassie,' he called out loudly, 'Aunt Cassie, would you mind – '

She was just inside the door now and she looked up at him and smiled. 'Well, Neddy,' she said in her bright social manner, 'how is it over there? When you see Uncle Horace, tell him – '

THE WOMAN'S GHOST STORY

Algernon Blackwood

'Yes,' she said, from her seat in the dark corner, 'I'll tell you an experience if you care to listen. And, what's more, I'll tell it briefly, without trimmings – I mean without unessentials. That's a thing story-tellers never do, you know,' she laughed. 'They drag in all the unessentials and leave their listeners to disentangle; but I'll give you just the essentials, and you can make of it what you please. But on one condition: that at the end you ask no questions, because I can't explain it and have no wish to.'

We agreed. We were serious. After listening to a dozen prolix stories from people who merely wished to 'talk' but had nothing to tell, we wanted 'essentials'.

'In those days,' she began, feeling from the quality of our silence that we were with her, 'in those days I was interested in psychic things, and had arranged to sit up alone in a haunted house in the middle of London. It was a cheap and dingy lodging-house in a mean street, unfurnished. I had already made a preliminary examination in daylight that afternoon, and the keys from the caretaker, who lived next door, were in my pocket. The story was a good one – satisfied me, at any rate, that it was worth investigating; and I won't weary you with details as to the woman's murder and all the tiresome elaboration as to *why* the place was *alive*. Enough that it was.

'I was a good deal bored, therefore, to see a man, whom I took to be the talkative old caretaker, waiting for me on the steps when I went in at 11 p.m., for I had sufficiently explained that I wished to be there alone for the night.

'"I wished to show you *the* room," he mumbled, and of course I couldn't exactly refuse, having tipped him for the temporary loan of a chair and table.

'"Come in, then, and let's be quick," I said.

'We went in, he shuffling after me through the unlighted

hall up to the first floor where the murder had taken place, and I prepared myself to hear his inevitable account before turning him out with the half-crown his persistence had earned. After lighting the gas I sat down in the arm-chair he had provided – a faded, brown plush arm-chair – and turned for the first time to face him and get through with the performance as quickly as possible. And it was in that instant I got my first shock. The man was *not* the caretaker. It was not the old fool, Carey, I had interviewed earlier in the day and made my plans with. My heart gave a horrid jump.

'"Now who are *you*, pray?" I said. "You're not Carey, the man I arranged with this afternoon. Who are you?"

'I felt very uncomfortable, as you may imagine. I was a "psychical researcher", and a young woman of new tendencies, and proud of my liberty, but I did not care to find myself in an empty house with a stranger. Something of my confidence left me. Confidence with women, you know, is all humbug after a certain point. Or perhaps you don't know, for most of you are men. But anyhow my pluck ebbed in a quick rush, and I felt afraid.

'"Who are you?" I repeated quickly and nervously. The fellow was well dressed, youngish and good-looking, but with a face of great sadness. I myself was barely thirty. I am giving you essentials, or I would not mention it. Out of quite ordinary things comes this story. I think that's why it has value.

'"No," he said; "I'm the man who was frightened to death."

'His voice and his words ran through me like a knife, and I felt ready to drop. In my pocket was the book I had bought to make notes in. I felt the pencil sticking in the socket. I felt, too, the extra warm things I had put on to sit up in, as no bed or sofa was available – a hundred things dashed through my mind, foolishly and without sequence or meaning, as the way is when one is really frightened. Unessentials leaped up and puzzled me, and I thought of what the papers might say if it came out, and what my "smart" brother-in-law would think, and whether it would be told that I had cigarettes in my pocket, and was a free-thinker.

'"The man who was frightened to death!" I repeated aghast.

'"That's me," he said stupidly.

'I stared at him just as you would have done – any one of you men now listening to me – and felt my life ebbing and flowing like a sort of hot fluid. You needn't laugh! That's how I felt. Small things, you know, touch the mind with great earnestness when terror is there – *real terror*. But I might have been at a middle-class tea-party, for all the ideas I had: they were so ordinary!

'"But I thought you were the caretaker I tipped this afternoon to let me sleep here!" I gasped. "Did – did Carey send you to meet me?"

'"No," he replied in a voice that touched my boots somehow. "I am the man who was frightened to death. And, what is more, I am frightened *now*!"

'"So am I!" I managed to utter, speaking instinctively. "I'm simply terrified."

'"Yes," he replied in that same odd voice that seemed to sound within me. "But you are still in the flesh, and I – *am not*!"

'I felt the need for vigorous self-assertion. I stood up in that empty, unfurnished room, digging the nails into my palms and clenching my teeth. I was determined to assert my individuality and my courage as a new woman and free soul.

'"You mean to say you are not in the flesh!" I gasped. "What in the world are you talking about?"

'The silence of the night swallowed up my voice. For the first time I realized that darkness was over the city; that dust lay upon the stairs; that the floor above was untenanted and the floor below empty. I was alone in an unoccupied and haunted house, unprotected, and a woman. I chilled. I heard the wind round the house, and knew the stars were hidden. My thoughts rushed to policemen and omnibuses, and everything that was useful and comforting. I suddenly realized what a fool I was to come to such a house alone. I was icily afraid. I thought the end of my life had come. I was an utter fool to go in for psychical research when I had not the necessary nerve.

'"Good God!" I gasped. "If you're not Carey, the man I arranged with, who are you?"

'I was really stiff with terror. The man moved slowly

towards me across the empty room. I held out my arm to stop him, getting up out of my chair at the same moment, and he came to halt just opposite to me, a smile on his worn, sad face.

'"I told you who I am," he repeated quietly with a sigh, looking at me with the saddest eyes I have ever seen, "and I am frightened *still*."

'By this time I was convinced that I was entertaining either a rogue or a madman, and I cursed my stupidity in bringing the man in without having seen his face. My mind was quickly made up, and I knew what to do. Ghosts and psychic phenomena flew to the winds. If I angered the creature my life might pay the price. I must humour him till I got to the door, and then race for the street. I stood bolt upright and faced him. We were about of a height, and I was a strong, athletic woman who played hockey in winter and climbed Alps in summer. My hand itched for a stick, but I had none.

'"Now, of course, I remember," I said with a sort of stiff smile that was very hard to force. "Now I remember your case and the wonderful way you behaved."

'The man stared at me stupidly, turning his head to watch me as I backed more and more quickly to the door. But when his face broke into a smile I could control myself no longer. I reached the door in a run, and shot out on to the landing. Like a fool, I turned the wrong way, and stumbled over the stairs leading to the next storey. But it was too late to change. The man was after me, I was sure, though no sound of footsteps came; and I dashed up the next flight, tearing my skirt and banging my ribs in the darkness, and rushed headlong into the first room I came to. Luckily the door stood ajar, and, still more fortunate, there was a key in the lock. In a second I had slammed the door, flung my whole weight against it, and turned the key.

'I was safe, but my heart was beating like a drum. A second later it seemed to stop altogether, for I saw that there was someone else in the room besides myself. A man's figure stood between me and the windows, where the street lamps gave just enough light to outline his shape against the glass. I'm a plucky woman, you know, for even then I didn't give up hope, but I may tell you that I have never felt so vilely

frightened in all my born days. I had locked myself in with him!

'The man leaned against the window, watching me where I lay in a collapsed heap upon the floor. So there were two men in the house with me, I reflected. Perhaps other rooms were occupied too! What could it all mean? But, as I stared, something changed in the room, or in me – hard to say which – and I realized my mistake, so that my fear, which had so far been physical, at once altered its character and became *psychical*. I became afraid in my soul instead of in my heart, and I knew immediately who this man was.

'"How in the world did you get up here?" I stammered to him across the empty room, amazement momentarily stemming my fear.

'"Now, let me tell you," he began, in that odd far-away voice of his that went down my spine like a knife. "I'm in different space, for one thing, and you'd find me in any room you went into; for according to your way of measuring, I'm *all over the house*. Space is a bodily condition, but I am out of the body, and am not affected by space. It's my condition that keeps me here. I want something to change my condition for me, for then I could get away. What I want is sympathy. Or, really, more than sympathy; I want affection – I want *love*!"

'While he was speaking I gathered myself slowly upon my feet. I wanted to scream and cry and laugh all at once, but I only succeeded in sighing, for my emotion was exhausted and a numbness was coming over me. I felt for the matches in my pocket and made a movement towards the gas jet.

'"I should be much happier if you didn't light the gas," he said at once, "for the vibrations of your light hurt me a good deal. You need not be afraid that I shall injure you. I can't touch your body to begin with, for there's a great gulf fixed, you know; and really this half-light suits me best. Now, let me continue what I was trying to say before. You know, so many people have come to this house to see me, and most of them have seen me, and one and all have been terrified. If only, oh! if only someone would be *not* terrified, but kind and loving to me! Then, you see, I might be able to change my condition and get away."

His voice was so sad that I felt tears start somewhere at the back of my eyes; but fear kept all else in check, and I stood shaking and cold as I listened to him.

'"Who are you then? Of course Carey didn't send you, I know now," I managed to utter. My thoughts scattered dreadfully and I could think of nothing to say. I was afraid of a stroke.

'"I know nothing about Carey, or who he is," continued the man quietly, "and the name my body had I have forgotten, thank God; but I am the man who was frightened to death in this house ten years ago, and I have been frightened ever since, and am frightened still; for the succession of cruel and curious people who come to this house to see the ghost, and thus keep alive its atmosphere of terror, only helps to render my condition worse. If only someone would be kind to me – *laugh*, speak gently and rationally with me, cry if they like, pity, comfort, soothe me – anything but come here in curiosity and tremble as you are now doing in that corner. Now, madam, won't you take pity on me?" His voice rose to a dreadful cry. "Won't you step out into the middle of the room and try to love me a little?"

'A horrible laughter came gurgling up in my throat as I heard him, but the sense of pity was stronger than the laughter, and I found myself actually leaving the support of the wall and approaching the centre of the floor.

'"By God!" he cried, at once straightening up against the window, "you have done a kind act. That's the first attempt at sympathy that has been shown me since I died, and I feel better already. In life, you know, I was a misanthrope. Everything went wrong with me, and I came to hate my fellow men so much that I couldn't bear to see them even. Of course, like begets like, and this hate was returned. Finally I suffered from horrible delusions, and my room became haunted with demons that laughed and grimaced, and one night I ran into a whole cluster of them near the bed – and the fright stopped my heart and killed me. It's hate and remorse, as much as terror, that clogs me so thickly and keeps me here. If only someone could feel pity, and sympathy, and perhaps a little love for me, I could get away and be happy. When you came this afternoon to see over the house I watched you, and a

little hope came to me for the first time. I saw you had courage, originality, resource – *love.* If only I could touch your heart, without frightening you, I knew I could perhaps tap that love you have stored up in your being there, and thus borrow the wings for my escape!"

'Now I must confess my heart began to ache a little, as fear left me and the man's words sank their sad meaning into me. Still, the whole affair was so incredible, and so touched with unholy quality, and the story of a woman's murder I had come to investigate had so obviously nothing to do with this thing, that I felt myself in a kind of wild dream that seemed likely to stop at any moment and leave me somewhere in bed after a nightmare.

'Moreover, his words possessed me to such an extent that I found it impossible to reflect upon anything else at all, or to consider adequately any ways and means of action or escape.

'I moved a little nearer to him in the gloom, horribly frightened, of course, but with the beginnings of a strange determination in my heart.

'"You women," he continued, his voice plainly thrilling at my approach, "you wonderful women, to whom life often brings no opportunity of spending your great love, oh, if you only could know how many of *us* simply yearn for it! It would save our souls, if you but knew. Few might find the chance that you now have, but if you only spend your love freely, without definite object, just letting it flow openly for all who need, you would reach hundreds and thousands of souls like me, and *release us*! Oh, madam, I ask you again to feel with me, to be kind and gentle – and if you can to love me a little!"

'My heart did leap within me and this time the tears did come, for I could not restrain them. I laughed too, for the way he called me "madam" sounded so odd, here in this empty room at midnight in a London street, but my laughter stopped dead and merged in a flood of weeping when I saw how my change of feeling affected him. He had left his place by the window and was kneeling on the floor at my feet, his hands stretched out towards me, and the first signs of a kind of glory about his head.

'"Put your arms round me and kiss me, for the love of

God!" he cried. "Kiss me, oh, kiss me, and I shall be freed! You have done so much already – now do this!"

'I stuck there, hesitating, shaking, my determination on the verge of action, yet not quite able to compass it. But the terror had almost gone.

' "Forget that I'm a man and you're a woman," he continued in the most beseeching voice I ever heard. "Forget that I'm a ghost, and come out boldly and press me to you with a great kiss, and let your love flow into me. Forget yourself just for one minute and do a brave thing! Oh, love me, *love me*, LOVE ME! and I shall be free!"

'The words, or the deep force they somehow released in the centre of my being, stirred me profoundly, and an emotion infinitely greater than fear surged up over me and carried me with it across the edge of action. Without hesitation I took two steps forward towards him where he knelt, and held out my arms. Pity and love were in my heart at that moment, genuine pity, I swear, and genuine love. I forgot myself and my little tremblings in a great desire to help another soul.

' "I love you! poor, aching, unhappy thing! I love you," I cried through hot tears; "and I am not the least bit afraid in the world."

'The man uttered a curious sound, like laughter, yet not laughter, and turned his face up to me. The light from the street below fell on it, but there was another light, too, shining all round it that seemed to come from the eyes and skin. He rose to his feet and met me, and in that second I folded him to my breast and kissed him full on the lips again and again.'

All our pipes had gone out, and not even a skirt rustled in that dark studio as the story-teller paused a moment to steady her voice, and put a hand softly up to her eyes before going on again.

'Now, what can I say, and how can I describe to you, all you sceptical men sitting there with pipes in your mouths, the amazing sensation I experienced of holding an intangible.

impalpable thing so closely to my heart that it touched my body with equal pressure all the way down, and then melted away somewhere into my very being? For it was like seizing a rush of cool wind and feeling a touch of burning fire the moment it had struck its swift blow and passed on. A series of shocks ran all over and all through me; a momentary ecstasy of flaming sweetness and wonder thrilled down into me; my heart gave another great leap – and then I was alone.

'The room was empty. I turned on the gas and struck a match to prove it. All fear had left me, and something was singing round me in the air and in my heart like the joy of a spring morning in youth. Not all the devils or shadows or hauntings in the world could then have caused me a single tremor.

'I unlocked the door and went all over the dark house, even into the kitchen and cellar and up among the ghostly attics. But the house was empty. Something had left it. I lingered a short hour, analysing, thinking, wondering – you can guess what and how, perhaps, but I won't detail, for I promised only essentials, remember – and then went out to sleep the remainder of the night in my own flat, locking the door behind me upon a house no longer haunted.

'But my uncle, Sir Henry, the owner of the house, required an account of my adventure, and of course I was in duty bound to give him some kind of a story. Before I could begin, however, he held up his hand to stop me.

'"First," he said, "I wish to tell you a little deception I ventured to practise on you. So many people have been to that house and seen the ghost that I came to think the story acted on their imaginations, and I wished to make a better test. So I invented for their benefit another story, with the idea that if you did see anything I could be sure it was not due merely to an excited imagination."

'"Then what you told me about a woman having been murdered, and all that, was not the true story of the haunting?"

'"It was not. The true story is that a cousin of mine went mad in the house, and killed himself in a fit of morbid terror following upon years of miserable hypochondriasis. It is his figure that investigators see."

'"That explains, then," I gasped –

'"Explains what?"

'I thought of that poor struggling soul, longing all these years for escape, and determined to keep my story for the present to myself.

'"Explains, I mean, why I did not see the ghost of the murdered woman," I concluded.

'"Precisely,' said Sir Henry, "and why, if you had seen anything, it would have had value, inasmuch as it could not have been caused by the imagination working upon a story you already knew."'

THE GHOST OF *U65*

G. A. Minto

It is amusing sometimes to play the old game of choosing the three books one would take if faced with a prolonged sojourn on a desert island. Personally I would take a good atlas, *Whitaker's Almanack* and *Jane's Fighting Ships.* The last especially I find to be a mine of curious and fascinating facts, ranging as it does from the latest giants among aircraft carriers to the Soviet cruiser *Aurora.* This noble vessel, built in 1895 and still in commission, distinguished herself when she bombarded the Winter Palace in St Petersburg during the Revolution of 1917, thereby winning almost the only victory in Russian naval history.

The other day, while having yet another browse through *Jane's*, I was interested to see that the new German submarines, unlike their predecessors, bear names instead of numbers. Admittedly the names so far chosen by the renascent Marineamt are not inspiring. It would be difficult to raise much enthusiasm about ships called *Wilhelm Bauer* or *Hai*, and perhaps those responsible for choosing the names of future boats will be a little more imaginative. But the new practice would have pleased the Emperor Wilhelm II. As far back as 1912 he wished to name his submarines properly, yet for some reason his Naval Staff would not agree. For the Hohenzollerns were never quite the autocrats they liked to think they were. In the words of the old song of the Prussian Junkers:

> *'Und der Konig absolut*
> *Wenn uns den Willen tut.'*[1]

Despite the present trend I myself feel that the growing West German Navy will revert to the simple name of U-boat. There is so much tradition about the word that the new

[1] 'Our unchallenged King and Lord, so long as he obeys our word.'

generation of submariners may well wish to revive it. And I wonder, if *U 65* appears, whether anyone will remember the strange story of the first of her line. It is, I think, well worth retelling even after almost fifty years have passed.

I have been a servant of the State for most of my working life and, up till very recently, believed that no Governmental activity, however exotic, could surprise me. The complexity of modern life being what it is, there are few pies untouched by official fingers, and the process, for good and evil, continues apace. Nevertheless, when I learned from cold clear print that the German Admiralty had, within living memory, officially laid a ghost on board, of all things, a brand-new submarine, I confess that I blinked incredulously. Church and State throughout the ages have been closely interwoven, but it is surely unique, certainly in the twentieth century, for the High Command of a great armed service to call upon the clergy to exorcise an unquiet spirit. This actually happened in the spring of 1917, and I have been at some pains, so far as is now possible, to trace and verify this strangest of stories. It must be exceedingly rare for reports of such a nature to be submitted by responsible officers to their superiors, and the Naval Staff in Berlin were, no doubt, puzzled and intrigued. There must have been eager competition in the Marineamt for the papers; for to my mind the haunting of *U 65* ranks as one of the best authenticated ghost stories of the sea.

In 1915 the naval policy of the Imperial Government had at last been formulated. Briefly, among other weighty matters, it called for a large expansion of submarine construction; for the High Command were gradually coming round to the idea, energetically and perpetually expounded by Grand Admiral von Tirpitz, that the war might well be won by the U-boats. This strategy was particularly congenial to the Kaiser, who was most reluctant to risk his surface ships in an all-out clash with Jellicoe's Grand Fleet. Accordingly, large contracts were placed with State and private shipyards for submarines, and soon they were sliding down the ways in ever-increasing numbers.

U 65, the subject of our story, was one of a class of twenty-four vessels especially designed to operate from the ports of

the occupied coast of Flanders. Fully loaded, she displaced five hundred and twelve tons and her diesel engines gave her a surface speed of just under fourteen knots. In commission she was manned by three officers and thirty-one petty officers and men.

Her keel had been laid in the great naval dockyard of Wilhelmshaven in June 1916, and, almost from the first, ill-luck had dogged her construction. A few days after work on her had started she claimed her first victims. A heavy steel girder was being lowered into position when it slipped from the crane tackle and, crashing down on the embryo boat, killed one workman outright and mortally injured another. Accidents are, of course, unhappily frequent in all places of heavy labour, but it was a bad beginning for a new ship. Her reputation as unlucky was luridly enhanced a few months later when three men were suffocated in her engine-room by poisonous fumes. *U 65* had cost five men their lives even before she put to sea.

Her trial trip was equally marked by tragedy. Meeting very heavy weather in the Heligoland Bight, she lost one seaman overboard, and only chance prevented the loss of two more. Nor was that the whole tale of the trials (in both senses); for *U 65* came near to killing her entire complement when she submerged for diving tests a few hours later. A serious leak developed in one of the forward ballast-tanks, and it was over half a day before she could be persuaded to surface again. Meanwhile the flood water had reached the giant batteries and, releasing deadly gases, almost asphyxiated every man aboard. When, at last, she emerged on to the surface, two-thirds of the technicians and crew were unconscious and the remainder violently sick and ill. Two died in hospital soon after getting ashore. Eight lives was now *U 65*'s melancholy score.

However, the necessary repairs were made and a second series of trials passed off without any noteworthy incident. Early in February 1917 she was officially accepted for the Imperial Navy and *Oberleutnant* Karl Honig was appointed in command. He was a Regular officer of experience and high reputation in the submarine service, and one marked out for accelerated promotion in the future. He appears to have been

quite satisfied with his command, and his Letter of Proceedings after the first operational cruise makes no mention of any constructional defects.

Unhappily, though the word gremlin was unknown in the First World War, there was a very evil one lurking in the shapely grey hull of *U 65*. A few days after her return to Wilhelmshaven she was hoisting in torpedoes when a war-head exploded, blowing five men, including the Second Officer, into fragments of humanity. Nine others received serious injuries. A court of enquiry was unable to discover the cause of the disaster, and returned the German version of the verdict 'Act of God'.

A few weeks later, while still in port, the post-luncheon calm of the wardroom was rudely disturbed when a white-faced seaman dashed in shouting, '*Herr Kapitan*, the dead Second Officer has come aboard!' Such a breach of the iron Prussian discipline must have, thought the shocked Captain Honig, some rational explanation, and, selecting the most obvious, he taxed the sailor sternly with being drunk. But the man seemed perfectly sober, albeit terrified, and repeated the story that he had seen the dead officer mount the gang-plank to board the ship. Deeply puzzled but thoroughly sceptical, the Commanding Officer picked up his cap, and, followed by his subordinates, climbed on deck. It was a perfect spring afternoon, and a less likely time to see ghosts could hardly be imagined. Nevertheless he was amazed to find another seaman called Petersen crouching behind the conning-tower in an extremity of terror. In response to a barked order this man pulled himself together sufficiently to stammer that he, too, had seen the dead officer come aboard, salute and walk forward to the bows, there to vanish into thin air.

Like a good officer, Honig was determined to get to the bottom of an incident so obviously dangerous to the morale of his crew. A doctor was called, and certified that both men were sane and sober; then Honig interrogated them strictly about what they had seen. They were unshaken in their separate yet similar accounts, and since they both bore excellent characters, their puzzled captain had to accept the fact that they had at any rate seen someone or something. For a little he toyed with the idea that some misguided humorist

had perpetrated a practical joke in the worst possible taste, and vowed grimly that the joker, if detected, would be sorry. He decided to seek the discreet help of the Chief of the Dockyard Police, and that officer, sworn to secrecy, made very thorough enquiries. They all led to nothing, and it seemed clear that practical joking could be ruled out. More puzzled and more than a little worried, Honig reported the strange incident to his Flotilla Captain, who put the matter down to the over-strained nerves of tired men. The incident, however, had, as Honig had feared, made a serious and distressing impression on his crew, who were now convinced that the submarine and her company were doomed. The day before she sailed on her next cruise Seaman Petersen deserted, and, so far as is known, was never apprehended by the naval authorities.

In due course *U 65* left her home port, and her next two forays against Allied shipping were moderately successful. Seven ships were sunk, and Captain Honig may well have thought that his superior's explanation had been correct. His subordinates were not so cheerful, for they were uneasy and depressed. The story of the ghost at Wilhelmshaven had lost nothing in the telling, and a number of the men swore that the boat was haunted. At least three officially reported that they had seen an unknown officer walk into the torpedo-room, from which he did not emerge.

Captain Honig, like the good commanding officer he was, did his best to treat the whole matter with sceptical contempt, but he was soon to have a rude awakening.

Leaving Heligoland on New Year's Day, 1918, *U 65* called at Zeebrugge *en route* to her war station in the English Channel. During her stay in port three men reported that they had seen the ghost. All three had only that day joined the ship, and, so far as could be ascertained, had no previous knowledge of the haunting.

Towards dusk of 21st January, the U-boat was in a position about fifteen miles due south of Portland Bill. The weather was rapidly worsening, with fierce gusts and a rising sea which threw sheets of spray over the bridge. Captain Honig and two look-outs, one on either side, were on watch, crouching behind the meagre shelter of the canvas screens on which the spindrift

rattled like rifle-fire. At 4.30 exactly the starboard look-out was amazed to see a figure in officer's uniform, without coat or oilskins, standing right in the bows, apparently impervious to the seas that burst around him. Then the apparition turned, and, even in the failing light, the stupefied sailor was able to recognize the features of the officer whose pitiful remains lay buried in the naval cemetery at Wilhelmshaven. 'Lord God, it's the ghost!' he shrieked, and, staggering back with outstretched hands, bumped violently into the captain at the after end of the narrow bridge. That officer, cursing roundly, peered forward in his turn, and what he saw struck him, in the words of his official report, '*sprachlos*' – speechless. But training and discipline always tell, and automatically he shouted for the reserve watch below. As they tumbled up the hatch they found the captain and the look-outs pointing excitedly to the deserted foredeck, which showed only the white foam of the breaking seas. To the new arrivals Honig lamely explained that he had simply been testing their alertness.

Thenceforward a cloud of depression enfolded *U 65*. Men were disinclined to be alone, and none would venture unaccompanied into the forward torpedo-room. Possibly due to suggestion, more men than ever swore they saw the ghost, and one, at least, said that it greeted him in passing. Fear gripped the vessel in those winter days amidst the grey seas of the Channel.

Nevertheless she completed her patrol and returned safely to Bruges, her new operational base, early in February. No doubt eager for relaxation after his many worries, Captain Honig went ashore on the first night in port to visit the Officers' Club, but on his way there the air-raid sirens sounded. He was about to enter a shelter when a shell-splinter decapitated him before the eyes of several members of his crew. The headless body was carried aboard *U 65*, and that night one officer and eight men saw the ghost standing mournfully beside the canvas-shrouded corpse.

The matter was now far beyond a joke and Higher Authority intervened. No less a personage than the Admiral of Submarines visited *U 65* and personally questioned each of the crew. Officially sceptical he was nevertheless impressed

by what he heard, especially when he received a unanimous request from the ship's company for transfer to another boat. In theory this request was ignored, but in practice almost every man was drafted on one pretext or another over the next few weeks, and *U 65* was ordered into reserve at Bruges.

It was at this point that unorthodox methods were adopted by the Admiral to raise the morale of the new crew. A Lutheran chaplain, Pastor Franz Weber, then serving at the base, was summoned by the Senior Officer of Submarines and told the whole weird story. In response, the reverend gentleman suggested that he might conduct a service of exorcism to lay the unquiet spirit of *U 65*. It could do no harm, he thought, and might possibly do a lot of good. To this the Admiral agreed, reporting his decision to the Naval Staff in Berlin. Pastor Weber duly held the service, but, unfortunately, it had unexpected results. For the new crew, already despondent and nervous, were gravely upset by this official recognition of the ghost. As one man they applied for transfer from the boat, but this time the request was brusquely refused.

Early in May a new Commanding Officer was appointed, Lieutenant-Commander Schelle. A strict disciplinarian, he refused to tolerate 'any damned nonsense about ghosts', and made it clear that any man who so much as mentioned the word would have cause to regret it. As if in justification of his uncompromising attitude the fearsome tales died down, and the next two operational cruises were without incident. In June, however, the ghost reappeared, and two men deserted rather than sail in that haunted ship. They were arrested and tried by court-martial, but they sturdily maintained that nothing would induce them to return to *U 65*. Sentenced to death, both were reprieved and drafted to a penal battalion on the Western Front. (One, at least, survived the war, and wrote an excellent account of his experiences in the submarine in a journal devoted to psychical research.)

On 30th June, *U 65* sailed on what was to be her last voyage. True to form, her death was to be as mysterious as her life, for no real explanation of her loss was ever found. The main facts, however, are well authenticated.

Early in the morning of 10th July the US submarine *L 2* was patrolling at periscope depth nine miles off Cape Clear

on the southern Irish coast. Suddenly she sighted a German U-boat on the surface, cruising slowly as she charged her batteries. She was *U 65*. Conditions were ideal and the American captain manœuvred his vessel into the attacking position. He was about to give the order to fire when there was a tremendous explosion. As soon as the mountain of water had subsided the startled officer saw that his prospective victim had vanished, leaving masses of wreckage and oil-slick on the calm surface.

There have, of course, been a number of theories to explain her destruction. She may have been torpedoed by another German submarine in mistake, for there were a number of these operating in the vicinity at the time, but I have been unable to trace any official report to that effect. It is also possible that yet another defective war-head (as had happened at the outset of her career) had exploded, setting off a chain reaction among the others. That would account for the tremendous violence of the explosion which *L 2* had noted.

The explanation of this strange story? There is none that I can see. In 1921, Professor Dr Hecht, a very distinguished psychologist, conducted a profound investigation into the whole matter, seeking out and questioning as many witnesses as he could trace. He had access to the archives of the German Admiralty, but even with these facilities he could produce no satisfactory explanation of the haunting of *U 65*. As a man of science he naturally deprecated any suggestion of the supernatural, but in his conclusion he rather ruefully, as it seems to me, refers to Hamlet's dictum to the sadly puzzled Horatio.

There are also more things in the sea than our philosophy can yet compass.

FOOTSTEPS INVISIBLE

Robert Arthur

The night was dark, and violent with storm. Rain beat down as if from an angry heaven, and beneath its force all the noises of a metropolis blended oddly, so that to Jorman they sounded like the muted grumble of the city itself.

He himself was comfortable enough, however. The little box-sized news-stand beside the subway entrance was tight against the rain.

The window that he kept open to hear prospective customers, take in change and pass out papers let in a wet chill, but a tiny oil heater in one corner gave out a glow of warmth that beat it back.

A midget radio shrilled sweetly, and Foxfire, his toy wire-haired terrier, snored at his feet.

Jorman reached up and switched the radio off. There were times when it gave him pleasure. But more often he preferred to listen to life itself, as it poured past his stand like a river.

Tonight, though, even Times Square was deserted to the storm gods. Jorman listened and could not hear a single footstep, though his inner time sense – reinforced by a radio announcement a moment before – told him it was barely half-past twelve.

He lit a pipe and puffed contentedly.

After a moment he lifted his head. Footsteps were approaching: slow, measured, familiar footsteps. They paused in front of his stand momentarily, and he smiled.

'Hello, Clancy,' he greeted the cop on the beat. 'A nice night for ducks.'

'If I only had web feet,' the big officer grumbled, ''twould suit me fine. You're a funny one, now, staying out so late on a night like this, and not a customer in sight.'

'I like it.' Jorman grinned. 'Like to listen to the storm. Makes my imagination work.'

'Mine, too,' Clancy grunted. 'But the only thing it can

imagine is my own apartment, with a hot tub and a hot drink waitin'. Arrgh!'

He shook himself, and with a good-night tramped onward.

Jorman heard the officer's footsteps diminish. There was silence for a while, save for the rush of the rain and the occasional splashing whir of a cab sloshing past. Then he heard more steps.

This time they came towards him from the side street, and he listened intently to them, head cocked a little to one side.

They were – he searched for the right word – well, odd. *Shuffle-shuffle*, as if made by large feet encased in sneakers, and they slid along the pavement for a few inches with each step. *Shuffle-shuffle – shuffle-shuffle*, they came towards him slowly, hesitantly, as if the walker were pausing every few feet to look about him.

Jorman wondered whether the approaching man could be a cripple. A clubfoot, perhaps, dragging one foot with each step. For a moment he had the absurd thought that the sounds were made by four feet, not two; but he dismissed it with a smile and listened more closely.

The footsteps were passing him now, and though the rain made it hard to distinguish clearly, he had the impression that each shuffling step was accompanied by a slight clicking noise.

As he was trying to hear more distinctly, Foxfire woke from his slumbers. Jorman felt the little dog move at his feet, then heard the animal growling deep in its chest. He reached down and found Foxfire huddled against his shoe, tail tucked under, hair bristling.

'Quiet, boy!' he whispered. 'I'm trying to hear.'

Foxfire quieted. Jorman held his muzzle and listened. The footsteps of the stranger had shuffled past him to the corner. There they paused, as if in irresolution. Then they turned south on Seventh Avenue, and after a moment were engulfed in the storm noise.

Jorman released his hold on his dog and rubbed his chin perplexedly, wondering what there could have been about the pedestrian's scent to arouse Foxfire so.

For a moment Jorman sat very still, his pipe clenched in his hand. Then with a rush of relief he heard Clancy's returning tramp. The cop came up and stopped, and Jorman did

not wait for him to speak. He leaned out of his little window.

'Clancy,' he asked, trying to keep the excitement out of his voice, 'what does that fellow look like down the block there – the one heading south on Seventh? He ought to be about in the middle of the block.'

'Huh?' Clancy said. 'I don't see any guy. Somebody snitch a paper?'

'No.' Jorman shook his head. 'I was just curious. You say there isn't anyone – '

'Not in sight,' the cop told him. 'Must have turned in some place. You and me have this town to ourselves tonight. Well, be good. I got to try some more doors.'

He sloshed away, the rain pattering audibly off his broad, rubber-coated back, and Jorman settled back into his chair chuckling to himself. It was funny what tricks sounds played on you, especially in the rain.

He relit his dead pipe and was thinking of shutting up for the night when his last customer of the evening approached. This time he recognized the steps. It was a source of pride to him – and of revenue as well – that he could call most of his regulars by name if they came up when the street wasn't too crowded.

This one, though he didn't come often and had never come before at night, was easy. The step was a firm, decisive one. *Click* – that was the heel coming down – *slap* – that was the sole being planted firmly. *Click-slap* – the other foot. Simple. He could have distinguished it in a crowd.

'Good morning, Sir Andrew,' Jorman said pleasantly as the steps came up to his stand. '*Times*?'

'Thanks.' It was a typically British voice that answered. 'Know me, do you?'

'Oh, yes.' Jorman grinned. It was usually a source of mystification to his customers that he knew their names. But names were not too hard to learn, if the owners of them lived or worked near by. 'A bellboy from your hotel was buying a paper last time you stopped. When you'd gone on, he told me who you were.'

'That easy, eh?' Sir Andrew Carraden exclaimed. 'Don't know as I like it so much, though, being kept track of. Prefer to lose myself these days. Had enough of notoriety in the past.'

'Had plenty of it four years ago, I suppose,' Jorman suggested. 'I followed the newspaper accounts of your tomb-hunting expedition. Interesting work, archaeology. Always wished I could poke around in the past that way, some time.'

'Don't!' The word was sharp. 'Take my advice and stay snug and cozy in the present. The past is an uncomfortable place. Sometimes you peer into it and then spend the rest of your life trying to get away from it. And – But I musn't stop here chatting. Not in this storm. Here's your money. No, here on the counter . . .'

And then, as Jorman fumbled for and found the pennies, Sir Andrew Carraden exclaimed again.

'I say!' he said. 'I'm sorry.'

'Perfectly all right,' Jorman told him. 'It pleases me when people don't notice. A lot don't, you know, in spite of the sign.'

'Blind newsdealer,' Sir Andrew Carraden read the little placard tacked to the stand. 'I say – '

'Wounded in the war,' Jorman told him. 'Sight failed progressively. Went entirely a couple of years ago. So I took up this. But I don't mind. Compensations, you know. Amazing what a lot a man can hear when he listens. But you're going to ask me how I knew you, aren't you? By your footsteps. They're very recognizable. Sort of a *click-slap, click-slap.*'

His customer was silent for a moment. Jorman was about to ask whether anything was wrong when the Englishman spoke.

'Look. I – ' and his tone took on an almost hungry eagerness – 'I've got to talk to somebody, or blow my top. I mean, go barmy. Completely mad. Maybe I am, already. I don't know. You – you might have a few minutes to spare? You might be willing to keep me company for an hour? I – it might not be too dull.'

Jorman hesitated in answering. Not because he intended to refuse – the urgency in the man's voice was unmistakable – but there was something of a hunted tone in Sir Andrew Carraden's voice that aroused Jorman's curiosity.

It was absurd – but Jorman's ears were seldom wrong. The Englishman, the archaeologist whose name had been so prominent a few years back, was a hunted man. Perhaps a

desperate man. A fugitive – from what?

Jorman did not try to guess. He nodded.

'I have time,' he agreed.

He bent down and picked up Foxfire, attached the leash, threw an old ulster over his shoulders and turned down his bright gasoline lantern. With Foxfire straining at the leash, he swung up his racks and padlocked the stand.

'This way,' Sir Andrew Carraden said at his side. 'Not half a block. Like to take my arm?'

'Thanks.' Jorman touched the other's elbow. The touch told him what he remembered from photographs in the papers he had seen, years back. The Britisher was a big man. Not the kind to fear anything. Yet now he was afraid.

They bowed their heads to the somewhat lessened rain and walked the short distance to the hotel.

They turned into the lobby, their heels loud on marble. Jorman knew the place: the Hotel Russet. Respectable, but a bit run down.

As they passed the desk, a sleepy clerk called out.

'Oh, pardon me. There's a message here for you. From the manager. Relative to some work we've been doing – '

'Thanks, thanks,' Jorman's companion answered impatiently, and Jorman heard paper stuffed into a pocket. 'Here's the elevator. Step up just a bit.'

They had been seated in easy chairs for some minutes, pipes going, hot drinks in front of them, before Sir Andrew Carraden made any further reference to the thing that was obviously on his mind.

The room they were in was fairly spacious, judging from the reverberations of their voices, and since it seemed to be a sitting-room, probably was joined to a bedroom beyond. Foxfire slumbering at Jorman's feet, they had been talking of inconsequentials – when the Englishman interrupted himself abruptly.

'Jorman,' he said, 'I'm a desperate man. I'm being hunted.'

Jorman heard coffee splash as an unsteady hand let the cup rattle against the saucer.

'I guessed so,' he confessed. 'It was in your voice. The police?'

Sir Andrew Carraden laughed, a harsh, explosive sound.

'Your ears *are* sharp,' he said. 'The police? I wish it were! No. By a – a personal enemy.'

'Then couldn't the police – ' Jorman began. The other cut him short.

'No! They can't help me. Nobody in this world can help me. And God have mercy on me, nobody in the next!'

Jorman passed over the emphatic exclamation.

'But surely – '

'Take my word for it, I'm on my own,' Sir Andrew Carraden told him, his voice grim. 'This is a – a feud, you might say. And I'm the hunted one. I've done a lot of hunting in my day, and now I know the other side of it. It's not pleasant.'

Jorman sipped at his drink.

'You – this enemy. He's been after you long?'

'Three years.' The Englishman's voice was low, a bit unsteady. In his mind Jorman could see the big man leaning forward, arm braced against knee, face set in grim lines.

'It began one night in London. A rainy night like this. I was running over some clay tablets that were waiting deciphering. Part of the loot from the tomb of Tut-Ankh-Tothet. The one the stories in the papers you referred to were about.

'I'd been working pretty hard. I knocked off for a pipe and stood at the window looking out. Then I heard it.'

'Heard it?'

'Heard him.' Carraden corrected himself swiftly. 'Heard *him* hunting for me. Heard his footsteps – '

'Footsteps?'

'Yes. In the pitch-black night. Heard him tramping back and forth as he tried to locate me. Then he picked up my trail and came up the garden path.'

Sir Andrew paused, and Jorman heard the coffee cup being raised again.

'My dog, a Great Dane, scented him. It was frightened, poor beast, and with reason. But it tried to attack. He tore the dog to pieces on my own doorstep. I couldn't see the fight, but I could hear. The beast held him up long enough for me to run for it. Out the back door, into the storm.

'There was a stream half a mile away. I made for that, plunged into it, floated two miles down, went ashore, picked up a ride to London. Next morning I left London on a

freighter for Australia before he could pick up my trail again.'

Jorman heard the archaeologist draw a deep breath.

'It took him six months to get on to me again, up in the Australian gold country. Again I heard him in time. I got away on a horse as he was forcing his way into my cabin, caught a cargo plane for Melbourne, took a fast boat to Shanghai. But I didn't stay there long.'

'Why not?' Jorman asked. He fancied that Carraden had shuddered slightly.

'Too much like his own country. Conditions were – favourable for him in the Orient. Unfavourable for me. I had a hunch. I hurried on to Manila and took a plane for the States there. Got a letter from an old Chinese servant that *he* arrived the next night.'

Jorman sipped slowly at his coffee, his brow knitted. He did not doubt the man's sincerity, but the story *was* a bit puzzling.

'This fellow, this enemy of yours,' he commented slowly, 'you said the Orient was too much like his own country. I assume you mean Egypt.'

'Yes. He comes from Egypt. I incurred his – well, his enmity there.'

'He's a native then? An Egyptian native?'

Carraden hesitated, seeming to choose his words.

'Well, yes,' he said finally. 'In a way you might call him a native of Egypt. Though, strictly speaking, he comes from another – another country. One less well known.'

'But,' Jorman persisted, 'I should think that you, a man of wealth, would have all kinds of recourse against a native, no matter where he might be from. After all, the man is bound to be conspicuous, and ought to be easy to pick up. I know you said the police could not help you, but have you tried? And how in the world does the fellow follow you so persistently? From London to Australia to Shanghai – that's a thin trail to run down.'

'I know you're puzzled,' the other told him. 'But take my word for it, the police are no good. This chap – well, he just isn't conspicuous, that's all. He moves mostly by night. But even so he can go anywhere.

'He has – well, methods. And as for following me, he has

his own ways of doing that, too. He's persistent. So awfully, awfully persistent. That's the horror of it: that blind, stubborn persistence with which he keeps on my trail.'

Jorman was silent. Then he shook his head.

'I admit you've got me curious,' he told Carraden. 'I can see easily enough there are some things you don't want to tell me. I suppose the reason he's hunting you so doggedly is one of them.'

'Right,' the Englishman admitted. 'It was while the expedition was digging out old Tut-Ankh-Tothet. It was something I did. A law I violated. A law I was aware of, but – well, I went ahead anyway.

'You see, there were some things we found buried with old Tothet the press didn't hear of. Some papyri, some clay tablets. And off the main tomb a smaller one . . .

'Well, I can't tell you more. I violated an ancient law, then got panicky and tried to escape the consequences. In doing so, I ran afoul of this – this fellow. And brought him down on my neck. If you don't mind – '

There was a desperate note in his host's voice. Jorman nodded.

'Certainly,' he agreed. 'I'll drop the subject. After all, it's your business. You've never tried to ambush the fellow and have it out with him, I suppose?'

He imagined Carraden shaking his head.

'No use,' the other said shortly. 'My only safety is in flight. So I've kept running. When I got to 'Frisco, I thought I was safe for a while. But this time he was on my heels almost at once. I heard him coming up the street for me late one foggy night. I got out the back door and ran for it. Got away to the Canadian plains.

'I planted myself out in the middle of nowhere, on a great, rolling grassy plain with no neighbour for miles. Where no one would even think of me, much less speak to me or utter my name. I was safe there almost a year. But in the end it was – well, almost a mistake.'

Carraden put down his cup with a clatter. Jorman imagined it was because the cup had almost slipped from shaking fingers.

'You see, out there on the prairie, there were no footsteps.

This time he came at night, as usual, and he was almost on me before I was aware of it. And my horse was lame. I got away. But it was a near thing. Nearer than I like to remember . . .

'So I came to New York. I've been here since, in the very heart of the city. It's the best place of all to hide. Among people. So many millions crossing and recrossing my path muddy up my trail, confuse the scent – '

'Confuse the scent?' Jorman exclaimed.

Carraden coughed. 'Said more than I meant to, that time,' he admitted. 'Yes, it's true. He scents me out. In part, at least.

'It's hard to explain. Call it the intangible evidences of my passage.'

'I see.' The man's voice pleaded so for belief that Jorman nodded, though he was far from seeing.

'I've been here almost a year now,' the Englishman told him. 'Almost twelve months with no sign of him. I've been cautious; man, how cautious I've been! Lying in my burrow like a terrified rabbit.

'Most of that time I've been right here, close to Times Square, where a million people a day cut my trail. I've huddled in my two rooms here – there's a bedroom beyond – going out only by day. He is usually most active at night. In the day people confuse him. It's the lonely reaches of the late night hours he likes best. And it's during them I huddle here, listening wakefully . . .

'Except on stormy nights like this. Storms make his job more difficult. The rain washes away my scent, the confusion of the winds and the raging of the elements dissipate my more intangible trail. That's why I ventured out tonight.

'Some day, even here, he'll find me,' Sir Andrew Carraden said continuing, his voice tight with strain. 'I'm prepared. I'll hear him coming – I hope – and as he forces this door, I'll get out through the other one, the one in the bedroom, and get away. I early learned the folly of holing up in a burrow with only one exit. Now I always have at least one emergency doorway.

'Believe me, man, it's a ghastly existence. The lying awake in the quiet hours of the night, listening, listening for him; the clutch at the heart, the sitting bolt upright, the constant

and continuing terror – '

Carraden did not finish his sentence. He was silent for several minutes, fighting, Jorman imagined, for self-control. Then the springs of his easy chair squeaked as he leaned forward.

'Look,' the Englishman said then, in such desperate earnestness that his voice trembled a bit. 'You must wonder whether I just brought you up here to tell you this tale. I didn't. I had a purpose. I told you the story to see how you reacted. And I'm satisfied. Anyway, you didn't openly disbelieve me; and if you think I'm crazy, maybe you'll humour me anyway. I have a proposition to make.'

Jorman sat up a bit straighter.

'Yes?' he asked, his face expressing uncertainty. 'What – '

'What kind of proposition?' Carraden finished the sentence for him. 'This. That you help me out by listening for him.'

Jorman jerked his head up involuntarily, so that it he had not been blind he would have been staring into the other's face.

'Listen for your enemy?'

'Yes,' the Englishman told him, voice hoarse. 'Listen for his approach. Like a sentinel. An outpost. Look, man, you're down there in your little stand every evening from six on, I've noticed. You stay until late at night. You're posted there not fifty yards from this hotel.

'When he comes, he'll go by you. He's bound to have cast about a bit, to unravel the trail – double back and forth like a hunting dog, you know, until he gets it straightened out.

'He may go by three or four times before he's sure. You have a keen ear. If he goes by while you're on the job, you're bound to hear him.'

Carraden's voice quickened, became desperately persuasive.

'And if you do, you can let me know. I'll instruct the doorman to come over if you signal. Or you can leave your stand and come up here; you can make it easily enough, only fifty paces. But somehow you must warn me. Say you will, man!'

Jorman hesitated in his answer. Sir Andrew mistook his silence.

'If you're frightened,' he said, 'there's no need to be. He won't attack you. Only me.'

'That part's all right,' Jorman told him honestly. 'What you've told me isn't altogether clear, and – I'll be frank – I'm not absolutely sure whether you're sane or not. But I wouldn't mind listening for you. Only, don't you see, I wouldn't have any way of recognizing your enemy's step.'

Carraden gave a little whistling sigh that he checked at once.

'Good man!' The exclamation was quiet, but his voice showed relief. 'Just so you'll do it. That last bit is easy enough. I've heard him several times. I can imitate his step for you, I think. There's only one thing worrying me.

'He – not everyone can hear him. But I'm counting on your blindness to give your ears the extra sensitivity – No matter. We have to have a go at it. Give me a moment.'

Jorman sat in silence and waited. The rain, beating against the panes of two windows, was distinctly lessening. Somewhere distant a fire siren wailed, a banshee sound.

Carraden was making a few tentative scrapings, with his hands or his feet, on the floor.

'Got it!' he announced. 'I've put a bedroom slipper on each hand. It's a noise like this.'

With the soft-soled slippers, he made a noise like the shuffle of a large bare foot – a double sound, *shuffle-shuffle*, followed by a pause, then repeated.

'If you're extra keen,' he announced, 'you can hear a faint click or scratch at each step. But – '

Then Jorman heard him sit up straight, knew Carraden was staring at his face.

'What is it, man?' the Englishman cried in alarm. 'What's wrong?'

Jorman sat very tense, his fingers gripping the arms of his chair.

'Sir Andrew,' he whispered, his lips stiff, 'Sir Andrew! I've already heard those footsteps. An hour ago in the rain he went by my stand.'

In the long silence that followed, Jorman could guess how the blood was draining from the other man's ruddy face, how the knuckles of his hands clenched.

'Tonight?' Carraden asked then, his voice harsh and so low that Jorman could hardly hear him. 'Tonight, man?'

'Just a few minutes before you came by,' Jorman blurted. 'I heard footsteps – *his* steps – shuffling by. The dog woke up and whimpered. They approached me slowly, pausing, then going on.'

The Englishman breathed, 'Go on, man! What then?'

'They turned. He went down Seventh Avenue, going south.'

Sir Andrew Carraden leaped to his feet, paced across the room, wheeled, came back.

'He's tracked me down at last!' he said in a tight voice, from which a note of hysteria was not far absent. 'I've got to go. Tonight. Now. You say he turned south?'

Jorman nodded.

'But that means nothing,' Carraden spoke swiftly, as if thinking out loud. 'He'll find he's lost the track. He'll turn back. And since he passed, I've made a fresh trail. The rain may not have washed it quite away. He may have picked it up. He may be coming up those stairs now. Where's my bag? My passport? My money? All in my bureau. Excuse me. Sit tight.'

Jorman heard a door flung open, heard the man rush into the adjoining bedroom, heard a tight bureau drawer squeal.

Then Carraden's footsteps again. A moment after, a bolt on a door pulled back. Then the door itself rattled. A pause, and it rattled again, urgently. Once again, this time violently. Jorman could hear Carraden's loud breathing in the silence that followed.

'The door won't open!' There was an edge of fear in the Englishman's voice as he called out. 'There's a key or something in the lock. From the outside.'

He came back into the sitting-room with a rush, paused beside Jorman.

'That message!' The words came through Carraden's teeth. 'The one the bloody clerk handed me. I wonder if – '

Paper ripped, rattled. Sir Andrew Carraden began to curse.

'The fool!' he almost sobbed. 'Oh, the bloody, bloody fool. "Dear sir – "' Carraden's voice was shaking now – '"redecoration of the corridor on the north side of your suite necessitated our opening your door this afternoon to facilitate the painting of it. In closing and locking it, a key inadvertently jammed in the lock, and we could not at once extricate it. Our lock-

smith will repair your lock promptly in the morning. Trusting you will not be inconvenienced – "

'God deliver us from fools!' Sir Andrew gasped. 'Luckily there's still time to get out this way. Come on, man, don't sit there. I'll show you down. But we must hurry, hurry.'

Jorman heard the other man's teeth chattering faintly together in the excess of emotion that was shaking him, felt the muscular quivering of near-panic in the big man as he put out his hand and took Sir Andrew's arm to help himself rise. And then, as he was about to lift himself, his fingers clamped tight about the Englishman's wrist.

'Carraden!' he whispered. 'Carraden! *Listen!*'

The other asked no question. Jorman felt the quivering muscles beneath his fingers tense. And a silence that was like a hand squeezing them breathless seemed to envelop the room. There was not even the faint, distant sound of traffic to break it.

Then they both heard it. In the hallway, coming towards the door. The faint padding sound of shuffling footsteps . . .

It was Foxfire, whimpering piteously at their feet, that broke the spell momentarily holding them.

'He – ' Carraden's word was a gasp – 'he's out there!'

He left Jorman's side. Jorman heard him shoving with desperate strength at something heavy. Castors squeaked. Some piece of furniture tipped over and fell with a crash against the inside of the door.

'There!' Carraden groaned. 'The desk. And the door's bolted. That'll hold him a moment. Sit tight, man. Hold the pup. He'll ignore you. It's me he wants. I've got to get that other door open before he can come through.'

His footsteps raced away into the bedroom. Jorman sat where he was, Foxfire under his arm, so tense that his muscles ached from sheer fright.

In the bedroom there was a crash, as of a man plunging against a closed door that stubbornly would not give. But above the noise from the bedroom, Jorman could hear the barricaded door – the door beyond which *he* was – start to give.

Nails screamed as they came forth from wood. Hinges groaned. And the whole mass – door, lintels, desk – moved

inward an inch or so. A pause, and then the terrible, inexorable pressure from the other side came again. With a vast rending the door gave way and crashed inward over the barricading furniture.

And in the echoes of the crash he heard the almost soundless *shuffle-shuffle* of feet crossing the room towards the bedroom.

In the bedroom Sir Andrew Carraden's effort to force the jammed door ceased suddenly. Then the Englishman screamed, an animal cry of pure terror from which all intelligence was gone. The window in the bedroom crashed up with a violence that shattered the glass.

After that there was silence for a moment, until Jorman's acute hearing caught, from the street outside and five floors down, the sound of an object striking the pavement.

Sir Andrew Carraden had jumped . . .

Somehow Jorman found the strength to stumble to his feet. He dashed straight forward towards the door, and fell over the wreckage of it. Hurt, but not feeling it, he scrambled up again and stumbled into the hall and down the corridor.

Somehow his questing hands found a door that was sheathed in metal, and he thrust it open. Beyond were banisters. Stairs. By the sense of feel he rushed down recklessly.

How many minutes it took to reach the lobby, to feel his way blindly past the startled desk clerk out to the street, he did not know. Or whether he had got down before *he* had.

Once outside on the wet pavement, cool night air on his cheek, he paused, his breath coming in sobbing gasps. And as he stood there, footsteps, shuffling footsteps, passed close by him from behind and turned westward.

Then Jorman heard an astounding thing. He heard Sir Andrew Carraden's footsteps also, a dozen yards distant, hurrying away from him.

Sir Andrew Carraden had leaped five floors. And still could walk . . .

No, run. For the tempo of the man's steps was increasing. He was trotting now. Now running. And behind the running footsteps of Carraden were *his* steps, moving more swiftly, too, something scratching loudly on the concrete each time he brought a foot down.

'Sir Andrew!' Jorman called loudly, senselessly. 'Sir An–'

Then he stumbled and almost fell, trying to follow. Behind him the desk clerk came hurrying up. He exclaimed something in shocked tones, but Jorman did not even hear him. He was bending down, his hand exploring the object over which he had stumbled.

'Listen!' Jorman gasped with a dry mouth to the desk clerk, jittering above him. 'Tell me quick! I've got to know. What did the man look like who followed me out of the hotel just now?'

'F-followed you?' the clerk stuttered. 'Nobody f-followed you. Nobody but you has gone in or out in the last hu-half hour. Listen, why did he do it? Why did he jump?'

Jorman did not answer him.

'Dear God,' he was whispering, and in a way it was a prayer. 'Oh, dear God!'

His hand was touching the dead body of Andrew Carraden, lying broken and bloody on the pavement.

But his ears still heard those footsteps of pursued and pursuer, far down the block, racing away until not even he could make them out any longer.

THE NIGHT-DOINGS AT 'DEADMAN'S'

Ambrose Bierce

It was a singularly sharp night, and clear as the heart of a diamond. Clear nights have a trick of being keen. In darkness you may be cold and not know it; when you see, you suffer. This night was bright enough to bite like a serpent. The moon was moving mysteriously along behind the giant pines crowning the South Mountain, striking a cold sparkle from the crusted snow, and bringing out against the black west the ghostly outlines of the Coast Range, beyond which lay the invisible Pacific. The snow had piled itself, in the open spaces along the bottom of the gulch, into long ridges that seemed to heave, and into hills that appeared to toss and scatter spray. The spray was sunlight, twice reflected: dashed once from the moon, once from the snow.

In this snow many of the shanties of the abandoned mining camp were obliterated (a sailor might have said they had gone down) and at irregular intervals it had overtopped the tall trestles which had once supported a river called a flume; for, of course, 'flume' is *flumen.* Among the advantages of which the mountains cannot deprive the gold hunter is the privilege of speaking Latin. He says of his dead neighbour, 'He has gone up the flume.' This is not a bad way to say, 'His life has returned to the Fountain of Life.'

While putting on its armour against the assaults of the wind, this snow had neglected no coign of vantage. Snow pursued by the wind is not wholly unlike a retreating army. In the open field it ranges itself in ranks and battalions; where it can get a foothold it makes a stand; where it can take cover it does so. You may see whole platoons of snow cowering behind a bit of broken wall. The devious old road, hewn out of the mountain-side, was full of it. Squadron upon squadron had struggled to escape by this line, when suddenly pursuit had ceased. A more desolate and dreary spot than Deadman's Gulch in a winter midnight it is impossible to imagine. Yet

Mr Hiram Beeson elected to live there, the sole inhabitant.

Away up the side of the North Mountain his little pine-log shanty projected from its single pane of glass a long, thin beam of light, and looked not altogether unlike a black beetle fastened to the hillside with a bright new pin. Within it sat Mr Beeson himself, before a roaring fire, staring into its hot heart as if he had never before seen such a thing in all his life. He was not a comely man. He was grey; he was ragged and slovenly in his attire; his face was wan and haggard; his eyes were too bright. As to his age, if one had attempted to guess it, one might have said forty-seven, then corrected himself and said seventy-four. He was really twenty-eight. Emaciated he was; as much, perhaps, as he dared be, with a needy undertaker at Bentley's Flat and a new and enterprising coroner at Sonora. Poverty and zeal are an upper and a nether millstone. It is dangerous to make a third in that kind of sandwich.

As Mr Beeson sat there, with his ragged elbows on his ragged knees, his lean jaws buried in his lean hands, and with no apparent intention of going to bed, he looked as if the slightest movement would tumble him to pieces. Yet during the last hour he had winked no fewer than three times.

There was a sharp rapping at the door. A rap at that time of night and in that weather might have surprised an ordinary mortal who had dwelt two years in the Gulch without seeing a human face, and could not fail to know that the country was impassable; but Mr Beeson did not so much as pull his eyes out of the coals. And even when the door was pushed open he only shrugged a little more closely into himself, as one does who is expecting something that he would rather not see. You may observe this movement in women when, in a mortuary chapel, the coffin is borne up the aisle behind them.

But when a long old man in a blanket overcoat, his head tied up in a handkerchief and nearly his entire face in a muffler, wearing green goggles and with a complexion of glittering whiteness where it could be seen, strode silently into the room, laying a hard, gloved hand on Mr Beeson's shoulder, the latter so far forgot himself as to look up with an appearance of no small astonishment; whomever he may have been expecting, he had evidently not counted on meeting anyone like this. Nevertheless, the sight of this unexpected guest produced

in Mr Beeson the following sequence: a feeling of astonishment; a sense of gratification; a sentiment of profound goodwill. Rising from his seat, he took the knotty hand from his shoulder, and shook it up and down with a fervour quite unaccountable; for in the old man's aspect was nothing to attract, much to repel. However, attraction is too general a property for repulsion to be without it. The most attractive object in the world is the face we instinctively cover with a cloth. When it becomes still more attractive – fascinating – we put seven feet of earth above it.

'Sir,' said Mr Beeson, releasing the old man's hand, which fell passively against his thigh with a quiet clack, 'it is an extremely disagreeable night. Pray be seated; I am very glad to see you.'

Mr Beeson spoke with an easy good breeding that one would hardly have expected, considering all things. Indeed, the contrast between his appearance and his manner was sufficiently surprising to be one of the commonest of social phenomena in the mines. The old man advanced a step toward the fire, glowing cavernously in the green goggles. Mr Beeson resumed:

'You bet your life I am!'

Mr Beeson's elegance was not too refined; it had made reasonable concessions to local taste. He paused a moment, letting his eyes drop from the muffled head of his guest, down along the row of mouldy buttons confining the blanket overcoat, to the greenish cowhide boots powdered with snow, which had begun to melt and run along the floor in little rills. He took an inventory of his guest, and appeared satisfied. Who would not have been? Then he continued:

'The cheer I can offer you is, unfortunately, in keeping with my surroundings; but I shall esteem myself highly favoured if it is your pleasure to partake of it, rather than seek better at Bentley's Flat.'

With a singular refinement of hospitable humility Mr Beeson spoke as if a sojourn in his warm cabin on such a night, as compared with walking fourteen miles up to the throat in snow with a cutting crust, would be an intolerable hardship. By way of reply, his guest unbuttoned the blanket overcoat. The host laid fresh fuel on the fire, swept the hearth

with the tail of a wolf, and added:

'But *I* think you'd better skedaddle.'

The old man took a seat by the fire, spreading his broad soles to the heat without removing his hat. In the mines the hat is seldom removed except when the boots are. Without further remark Mr Beeson also seated himself in a chair which had been a barrel, and which, retaining much of its original character, seemed to have been designed with a view to preserving his dust if it should please him to crumble. For a moment there was silence; then, from somewhere among the pines, came the snarling yelp of a coyote; and simultaneously the door rattled in its frame. There was no other connection between the two incidents than that the coyote has an aversion to storms, and the wind was rising; yet there seemed somehow a kind of supernatural conspiracy between the two, and Mr Beeson shuddered with a vague sense of terror. He recovered himself in a moment and again addressed his guest.

'There are strange doings here. I will tell you everything, and then if you decide to go I shall hope to accompany you over the worst of the way; as far as where Baldy Peterson shot Ben Hike – I dare say you know the place.'

The old man nodded emphatically, as intimating not merely that he did, but that he did indeed.

'Two years ago,' began Mr Beeson, 'I, with two companions, occupied this house; but when the rush to the Flat occurred we left, along with the rest. In ten hours the Gulch was deserted. That evening, however, I discovered I had left behind me a valuable pistol (that is it) and returned for it, passing the night here alone, as I have passed every night since. I must explain that a few days before we left, our Chinese domestic had the misfortune to die while the ground was frozen so hard that it was impossible to dig a grave in the usual way. So, on the day of our hasty departure, we cut through the floor there, and gave him such burial as we could. But before putting him down I had the extremely bad taste to cut off his pigtail and spike it to that beam above his grave, where you may see it at this moment, or, preferably, when warmth has given you leisure for observation.

'I stated, did I not, that the Chinaman came to his death from natural causes? I had, of course, nothing to do with that,

and returned through no irresistible attraction, or morbid fascination, but only because I had forgotten a pistol. This is clear to you, is it not, sir?'

The visitor nodded gravely. He appeared to be a man of few words, if any. Mr Beeson continued:

'According to the Chinese faith, a man is like a kite: he cannot go to heaven without a tail. Well, to shorten this tedious story – which, however, I thought it my duty to relate – on that night, while I was here alone and thinking of anything but him, that Chinaman came back for his pigtail.

'He did not get it.'

At this point Mr Beeson relapsed into blank silence. Perhaps he was fatigued by the unwonted exercise of speaking; perhaps he had conjured up a memory that demanded his undivided attention. The wind was now fairly abroad, and the pines along the mountain-side sang with singular distinctness. The narrator continued:

'You say you do not see much in that, and I must confess I do not myself.

'But he keeps coming!'

There was another long silence, during which both stared into the fire without the movement of a limb. Then Mr Beeson broke out, almost fiercely, fixing his eyes on what he could see of the impassive face of his auditor:

'Give it him? Sir, in this matter I have no intention of troubling anyone for advice. You will pardon me, I am sure – ' here he became singularly persuasive – 'but I have ventured to nail that pigtail fast, and have assumed the somewhat onerous obligation of guarding it. So it is quite impossible to act on your considerate suggestion.

'Do you play me for a Modoc?'

Nothing could exceed the sudden ferocity with which he thrust this indignant remonstrance into the ear of his guest. It was as if he had struck him on the side of the head with a steel gauntlet. It was a protest, but it was a challenge. To be mistaken for a coward – to be played for a Modoc: these two expressions are one. Sometimes it is a Chinaman. Do you play me for a Chinaman? is a question frequently addressed to the ear of the suddenly dead.

Mr Beeson's buffet produced no effect, and after a moment's

pause, during which the wind thundered in the chimney like the sound of clods upon a coffin, he resumed:

'But, as you say, it is wearing me out. I feel that the life of the last two years has been a mistake – a mistake that corrects itself; you see how. The grave! No; there is no one to dig it. The ground is frozen, too. But you are very welcome. You may say at Bentley's – but that is not important. It was very tough to cut: they braid silk into their pigtails. Kwaagh.'

Mr Beeson was speaking with his eyes shut, and he wandered. His last word was a snore. A moment later he drew a long breath, opened his eyes with an effort, made a single remark, and fell into a deep sleep. What he said was this:

'They are swiping my dust!'

Then the aged stranger, who had not uttered one word since his arrival, arose from his seat and deliberately laid off his outer clothing, looking as angular in his flannels as the late Signorina Festorazzi, an Irish woman, six feet in height, and weighing fifty-six pounds, who used to exhibit herself in her chemise to the people of San Francisco. He then crept into one of the 'bunks', having first placed a revolver in easy reach, according to the custom of the country. This revolver he took from a shelf, and it was the one which Mr Beeson had mentioned as that for which he had returned to the Gulch two years before.

In a few moments Mr Beeson awoke, and seeing that his guest had retired he did likewise. But before doing so he approached the long, plaited wisp of pagan hair and gave it a powerful tug, to assure himself that it was fast and firm. The two beds – mere shelves covered with blankets not overclean – faced each other from opposite sides of the room, the little square trap door that had given access to the Chinaman's grave being midway between. This, by the way, was crossed by a double row of spike-heads. In his resistance to the supernatural, Mr Beeson had not disdained the use of material precautions.

The fire was now low, the flames burning bluely and petulantly, with occasional flashes, projecting spectral shadows on the walls – shadows that moved mysteriously about, now dividing, now uniting. The shadow of the pendent queue, however, kept moodily apart, near the roof at the farther end

of the room, looking like a note of admiration. The song of the pines outside had now risen to the dignity of a triumphal hymn. In the pauses the silence was dreadful.

It was during one of these intervals that the trap in the floor began to lift. Slowly and steadily it rose, and slowly and steadily rose the swaddled head of the old man in the bunk to observe it. Then, with a clap that shook the house to its foundation, it was thrown clean back, where it lay with its unsightly spikes pointing threateningly upward. Mr Beeson awoke, and without rising, pressed his fingers into his eyes. He shuddered; his teeth chattered. His guest was now reclining on one elbow, watching the proceedings with the goggles that glowed like lamps.

Suddenly a howling gust of wind swooped down the chimney, scattering ashes and smoke in all directions, for a moment obscuring everything. When the firelight again illuminated the room there was seen, sitting gingerly on the edge of a stool by the hearthside, a swarthy little man of prepossessing appearance and dressed with faultless taste, nodding to the old man with a friendly and engaging smile. 'From San Francisco, evidently,' thought Mr Beeson, who having somewhat recovered from his fright was groping his way to a solution of the evening's events.

But now another actor appeared upon the scene. Out of the square black hole in the middle of the floor protruded the head of the departed Chinaman, his glassy eyes turned upward in their angular slits and fastened on the dangling queue above with a look of yearning unspeakable. Mr Beeson groaned, and again spread his hands upon his face. A mild odour of opium pervaded the place. The phantom, clad only in a short blue tunic quilted and silken but covered with grave-mould, rose slowly, as if pushed by a weak spiral spring. Its knees were at the level of the floor, when with a quick upward impulse like the silent leaping of a flame it grasped the queue with both hands, drew up its body and took the tip in its horrible yellow teeth. To this it clung in a seeming frenzy, grimacing ghastly, surging and plunging from side to side in its efforts to disengage its property from the beam, but uttering no sound. It was like a corpse artificially convulsed by means of a galvanic battery. The contrast between its superhuman

activity and its silence was no less than hideous!

Mr Beeson cowered in his bed. The swarthy little gentleman uncrossed his legs, beat an impatient tattoo with the toe of his boot and consulted a heavy gold watch. The old man sat erect and quietly laid hold of the revolver.

Bang!

Like a body cut from the gallows the Chinaman plumped into the black hole below, carrying his tail in his teeth. The trap door turned over, shutting down with a snap. The swarthy little gentleman from San Francisco sprang nimbly from his perch, caught something in the air with his hat, as a boy catches a butterfly, and vanished into the chimney as if drawn up by suction.

From away somewhere in the outer darkness floated in through the open door a faint, far cry – a long, sobbing wail, as of a child death-strangled in the desert, or a lost soul borne away by the Adversary. It may have been the coyote.

In the early days of the following spring a party of miners on their way to new diggings passed along the Gulch, and straying through the deserted shanties found in one of them the body of Hiram Beeson, stretched upon a bunk, with a bullet hole through the heart. The ball had evidently been fired from the opposite side of the room, for in one of the oaken beams overhead was a shallow blue dent, where it had struck a knot and been deflected downward to the breast of its victim. Strongly attached to the same beam was what appeared to be an end of a rope of braided horsehair, which had been cut by the bullet in its passage to the knot. Nothing else of interest was noted, excepting a suit of mouldy and incongruous clothing, several articles of which were afterwards identified by respectable witnesses as those in which certain deceased citizens of Deadman's had been buried years before. But it is not easy to understand how that could be, unless, indeed, the garments had been worn as a disguise by Death himself – which is hardly credible.

THE EARLIER SERVICE

Margaret Irwin

Mrs Lacey and her eldest daughter Alice hurried through the diminutive gate that led from the Rectory garden into the churchyard. Alice paused to call: 'Jane, Father's gone on,' under the window of her young sister's room. To her mother she added with a cluck of annoyance, 'What a time she takes to dress!'

But Jane was sitting, ready dressed for church, in the window-seat of her room. Close up to her window and a little to the right, stood the square church tower with gargoyles at each corner. She could see them every morning as she lay in her bed at the left of the window, their monstrous necks stretched out as though they were trying to get into her room.

The church bell stopped. Jane could hear the shuffle of feet as the congregation rose at the entrance of her father; then came silence, and then the drone of the General Confession. She jumped up, ran downstairs and into the churchyard. Right above her now hung the gargoyles, peering down at her. Behind them the sun was setting in clouds, soft and humid as winter sunsets can only be in Somerset. She was standing in front of a tiny door studded with nails. The doorway was the oldest part of the church of Cloud Martin. It dated back to Saxon days; and the shrivelled bits of blackened, leather-like stuff, still clinging to some of the nails, were said to be the skins of heathens flayed alive.

Jane paused a moment, her hands held outwards and a little behind her. Her face was paler than it had been in her room, her eyes were half shut, and her breath came a little quickly, but then she had been running. With the same sudden movement that she had jumped from the window-seat, she now jerked her hands forward, turned the great iron ring that served as a door-handle, and stole into the church.

The door opened into the corner just behind the Rectory pew. She was late. Mrs Lacey and Alice were standing up and chanting the monotone that had become a habitual and

almost an unconscious part of their lives. Jane stole in past her mother, and knelt for an instant, her red pigtail, bright symbol of an old-fashioned upbringing, flopping sideways on to the dark wood. 'Please God, don't let me be afraid – don't, don't, *don't* let me be afraid,' she whispered; then stood, and repeated the responses in clear and precise tones, her eyes fixed on the long stone figure of the Crusader against the wall in front of her.

He was in chain armour; the mesh of mail surrounded his face like the coif of a nun, and a high crown-like helmet came low down on his brows. His feet rested against a small lion, which Jane as a child had always thought was his favourite dog that had followed him to the Holy Wars. His huge mailed hand grasped the pommel of his sword, drawn an inch or two from its scabbard. Jane gazed at him as though she would draw into herself all the watchful stern repose of the sleeping giant. Behind the words of the responses, other words repeated themselves in her mind:

> The knight is dust,
> His good sword rust;
> His soul is with the saints, we trust.

'But he is *here*,' she told herself, 'you can't really be afraid with him here.'

There came the sudden silence before the hymn, and she wondered what nonsense she had been talking to herself. She knew the words of the service too well, that was what it was; how could she ever attend to them?

They settled down for the sermon, a safe twenty minutes at least, in the Rector's remote and dreamlike voice. Jane's mind raced off at a tangent, almost painfully agile, yet confined always somewhere between the walls of the church.

'You shouldn't think of other things in church,' was a maxim that had been often repeated to her. In spite of it she thought of more other things in those two Sunday services than in the whole week between.

'What a lot of Other Things other people must have thought of too in this church,' she said to herself; the thought shifted and changed a little; 'there are lots of Other Things in this

church; there are too many Other Things in this church.' Oh, she *mustn't* say things like that to herself or she would begin to be afraid again – she was not afraid yet – of course, she was not afraid, there was nothing to be afraid of, and if there were, the Crusader was before her, his hand on his sword, ready to draw it at need. And what need could there be? Her mother was beside her whose profile she could see without looking at it, *she* would never be disturbed, and by nothing.

But at that moment Mrs Lacey shivered, and glanced behind her at the little door by which Jane had entered. Jane passed her fur to her, but Mrs Lacey shook her head. Presently she looked round again, and kept her head turned for fully a minute. Jane watched her mother until the familiar home-trimmed hat turned again to the pulpit; she wondered then if her mother would indeed never be disturbed, and by nothing.

She looked up at the crooked angel in the tiny window of medieval glass. His red halo was askew; his oblique face had been a friend since her childhood. A little flat-nosed face in the carving round the pillar grinned back at her and all but winked.

'How old are you?' asked Jane.

'Six hundred years odd,' he replied.

'Then you should know better than to wink in church, let alone always grinning.'

But he only sang to a ballad tune:

'Oh, if you'd seen as much as I,
It's often you would wink.'

'And now unto God the Father God the Son and God the Holy Ghost – '

Already! *Now* they would soon be outside again, out of the church for a whole safe week. But they would have to go through that door first.

She waited anxiously till her father went up to the altar to give the blessing. After she was confirmed, she, too, would have to go up to the altar. She would have to go. Now her father was going. He took so long to get there, he seemed

so much smaller and darker as he turned his back on the congregation; it was really impossible sometimes to see that he had on a white surplice at all. What was he going to do up there at the altar, what was that gleaming pointed thing in his hand? *Who* was that little dark man going up to the altar? Her fingers closed tight on her prayer book as the figure turned round.

'You idiot, of course it's Father! There, you can see it's Father.'

She stared at the benevolent nut-cracker face, distinct enough now to her for all the obscurity of the chancel. How much taller he seemed now he had turned round. And of course, his surplice was white – quite white. What *had* she been seeing?

'May the peace of God which passeth all understanding – '

She wished she could kneel under the spell of those words for ever.

'Oh, yes,' said the little flat-nosed face as she rose from her knees, 'but you'd find it dull, you know.' He was grinning atrociously.

The two Rectory girls filed out after their mother, who carefully fastened the last button on her glove before she opened the door on which hung the skins of men that had been flayed alive. As she did so, she turned round and looked behind her, but went out without stopping. Jane almost ran after her, and caught her arm. Mrs Lacey was already taking off her gloves.

'Were you looking round for Tom Elroy, Mother?' asked Alice.

'No, dear, not especially. I thought Tom or someone had come up to our door, but the church does echo so. I think there must be a draught from that door, but it's funny, I only feel it just at the end of the evening service.'

'You oughtn't to sit at the end of the pew then, and with your rheumatism. Janey, you always come in last. Why don't *you* sit at the end?'

'I won't!' snapped Jane.

'Whatever's the matter, Jane?' asked her mother.

'Why should I sit at the end of the pew? Why can't we move out of that pew altogether? I only wish we would.'

Nobody paid any attention to this final piece of blasphemy, for they had reached the lighted hall of the Rectory by this time and were rapidly dispersing. Jane hung her coat and hat on the stand in the hall and went into the pantry to collect the cold meat and cheese. The maids were always out on Sunday evening. Alice was already making toast over the dining-room fire; she looked up as the Rector entered, and remarked severely: 'You shouldn't quote Latin in your sermons, Father. Nobody in the church understands it.'

'Nobody understands my sermons,' said Mr Lacey, 'for nobody listens to them. So I may as well give myself the occasional pleasure of a Latin quotation, since only a dutiful daughter is likely to notice the lapse of manners. Alice, my dear, did I give out in church that next Friday is the last Confirmation class?'

'Friday!' cried Jane, in the doorway with the cheese. 'Next Friday the last class? Then the Confirmation's next week.'

'Of course it is, and high time, too,' said Alice, 'seeing that you were sixteen last summer. Only servant girls get confirmed *after* sixteen.'

That settled it then. In a spirit of gloomy resignation Jane engulfed herself in an orange.

There were bright stars above the church tower when she went to bed. She kept her head turned away as she drew the curtains, so that she should not see the gargoyles stretching their necks towards her window.

Friday evening found Jane at the last Confirmation class in the vestry with her father and three farmers' daughters, who talked in a curious mixture of broad Somerset and high school education and knew the catechism a great deal better than Jane.

After they had left, she followed closely at her father's elbow into the church to remove the hymn books and other vestiges of the choir practice that had taken place just before the class. The lamp he carried made a little patch of light wherever they moved; the outlying walls of darkness shifted, but pressed hard upon it from different quarters. The Rector was looking for his Plotinus, which he was certain he had put

down somewhere in the church. He fumbled all over the Rectory pew while Jane tried on vain pretexts to drag him away.

'I have looked in that corner – thoroughly,' she said.

The Rector sighed.

'What shall I say
Since Truth is dead?'

he enquired. 'So far from looking in that corner, Jane, you kept your head turned resolutely away from it.'

'Did I? I suppose I was looking at the list of Rectors. What a long one it is, and all dead but you, Father.'

He at once forgot Plotinus and left the Rectory pew to pore with proud pleasure over the names that began with one Johannes de Martigny and ended with his own.

'A remarkably persistent list. Only two real gaps – in the Civil Wars and in the fourteenth century. That was at the time of the Black Death, when there was no rector of this parish for many years. You see, Jane? – 1349, and then there's no name till 1361 – Giraldus atte Welle. Do you remember when you were a little girl, very proud of knowing how to read, how you read through all the names to me, but refused to say that one? You said "It's a dreadful name," and when I pressed you, you began to cry.'

'How silly! There's nothing dreadful in Giraldus atte Welle,' began Jane, but as she spoke she looked round her. She caught the Rector's arm. 'Father, there isn't anyone in the church besides us, is there?'

'My dear child, of course not. What's the matter? You're not nervous, are you?'

'No, not really. But we can find the Plotinus much easier by daylight. Oh – and Father – don't let's go out by the little door. Let's pretend we're the general congregation and go out properly by the big door.'

She pulled him down the aisle, talking all the way until they were both in his study. 'Father doesn't *know*,' she said to herself – 'he knows less than Mother. It's funny, when he would understand so much more.'

But he understood that she was troubled. He asked: 'Don't

you want to get confirmed, Jane?' and then: 'You mustn't be if you don't want it.'

Jane grew frightened. There would be a great fuss if she backed out of it now after the very last class. Besides, there was the Crusader. Vague ideas of the initiation rites of knight and crusader crossed her mind in connection with the rite of Confirmation. He had spent a night's vigil in a church, perhaps in this very church. One could never fear anything else after that. If only she didn't have to go right up to the altar at the Communion service. But she would not think of that, she told the Rector that it was quite all right really, and at this moment they reached the hall door and met Mrs Lacey hurrying towards them with a letter from Hugh, now at Oxford, who was coming home for the vacation on Wednesday.

'He asks if he may bring an undergraduate friend for the first few days – a Mr York who is interested in old churches and Hugh thinks he would like to see ours. He must be clever – it is such a pity Elizabeth is away – she is the only one who could talk to him; of course, he will enjoy talking with you, dear, but men seem to expect girls too to be clever now. And just as Janey's Confirmation is coming on – she isn't taking it seriously enough as it is.'

'*Mother!* Don't you want us to play dumb crambo like that last time Hugh brought friends down?'

'Nonsense,' said the Rector hastily. 'Dumb crambo requires so much attention that it should promote seriousness in all things. I am very glad the young man is coming, my love, and I will try my hardest to talk as cleverly as Elizabeth.'

He went upstairs with his wife, and said in a low voice: 'I think Jane is worrying rather too much about her Confirmation as it is. She seems quite jumpy sometimes.'

'Oh – *jumpy*, yes,' said Mrs Lacey, as though she refused to consider jumpiness the right qualification for Confirmation. The question of the curtains in the spare room, however, proved more immediately absorbing.

Hugh, who preferred people to talk shop, introduced his friend's hobby the first evening at dinner. 'He goes grubbing over churches with a pencil and a bit of paper and finds things

scratched on the walls and takes rubbings of them and you call them *graffiti*. Now, then, Father, any offers from our particular property?'

The Rector did not know of any specimens in his church. He asked what sort of things were scratched on the walls.

'Oh, anything,' said York, 'texts, scraps of dog Latin, aphorisms – once I found the beginning of a love song. When a monk, or anyone who was doing a job in the church, got bored, he'd begin to scratch words on the wall just as one does on a seat or log or anything today. Only we nearly always write our names and they hardly ever did.'

He showed some of the rubbings he had taken. Often, he explained, you couldn't see anything but a few vague scratches, and then in the rubbing they came out much clearer. 'The bottom of a pillar is a good place to look,' he said, 'and corners – anywhere where they're not likely to be too plainly seen.'

'There are some marks on the wall near our pew,' said Jane. 'Low down, nearly on the ground.'

He looked at her, pleased, and distinguishing her consciously for the first time from her rather sharp-voiced sister. He saw a gawky girl whose grave, beautiful eyes were marred by deep hollows under them, as though she did not sleep enough. And Jane looked back with satisfaction at a pleasantly ugly, wide, good-humoured face.

She showed him the marks next morning, both squatting on their heels beside the wall. Hugh had strolled in with them, declaring that they were certain to find nothing better than names of the present choir boys, and had retired to the organ loft for an improvisation. York spread a piece of paper over the marks and rubbed his pencil all over it and asked polite questions about the church. Was it as haunted as it should be?

Jane, concerned for the honour of their church, replied that the villagers had sometimes seen lights in the windows at midnight; but York contemptuously dismissed that. 'You'd hear as much of any old church.' He pulled out an electric torch and switched it on to the wall.

'It's been cut in much more deeply at the top,' he remarked; 'I can read it even on the wall.' He spelt out slowly: '*Nemo potest duobus dominis servire.* That's a text from the Vulgate. It means, "No man can serve two masters."'

'And did the same man write the rest underneath, too?'

'No, I should think that was written much later, about the end of the fourteenth century. Hartley will tell me exactly. He's a friend of mine in the British Museum, and I send him the rubbings and he finds out all about them.'

He examined the sentence on the paper by his torch, while Hugh's 'improvisation' sent horrible cacophonies reeling through the church.

'Latin again, and jolly bad – monkish Latin, you know. Can't make out that word. Oh!'

'Well?'

'It's an answer to the text above, I think. I say, this is the best find I've ever had. Look here, the first fellow wrote, "No man can serve two masters," and then, about a century later, number two squats down and writes – well, as far as I can make it out, it's like this: "Show service therefore to the good, but cleave unto the evil." Remarkable sentiment for a priest to leave in his church, for I'd imagine only the priest would be educated enough to write it. Now why did he say that, I wonder?'

'Because evil is more interesting than good,' murmured Jane.

'Hmph. You agree with him then? What kind of evil?'

'I don't know. It's just – don't you know how words and sentences stick in your head sometimes? It's as though I were always hearing it.'

'Do you think you'll hear it tomorrow?' asked York maliciously. He had been told that tomorrow was the day of her Confirmation. She tried to jump up, but as she was cramped from squatting so long on her heels she only sat down instead, and they both burst out laughing.

'I'm sorry,' said York, 'I didn't mean to be offensive. But I'd like to know what's bothering you.'

'What do you mean?'

'Oh, you know. But never mind. I dare say you can't say.'

This at once caused an unusual flow of speech from Jane.

'Why should evil be interesting?' she gasped. 'It isn't in real life – when the servants steal the spoons and the villagers quarrel with their neighbours. Mrs Elroy came round to Father in a fearful stew the other day because old Mrs Croft had

made a maukin of her.'

'A what?'

'An image – you know – out of clay, and she was sticking pins in it, and Mrs Elroy declared she knew every time a pin had gone in because she felt a stab right through her body.'

'What did your father say?'

'He said it was sciatica, but she wouldn't believe it, and he had to go round to Mrs Croft and talk about Christmas peace and goodwill, but she only leered and yammered at him in the awful way she does, and then Alice said that Christmas blessings only come to those who live at peace with their neighbours, and Mrs Croft knew that blessings meant puddings, so she took the pins out, and let the maukin be, and Mrs Elroy hasn't felt any more stabs.'

'Mrs Croft is a proper witch, then?'

York stood up, looking rather curiously at her shining eyes.

'Cloud Martin has always been a terribly bad parish for witches,' said Jane proudly.

'You find *that* form of evil interesting,' he said.

Jane was puzzled and abashed by his tone. She peered at the wall again and thought she could make out another mark underneath the others. York quickly took a rubbing and, examining the paper, found it to be one word only, and probably of the same date as the last sentence, which had caused so much discussion about evil.

'"Ma – ma," ah, I have it. "Maneo" – "I remain," that's all.'

'"*I* remain?" Who remains?'

'Why, the same "I" who advises us to cleave to evil. Remembering, perhaps, though it hadn't been said then, that the evil that men do lives after them.'

She looked at him with startled eyes. He thought she was a nice child but took things too seriously.

Hugh's attempts at jazz on the organ had faded away. As Jane and York left the church by the little door, they met him coming out through the vestry.

'Lots of luck,' said York, handing him the paper. 'Did you turn on the verger or anyone to look as well?'

'No – why? Aren't the family enough for you?'

'Rather. I was only wondering what that little man was

doing by the door as we went out. You must have seen him, too,' he said, turning to Jane, 'he was quite close to us.'

But as she stared at him, he wished he had not spoken.

'Must have been the organist,' said Hugh, who was looking back at the church tower. 'Do you like gargoyles, York? There's rather a pretty one up there of a devil eating a child – see it?'

On the Sunday morning after the Confirmation, the day of her first Communion, Jane rose early, dressed by candlelight, met her mother and sister in the hall, and followed them through the raw, uncertain darkness of the garden and churchyard. The chancel windows were lighted up; the gargoyles on the church tower could just be seen, their distorted shapes a deeper black against the dark sky.

Jane slipped past her mother at the end of the pew. Except for the lights in the chancel, and the one small lamp that hung over the middle aisle, the church was dark, and one could not see who was there. Mr Lacey was already in the chancel, and the service began. Jane had been to this service before, but never when the morning was dark like this. Perhaps that was what made it so different. For it *was* different.

Her father was doing such odd things up there at the altar. Why was he pacing backwards and forwards so often, and waving his hands in that funny way? And what *was* he saying? She couldn't make out the words – she must have completely lost the place. She tried to find it in her prayer book, but the words to which she was listening gave her no clue; she could not recognize them at all, and presently she realized that not only were the words unknown to her but so was the language in which they were spoken. Alice's rebuke came back to her: 'You shouldn't quote Latin in your sermons, Father.' But this wasn't a sermon, it was the Communion service. Only in the Roman Catholic Church they would have the Communion service in Latin, and then it would be the Mass. Was Father holding Mass? He would be turned out of the Church for being Roman. It was bewildering, it was dreadful. But her mother didn't seem to notice anything.

Did she notice that there were other people up there at the altar?

There was a brief pause. People came out of the darkness behind her, and went up to the chancel. Mrs Lacey slipped out of the pew and joined them. Jane sat back and let her sister go past her.

'You are coming, Janey?' whispered Alice as she passed.

Jane nodded, but she sat still. She had let her mother and sister leave her; she stared at the two rows of dark figures standing in the chancel behind the row of those who knelt; she could not see her mother and sister among them; she could see no one whom she knew.

She dared not look again at the figures by the altar; she kept her head bowed. The last time she had looked there had been two others standing by her father – that is, if that little dark figure had indeed been her father. If she looked now, would she see him there? Her head bent lower and sank into her hands. Instead of the one low voice murmuring the words of the Sacrament, a muffled chant of many voices came from the chancel.

She heard the scuffle of feet, but no steps came past her down into the church again. What were they doing up there? At last she had to look, and she saw that the two rows were standing facing each other across the chancel, instead of each behind the other. She tried to distinguish their faces, to recognize even one that she knew. Presently she became aware that why she could not do this was because they had no faces. The figures all wore dark cloaks with hoods, and there were blank white spaces under the hoods.

'It is possible,' she said to herself, 'that those are masks.' She formed the words in her mind deliberately and with precision as though to distract her attention; for she felt in danger of screaming aloud with terror, and whatever happened she must not draw down on her the attention of those waiting figures. She knew now that they were waiting for her to go up to the altar.

She might slip out by the little door and escape, if only she dared to move. She stood up and saw the Crusader lying before her, armed, on guard, his sword half drawn from its scabbard. Her breath was choking her. 'Crusader, Crusader,

rise and help me,' she prayed very fast in her mind. But the Crusader stayed motionless. She must go out by herself. With a blind, rushing movement, she threw herself on to the little door, dragged it open, and got outside.

Mrs Lacey and Alice thought that Jane, wishing for solitude, must have returned from the Communion table to some other pew. Only Mr Lacey knew that she had not come up to the Communion table at all; and it troubled him still more when she did not appear at breakfast. Alice thought she had gone for a walk; Mrs Lacey said in her vague, late-Victorian way that she thought it only natural Jane should wish to be alone for a little.

'I should say it was decidedly more natural that she should wish for sausages and coffee after being up for an hour on a raw December morning,' said her husband with unusual asperity.

It was York who found her half an hour later walking very fast through the fields. He took her hands, which felt frozen, and as he looked into her face he said: 'Look here, you know, this won't do. What are you so frightened of?' And then broke off his questions, told her not to bother to try and speak but to come back to breakfast, and half pulled her with him through the thick, slimy mud, back to the Rectory. Suddenly she began to tell him that the Early Service that morning had all been different – the people, their clothes, even the language, it was all quite different.

He thought over what she stammered out, and wondered if she could somehow have had the power to go back in time and see and hear the Latin Mass as it used to be in that old church.

'The old Latin Mass wasn't a horrible thing, was it?'

'Jane! Your father's daughter needn't ask that.'

'No. I see. Then it wasn't the Mass I saw this morning – it was – ' She spoke very low so that he could hardly catch the words. 'There was something horrible going on up there by the altar – and they were waiting – waiting for me.'

Her hand trembled under his arm. He thrust it down into his pocket on the pretext of warming it. It seemed to him

monstrous that this nice, straightforward little schoolgirl, whom he liked best of the family, should be hag-ridden like this.

That evening he wrote a long letter to his antiquarian friend, Hartley, enclosing the pencil rubbings he had taken of the words scratched on the wall by the Rectory pew.

On Monday he was leaving them, to go and look at other churches in Somerset. He looked hard at Jane as he said goodbye. She seemed to have completely forgotten whatever it was that had so distressed her the day before, and at breakfast had been the jolliest of the party. But when she felt York's eyes upon her, the laughter died out of hers; she said, but not as though she had intended to say it: 'You will come back for Wednesday.'

'Why, what happens on Wednesday?'

'It is full moon then.'

'That's not this Wednesday then, it must be Wednesday week. Why do you want me to come back then?'

She could give no answer to that. She turned self-conscious and began an out-of-date jazz song about 'Wednesday week way down in old Bengal!'

It was plain she did not know why she had said it. But he promised himself that he would came back by then, and asked Mrs Lacey if he might look them up again on his way home.

In the intervening ten days he was able to piece together some surprising information from Hartley which seemed to throw a light on the inscriptions he had found at Cloud Martin.

In the reports of certain trials for sorcery in the year 1474, one Giraldus atte Welle, priest of the parish of Cloud Martin in Somerset, confessed under torture to having held the Black Mass in his church at midnight on the very altar where he administered the Blessed Sacrament on Sundays. This was generally done on Wednesday or Thursday, the chief days of the Witches' Sabbath when they happened to fall on the night of the full moon. The priest would then enter the church by the little side door, and from the darkness in the body of the church those villagers who had followed his example and sworn themselves to Satan, would come up and join him, one by one, hooded and masked, that none might recognize the

other. He was charged with having secretly decoyed young children in order to kill them on the altar as a sacrifice to Satan, and he was finally charged with attempting to murder a young virgin for that purpose.

All the accused made free confessions towards the end of their trial, especially in so far as they implicated other people. All, however, were agreed on a certain strange incident. That just as the priest was about to cut the throat of the girl on the altar, the tomb of the Crusader opened, and the knight who had lain there for two centuries arose and came upon them with drawn sword, so that they scattered and fled through the church, leaving the girl unharmed on the altar.

With these reports from Hartley in his pocket, York travelled back on the Wednesday week by slow cross-country trains that managed to miss their connections and land him at Little Borridge, the station for Cloud Martin, at a quarter-past ten. The village cab had broken down, there was no other car to be had at that hour, it was a six-mile walk up to the Rectory, there was a station hotel where it would be far more reasonable to spend the night, and finish his journey next morning. Yet York refused to consider this alternative; all through the maddening and uncertain journey, he had kept saying to himself: 'I shall be late,' though he did not know for what. He had promised Jane he would be back this Wednesday, and back he must be. He left his luggage at the station and walked up. It was the night of the full moon, but the sky was so covered with cloud as to be almost dark. Once or twice he missed his way in following the elaborate instructions of the station-master, and had to retrace his steps a little. It was hard on twelve o'clock when at last he saw the square tower of Cloud Martin church, a solid blackness against the flying clouds.

He walked up to the little gate into the churchyard. There was a faint light from the chancel windows, and he thought he heard voices chanting. He paused to listen, and then he was certain of it, for he could hear the silence when they stopped. It might have been a minute or five minutes later that he heard the most terrible shriek he had ever imagined, though faint, coming as it did from the closed church; and knew it for Jane's voice. He ran up to the little door and

heard that scream again and again. As he broke through the door he heard it cry: 'Crusader! Crusader!' The church was in utter darkness, there was no light in the chancel, he had to fumble in his pockets for his electric torch. The screams had stopped and the whole place was silent. He flashed his torch right and left, and saw a figure lying huddled against the altar. He knew that it was Jane; in an instant he had reached her. Her eyes were open, looking at him, but they did not know him, and she did not seem to understand him when he spoke. In a strange, rough accent of broad Somerset that he could scarcely distinguish, she said: 'It was my body on the altar.'

SCOTS WHA HA'E

Dorothy K. Haynes

She lay awake in the darkness, hearing the town clock strike two. Something had jerked her out of sleep, leaving her skin scalded with fright. Her heartbeat was a little thrilling tick inside her, and her ears strained, listening to the remembered echo of the clock. It was a distant chime, not loud enough to have wakened her. What was it, then, that had stung her out of sleep?

Pushing back the blankets, she tiptoed to the bedroom door and listened. Stephanie was sound asleep, her side rising and falling gently, like a kitten's. She looked too peaceful to have cried out; and yet there had been *some* sound, thought her mother, loud enough to break a dream and set her nerves jumping.

She wasn't usually nervous. She was used to Eric being away all night. He worked nightshift every second week, leaving the house at half past nine with his flask and piece-box and his peaked hat with 'SECURITY' printed on the band. He was at the new industrial estate on the outskirts of the town, transferred north from the Midlands. It had been a good move. At home, his name had been on the Council housing list for five years. 'You've only one child, you see,' they told him, when he protested about the length of time they'd had to wait; but he and Brenda refused to have any more kids until they had a decent home to give them.

They couldn't believe their luck when they were told that a house went with the job in Scotland; nor could they believe their luck when they saw the house. 'You're lucky, son,' his boss told him, as he handed over the keys. 'You've got one down by the old castle. Half the folk would give their ears for one of those. They're old property, you see, gutted and rebuilt inside; bathrooms, central heating, the lot. We've even got people trying to buy them.'

Castle Wynd was steep, clean and quiet, with cobbled corners and little gardens fronting the pavement. The houses

were all different in style and level, and at the bottom, where the road dipped more steeply, they diminished to low, white-washed cottages, which seemed to lie humbly in the very shadow of the castle. There was nothing left now but a low mound guarded by a broken wall; but the atmosphere remained, medieval, picturesque and feudal, as if the old nobles still dominated the land and its vassals.

Brenda looked round the room, the furniture half visible through the greyness. Something kept her from settling back to sleep; a flicker of light through the thick curtains . . . ? No; that was imagination. It was the same noise which must have wakened her, someone banging a dustbin lid, or hitting with a stick on a piece of metal.

She lay still, puzzled and annoyed. A quarter past two! Nobody had any business to make such a racket at this time of night. It couldn't be any of the neighbours, surely. The noise was right out in the street, a whole crowd of people now, clanging and tramping and shouting. She couldn't make out what they were saying, but they sounded young and angry. Youths, probably; gangs with nothing better to do.

Prudence made her lie still. From her experience of this sort of thing in the city, it was better not to look, and certainly better not to be seen looking. It's a shame, though, she thought, that this sort of thing goes on even in a quiet little town.

The noise and scuffling came to a peak, passed the house, and went on down the hill. She heard it vaguely and intermittently till she fell asleep again; and next morning she could hardly believe it had happened; but later on she heard that one of the cottages had been disfigured by a splash of paint thrown at the gable, dark, reddish brown paint over the white wall and the neat cemented cobbles; and though the neighbours were shocked and indignant, none of them, oddly, had heard a thing.

'You'll be all right, then?' said Eric, next evening, 'If you've any trouble, phone the police. And don't worry. I'll be home at the weekend.'

The next two nights were quiet, though she wakened, or

dreamed that she wakened, without knowing why. It was on Friday, the night before Eric's change of shift, that something happened.

It wasn't late – not really late, only about half past eleven, and Brenda had just finished putting rollers in her hair. The knock at the door was quiet but quick, and for a moment she wondered why whoever it was hadn't rung the bell. Then she thought, 'Maybe they think I'm in bed. The living-room light's out.' She tied a scarf round her head, went to the door, and opened it carefully.

It was a young girl, thin and frightened and terribly out of breath. She looked as if she had thrown a tartan rug over her white nightdress and run desperately into the street. She couldn't speak, and Brenda, looking quickly up and down the road, drew her in and shut the door.

The girl stood in the lobby and shivered. 'In here,' said Brenda, opening the living-room door and leading her over to the fire. 'What's wrong? Are you in trouble of some kind?'

The girl didn't answer. She was dark and pretty, but so frightened that her breath caught painfully, like hiccups. Horrified, Brenda saw that she had nothing on her feet. 'You'll catch your death of cold,' she said, pushing her into a chair and stirring up what was left of the fire. 'Look, let me give you something to warm you up. I'll heat some milk – '

'No,' said the girl, cowering back; and when Brenda came with the milk, she wouldn't touch it. Her hands clutched the arms of the chair, and she shuddered.

'Oh God,' thought Brenda, 'why do these things happen when Eric's not here?' She didn't know what to do. Give the girl a shakedown on the couch? But it looked as if the girl was too frightened to stay. She kept eyeing the door like a cat ready to make a dart for it; and at that moment Stephanie came in, half sleeping.

'What is it, Mummy? I thought you were crying.'

'It's all right, dear. This lady came in, and – '

The girl moved across the room, quickly, looking over her shoulder. She seemed so desperate that Brenda knew she couldn't keep her. 'Let me give you a pair of slippers,' she said.

'No!' The answer came like a scream, and Brenda thought

she heard something like 'English swine . . .' But it couldn't have been that; it couldn't possibly. She gave a little shrug, and turned to Stephanie.

'Mummy, what did the lady want?'

'I don't know, dear. She's very upset about something. Come on now, back to bed. Time you were sleeping.'

'Well, I was. It was the smoke that wakened me; the smoke, and sparks coming in the window.'

'Smoke? You must have been dreaming, dear. There's nothing like that here.'

'No. I thought there was a house on fire.' She yawned. 'But I'd have heard the engines, wouldn't I?'

'Yes.' Brenda, tucking her up, knew that there was nothing burning in the street; but that strange and terrified girl looked as if she had been running away from a fire . . .

It was better at the weekend. Eric brought Shane, his Alsatian guard dog, home with him, and between the dog and her husband Brenda felt safer; only, Shane growled a lot, and woke them up snuffling at the door, and Eric kept heaving up in bed and hissing, 'Lie down, Shane!' He grumbled all through breakfast. 'For God's sake, I get more peace on the job!'

And then, one of the Security men went off sick, and Eric had to do another stint of nightshift. 'You won't mind, will you?' he said. 'You'll be all right. I think you're a bit like Shane. Half of your trouble is imagination.'

'I didn't imagine that terrified girl knocking at the door. Stephanie will prove that.'

'Well, don't open it again. Don't open it to anybody.'

As soon as she was alone, it started again, the howling and clashing and tramping of feet. She lay quaking, the old scalding terror on her, till it passed; then there were solitary footsteps coming up, quick but dragging; a thud at the door, and silence.

I won't go, she thought. They've thrown something, that's all. They know Eric's at work. But she couldn't settle till she knew, once and for all, what had caused that thud. Quietly, so as not to waken Stephanie, she put on her dressing-gown and opened the door cautiously.

Something was leaning against it. As she opened it wider,

a heavy weight slumped inwards, and a man, haggard and bloody, lay at her feet.

She put her hands to her mouth so as not to scream; but the man was not wounded, only exhausted, and the blood was not his. Not the worst of it, anyway. What covered him and his clothes had come from somebody else. He got to his feet, looked at her blankly, and muttered, 'I've killed him,' and something else she didn't catch, something wild and desperate about 'Mairn'.

'Who – who have you killed?' she whispered, keeping her voice down for Stephanie's sake. She didn't want Stephanie to come through this time; but . . . it was not only concern for the child. This time, she wasn't going to tell Eric. He would get on to her for opening the door again – strange, how she always seemed to open it to trouble; but even that was not the real reason. This man . . . there was something desperate about him, blood on his hands and anger on his brow, but oddly, she was not afraid of him. She spoke again, more distinctly.

'Do you want to tell me about it?'

He looked up sharply, his hand making lost, groping movements as if he were searching for something. 'You're English?' he said.

'Yes.'

He glared at her, raised his hand as if to strike her, and then he stumbled out into the darkness. Shaking, Brenda went to the telephone and called the police. She'd had enough. She sat up till they came, nosing about and asking questions, and even then she didn't go to bed. She waited till Eric arrived with Shane; and Shane licked up something in the lobby, a nauseating brown patch something like the blood that had splashed the cottage wall. It *must* have been blood. She remembered the comments of the neighbours, 'Yon was never paint. It washes off ower easy.'

That was the end of it. There was peace at nights after that, and gradually Brenda settled down and forgot the first uneasy weeks in Castle Wynd. It wasn't till a year or two later that it all came back to her again in a terrible rush of recognition.

Stephanie had moved into a new class at school, and was flicking over the books she had brought home to be covered.

Suddenly she looked up, pointing to a half-page illustration.

'Look, Mummy, there's the woman that came to see us that time, in her nightie.'

'Eh?' Brenda looked, and caught her breath. That was her, thin, pretty – 'Marion Braidfute,' it said underneath. 'Wife of Sir William Wallace . . .'

'It can't be,' she said. 'That was away back in twelve hundred and something. It's like her, though. Remarkably like her.'

'We were getting about her in school,' said Stephanie. 'The teacher said I was lucky to live in the same street as Wallace. And do you know what, Mummy? The soldiers killed his wife, and burned down his house, and Wallace was so angry he gathered an army and marched down past this very door to the castle where the English were, and killed the governor in his bed. He left the sword sticking in his body,' she said with relish. 'And – and Mummy, I didn't want to stick up for the English, because I think Wallace was brave.'

'Yes,' said Brenda. The memory of those strange nights washed over her again, mingled with awe and disbelief and horror: the young girl fleeing for her life, the smell of fire, and Sir William Wallace himself – it must have been Wallace, fresh from his revenge, groping for the sword he had left in Haselrigg's body, the sword he might have used on her. 'You're English?' he had said, recognizing her speech, as his wife had done, and hating her for it . . .

Strange how it hurt, the unjustified hatred of a ghost! And strange how she hoped now for his return, so that she could explain . . . But that was daft. She blinked, and forced herself to answer Stephanie. 'Yes,' she said, 'he was brave.' And very softly, so softly that Stephanie didn't hear, 'If I was a man, I'd have followed him myself.'

THE WHITTAKERS GHOST

G. B. S.

The following ghost story has been told me, word for word, by an eye-witness, and is authenticated by persons of recognized position. G. B. S.

My name is Anna Ducane, and I had two sisters, Helène and Louise. About twenty years ago we lived with our parents on our Canadian farm in the neighbourhood of Montreal, that is to say, within about thirty miles of that city. Our life was a very quiet, uneventful one. From time to time we visited among our neighbours in the country, or spent a few days, shopping and sight-seeing, 'in town' with our parents; but our excitements were simple and few, and a brood of ducks would serve us for conversation for a week. It is needful to say we enjoyed perfect health, and were all three of us strong, good-natured, and useful girls, who could turn our hands to most household employments, and a good many outdoor jobs as well – having a rather supercilious contempt of affectation and what we called 'fine-ladyism'.

All this I mention at the outset, because I wish to show that we were women to whom anything like nerves was unknown. At the time I speak of, Helène and I, who are twins, were nearly two-and-twenty, and Louise was about nineteen.

It was in the end of August that we received an unexpected and delightful invitation to spend some weeks in Montreal, at Whittakers, the house of an old Major Whittaker, who, with his two sisters, resided on a very pretty property on the outskirts of the town. Lucy Whittaker, their niece, had been at school with us in Hamilton, and her return from a visit to Europe was the reason for our invitation to her uncle's house. At first our mother declared she could not think of sending all three of us to stop in a town house; but Lucy wrote and insisted that none should remain behind. There was plenty of space, if we did not mind sharing one big room, like the ward of a hospital, which she was busy preparing for us.

So one evening early in September we found ourselves welcomed to Whittakers by Lucy, looking prettier than ever in a wonderful Parisian dress, the like of which none of us had ever seen. It quite cast into the shade all the elaborate preparations, the flouncings, frillings, and ironings, which had engrossed us all for the last fortnight.

But Lucy was just her own self, despite her smart new wardrobe, and she and Louise became at once as inseparable as they had been at school, while Helène and I fell straightway in love with the old Miss Whittakers, Miss Sara and Miss Hesba. They were different from any old ladies we had ever known; more refined in looks and manners than our country neighbours, and accomplished in many curious arts which now scarcely survive, such as tambour work, and painting on velvet, and playing the harp. We wanted at once to learn everything they could teach us, and thought that our three weeks' visit would never suffice if we did not begin immediately to be initiated into these mysteries, which were to render us of fresh importance and attractiveness when we should return home.

So we threw ourselves into all sorts of employments with a will, and the days flew by rapidly. Lucy and Louise were generally out of doors together, either in the big, old-fashioned garden behind the house, where they chattered and picked fruit and whispered their secrets by the hour, or in the town itself; sight-seeing and promenading under the protection of a young relation of our hosts', Harry Leroy, who was, like ourselves, visiting Whittakers for the first time.

A word here about Major Whittaker, who, though not wanting in the hospitality and geniality of a host, somehow was very little seen by his visitors: except at eight o'clock, morning and evening, when he regularly read prayers to his assembled household, and at the two meals that followed. He never appeared downstairs, but spent his time in a little study over the porch, where, if the door stood accidentally open, the passer-by might see him hard at work on his life's object, a Harmony of the Four Gospels, over which he had been poring for years. I never knew anything of his past history – how he came by his military title, when he had left the army, or what had given him the very strong and peculiar

religious opinions which he held. These opinions were enforced upon the household morning and evening at family prayers, when the Major's long extempore petitions sometimes kept us half an hour at a time upon our knees.

A fortnight of our time at Whittakers had passed very pleasantly, and we were beginning to think, with reluctance, that in another week or so we must be returning home. I mentioned this one afternoon to Miss Hesba as we sat at our painting. She scouted the idea at once, declaring that as long as we cared to stay, and the fine weather continued, we must not think of leaving them.

But even as she spoke, Miss Sara got up and looked anxiously out of the window, for it seemed as if the splendid weather was about to break. Clouds had been creeping up since the morning, and a wet-sounding, whistling wind was beginning to haunt the chimneys, and to rattle the red leaves of the maples.

The two younger girls, and Harry Leroy, came in from the garden, and, to our surprise, old Major Whittaker himself appeared from the regions above, shivering as if with cold. 'Shut the windows,' he said, 'and don't go out any more this evening.' For we generally spent the hour before and after prayers and supper in the verandah.

We did not heed his words particularly at the time, and soon he went away to his study again.

We spent the early part of the evening pleasantly enough, part-singing at the piano. Then came prayers and supper as usual, and then, as we recrossed the hall from the dining-room, some one of us suggested that we should go out upon the steps of the front door and watch the storm which was rapidly coming up, and the clouds which dashed across the full moon, hanging like a red globe over the St Lawrence.

I do not think either host or hostesses saw us, and we had quite forgotten the Major's counsel that we should not go out again that evening. We left the hall door ajar, and stood out upon the gravel in front of the house, we four girls and young Mr Leroy.

In order that the following circumstances may be clearly understood, I must explain a little the topography of Whittakers. It was a long, two-storeyed house, standing a little back

from the road which ran into Montreal, and its entrance was not unlike that of many modern English villas. It had two wooden gates, both opening upon the road, which always stood wide, and these were connected by a semicircular sweep of gravel in front of the house, edged with laurels and shrubs. The big garden, orchard, and fields were all behind the house, which in front approached within about fifty yards of the highway. The hall door of Whittakers stood always open during our visit – it was two leaves of battered, weather-stained oak, and on its outside were the marks whence two large knockers had evidently been removed. We had remarked their removal before, and Mr Leroy had said he supposed the rattle of the knockers had interfered with the Harmony of the Four Gospels in the study above.

As we stood upon the gravel walk we all five distinctly heard the noise of a heavy carriage approaching from the town along the road in front of us, apparently having two, or even four horses, and driven at a great pace. We could not see it for the laurels which intervened between us and the road on either side, but we knew it was rapidly drawing near the gate. Its approach interested us, for it was now nearly ten o'clock, and a visitor at such an hour was unheard of. But if not coming to Whittakers, whither could the carriage be going? for it was the last house of any importance for miles along that way.

We stepped back into the doorway, and found ourselves suddenly caught and dragged in by old Major Whittaker, who, trembling with excitement, and with his queer flowered dressing-gown fluttering round him, as though he had been just aroused from bed, somehow whirled us all into the hall, and banged-to the great leaves of the door with a noise that made the house shake.

But above all the rattle of chains and bars – for the old man was busy securing the door as if for a siege – we heard the approach of the carriage, which, as we expected, turned in at the gate and drew up, with a crack of the whip and a splutter of gravel when the horses were sharply pulled in at the hall steps.

We all five heard it; and so, I am sure, did Major Whittaker and his sisters, who had also come out into the hall. Not one

of us dared say anything, for we were awed by the intensity of excitement which characterized every movement of our host.

A moment afterwards the old door was almost battered in by a furious assault upon it with the iron knocker, and, looking in each other's faces, we all recollected simultaneously that *there was no knocker there.* 'Let us pray,' said Major Whittaker's voice above the noise. We all knelt down where we were, while he poured forth a long, rambling prayer, in which he entreated to be delivered from some evil and ghostly influence; but we were all too frightened and excited to listen much. Lucy and Louise were both crying and receiving an undercurrent of consolation from Harry Leroy, while our host prayed on in a high, unnatural tone. The hammering on the front door continued at intervals.

However, these grew longer and longer, and at last the sound ceased altogether. Not so the prayers, for though I was longing to get away to our room, which also looked to the front, to see if the carriage remained at the door, the old Major kept us quite half an hour, without any reference to the usual family worship, which had been punctually performed as usual two hours before.

When at last we retired to our room our first rush, of course, was to the window, but all that was to be seen was the moon riding high in the sky, and the storm clouds sweeping past – no trace of a carriage or its occupants anywhere. Of course we lay awake till morning, discussing the extraordinary event, and Lucy came creeping in to sleep with Louise, too frightened to remain by herself.

I ought to explain that she was almost as much a stranger to Whittakers as we were, having been lately left an orphan to the charge of her uncle, who had at first sent her on a tour with some friends to Europe. Consequently the bombardment of the house by the ghost and the spectre knocker (for we were convinced that what we had heard was supernatural) was as terrible to her as to us.

The next morning it seemed as if all the pleasure of our visit was gone, and – a straw will show which way the wind blows – on some reference being made to our return home, I was struck, but not altogether astonished, to find that no opposition was made to our carrying out our intention, even

by Miss Hesba. The two old ladies were evidently miserable and ill-at-ease about something, and though no allusion was made to the occurrence of the night before, it was in all our minds, and rose up between us and all enjoyment.

Our pleasant morning employments were not resumed, for the Misses Whittaker were closeted upstairs with their brother, and we younger ones preferred keeping all together in the garden, where the sun shone and we seemed to be out of the supernatural influence which invested the gloomy old place. Harry Leroy confided to us that he had investigated the front of the house, and that traces of the wheels of a heavy vehicle and the hoof-marks of a pair of horses were distinctly visible upon the gravel!

By-and-by, when we came in to early dinner, Miss Sara took me aside, and, twisting her watch-guard about in her hands from nervousness, explained that she and her brother thought perhaps it would be better, 'under the unfortunate circumstances', that our visit to Whittakers should end as soon as possible. Without actually saying so, she gave me to understand that the annoyance of the previous evening was not by any means over.

I was glad of her plain speaking, for though I did not personally mind the 'ghost', as we had already taken to call this disturbing influence, among ourselves, I could not bear the change which had so suddenly fallen upon the previously cheerful household. Besides, I dreaded its effect upon Louise, who was of a very excitable temperament. So I gladly arranged with Miss Sara to have a note ready for my mother, to be sent that afternoon by a special messenger, to prepare her for our unexpected return home, as soon as four disengaged places could be obtained in the stage, which in those days was the means of communication between Montreal and our nearest village. Four places – for I persuaded Miss Whittaker to let us take Lucy with us. I could not bear the idea of leaving the girl companionless, though her aunt said, with a sigh: 'Lucy is one of us, and must learn to bear this as we do!'

That night we again all slept together in the big front bedroom. I must mention that I had not told any of the others of Miss Sara's hint that possibly the ghost was not yet laid

to rest, for, I thought, we had talked over the matter quite enough. So I incited Lucy to tell us some of her European experiences, and we all went to sleep in the middle of her description of Cologne Cathedral.

We must have slept about two hours or so, when I was awakened by a sharp pinch from Helène, and called out, 'What are you doing?' before I opened my eyes. Her answer, 'Hush! it is here in the room!' woke me up thoroughly. I saw her face looking, pale in the dim light, towards the window, a large bow, which occupied the whole end of the room to the right hand of our bed. Louise and Lucy slept in another bed on our left, and consequently farther from the window.

I followed the direction of her looks with my eyes, but without stirring, for her words had given me an uncomfortable kind of thrill. There, behind the big dressing-table, which stood in the centre of the bow-window, but well into the room, leaving a considerable space clear behind it, I saw a tall veiled figure, which something told me at once was not human. It was muffled from head to foot in trailing, grey garments, and something was wrapped about its head, but from its long, swinging strides – for it paced to and fro in the little enclosure between window and table – I guessed it to be a male figure, though the garments were womanly, or perhaps monkish. At first it did not appear to notice us, but presently it began somewhat to slacken its regular walk, and turning its hooded head towards us, seemed to be intently regarding us. My hand was tightly locked in Helène's, and I know the same thought was in both our minds: 'What if it comes into the open part of the room, and near either of the beds?'

Suddenly a little gasp from the other bed told us that the other girls were also awake (it was too dark to see their faces), and Louise's voice broke the intense silence. In that Name to which all powers must yield, she commanded it to be gone.

This from Louise, the most timid and nervous of us all! I forgot the ghost in my amazement, and turned to look at her, as she sat up in bed, a trembling little white figure.

A moment after, when I looked to the window, the ghost *was* gone. Louise had exorcized it. She was crying bitterly now, and shaking all over. Helène and I jumped up and

crowded round her, patting and soothing her until her sobbing ceased.

'I don't know what put it into my head to do it, I'm sure,' she explained; 'but I had been looking at the dreadful thing so long: long before any of you woke – and at last I felt I should go mad if I did not speak. I could see his eyes quite plainly, like two lamps, looking me through and through, and I knew it was I who must speak to him.'

By-and-by, when we were all a little calmer, I told the girls of Miss Sara's confidence to me, and also of our arrangement to return home as soon as our journey could be settled. Lucy cried out that she could not be left behind, and hugged me when I said that, of course, she was to go with us, for as long as she liked to stay. 'I can never come back to this dreadful house,' she declared; and would take no comfort from the suggestion, which I had picked up from Miss Sara's conversation, that long intervals, sometimes of years, elapsed between these ghostly visitations.

So the night wore away, and with earliest dawn we were all glad to rise, and get through some of our packing, so as to shorten as much as possible our stay in the haunted bedchamber.

After breakfast, Helène and I took Miss Whittaker aside, and told her the events of the night. They impressed, but evidently did not astonish her, and her only question when we finished was, 'Did the figure attempt to approach any of you?'

'No,' I answered; 'though Louise declares its face and burning eyes were distinctly turned upon her.'

Our hostess sighed, but made no comment, and my twin-sister and I went away upstairs to finish the preparations for our departure, for it was decided we were to leave Whittakers that day at noon. These were soon completed, and Helène and I were about to descend to spend the last hour or two with the old ladies, when Lucy and Louise, who had been round the garden for the last time, rushed up the oak staircase and into the room, and I saw in a moment, by their disordered looks, that they had seen something more.

Yes, the ghost had again appeared, and the girls were still shaking with nervousness when they told their story.

'It was in the box-walk,' said Louise, 'and Mr Leroy was with us. Lucy went away for a few minutes, just as we reached the end, to pick herself some nuts in the shrubbery, and Mr Leroy began telling me how sorry he was our party was to be broken up, and might he come and see us at home. I said "of course", and just then we felt something close behind us (we were standing side-by-side), and, thinking it was Lucy, we turned and saw the horrible figure at our elbow, laying a hand upon the arm of each of us! An instant afterwards it was gone, but Lucy, who was coming up from the other end of the walk, had also plainly seen it, its back being towards her; so it was no imagination.'

No, it was no imagination. I told the whole story to Miss Whittaker before we left the house. This time the poor old lady broke down completely, and, wringing her hands, accused herself of bringing ruin upon two young lives. Then, seeing my astonishment, she was obliged to explain that it was a sign, too fatally proved to be true, of approaching death, when the veiled figure laid his hand upon any person to whom he chose to show himself. Her words sank like lead into my heart.

There is little more to tell.

Our little Louise fell ill of a strange low fever, soon after our return to the farm, and before Christmas she had left us for ever. Harry Leroy never paid his contemplated visit, for he, too, died, by the accidental discharge of his gun, a few weeks after we parted from him. The only happy consequence of our stay at Whittakers was Lucy's marriage to a neighbour of ours, who wedded her from our house, and by-and-by took her south, so that for some time we lost sight of her, and heard no news of her relations. When we met again she told us her uncle had died quietly one evening, after completing his life's work – the Harmony of the Four Gospels. Her aunts had shut up the house, which was their own, and had gone to live beyond Hamilton. I never saw them again; nor did I see much more of Lucy, for our own family removed at this time to England, and our Canadian ties were broken.

Whether the curse still lies upon the old house, or whether the house itself still stands, I know not, but the foregoing is a true and unexaggerated account of what we underwent there.

LADY CELIA'S MIRROR

Roger Malisson

Jardine and Thomson's Antiques had always been a modest concern until, in the mid-sixties, they opened up new premises near the King's Road, just as it was becoming fashionable. Jardine was the connoisseur. He loved antiques, specialized in porcelain, and hated dealing in tat. Bertie Thomson was the business brain. He quickly realized that they could sell almost anything to the trendy crowd and tourists, and had a few successful fights with his partner to extend their trade. One day he came home with a full-length mirror in a rosewood frame.

'It's certainly Victorian,' he said, standing back to admire his acquisition with an aesthete's satisfaction.

'No, dear, I'd say Edwardian,' said Jardine, peering closely at the massive carved frame.

'It's Victorian! !'

'Oh, well, suit yourself.'

They heaved it into their back room for restoration. Both agreed, however, that it should bring a good price, and Bertie told Jardine that he had bought it at an auction of Sir John Bennison's possessions which had been sold off to pay death duties. Sir John was solitary and had not bothered with insurance, trusts or even a will. The mirror was a good buy.

Jardine and Bertie lived in a flat above their shop, and that night as they were about to turn in, Bertie discovered that he had yet again left his cigarettes in the shop. He went downstairs and through the back room, not bothering to switch on the light as the moonlight was sufficient and in any case he could have found his way blindfold.

He retrieved his cigarettes from the counter and on his way back his glance fell on the old mirror. He paused to admire his bare and hairless chest. His figure had kept very trim, thanks to careful eating and exercise. Not a trace of grey in the thick blond hair; not bad at all. Suddenly he peered closer at his reflection. Those lines around his eyes – where

had they come from? Goodness, he must lay off the gin.

But no – it seemed to be that his reflection itself was changing. Bertie stood stupefied, rooted in front of the mirror as his reflection faded, dwindled . . . and was superseded by the dim image of an old woman in a long, filmy dress. The image was becoming clearer, more distinct every second. Its face was grey, deeply seamed and scarred, and in the little, half-closed eyes and distorted red mouth there was an expression of limitless malice. From the lacy sleeves protruded hands like claws; yellow, lined, and with only four fingers on each hand, from which extended long, ragged nails. Bertie opened his mouth to scream but could not, so stiff with terror was he.

Then the thing in the mirror moved jerkily, and he thought it stretched out its withered, mutilated claws to him. The movement broke the trance: Jardine almost fell out of bed with shock as he heard his partner scream, and moments later a hysterical and white-faced Bertie stumbled into the room, fell over a chair and collapsed sobbing on to the bed.

Jardine could make nothing of Bertie's jumbled account of the old woman in the mirror and thought that someone had broken in to steal his precious antiques. Armed with a poker, he marched down the stairs to investigate, with Bertie, who would not be left, clinging on to his arm. A thorough search revealed nothing, however, and the burglar-alarm system seemed to be in working order.

'It was the mirror!' cried Bertie, as Jardine painstakingly checked all his favourite pieces.

'What's wrong with it?'

'There was an old woman looking out at me, I tell you,' said Bertie, beside himself.

'Bertie?'

'Yes?'

'You're not having those hetero fantasies again are you?' Jardine asked suspiciously.

'No! Turn off the light and look!'

Jardine switched off the light and they looked at themselves in the mirror, side by side.

'I can see us. Can you see us?' asked Jardine, glowering.

'Yes.'

'Nothing else but us?'

'No. But before – '

'A little old woman?'

'Yes.'

'Oh.' Jardine turned and stamped upstairs.

'But Jed . . .'

'Either it was a trick of the light or you're needing a psychiatrist.'

'Beast! !'

Bertie passed a sleepless night and in the morning he was still so disturbed that Jardine resolved to sell the mirror as soon as he could. He cleaned and polished it carefully; it was in astonishingly good condition. The carving on the rich frame was exquisite. Jardine stared and stared into the well-silvered glass, but he could see nothing odd, no distortion that might account for his partner's experience. It was rather strange; Bertie was not given to imagining things.

He phoned a friend of his, a hairdresser who was opening a new salon in Mayfair. Laurence sprinted round in his lunch hour to see the mirror, and instantly fell in love with it.

'It's just exactly the sort of thing we want,' he said, clasping his hands. 'The salon's going to be all Victorian, you know; Victorian décor, Victorian dress for the staff, Victorian music whatever that might be, Victorian – '

'The mirror's Edwardian,' murmured Jardine.

'Oh, who's to know, Jed? No doubt we'll be slipping in some Beatles if the Victorian bit gets too much. Anything to keep the old ladies happy. Now do send that round as soon as you can; must run.'

The mirror was installed in Laurence's Victorian salon with a Victorian table in front of it. Mostly it was used by Jan, a strikingly pretty girl who, though only seventeen, was remarkably talented. She had ambitions beyond hairdressing and had considered modelling, but last week she had had the luck to meet, through a photographer friend, the legendary Hugo Pfaff. Listening to the boring chatter of bored society ladies

all day as she skilfully combed out their hair, she day-dreamed of Hugo, millionaire owner of his brainchild, the Jetset empire.

He had started out in the Bronx selling his own girlie magazine. That magazine was now *Jetset*, with classy articles by leading intellectuals padding out the nude photographs. He had a string of international Jetset Clubs staffed by the world-famous Jetset Pussy hostesses. It was to the ranks of the Pussy elite that Jan aspired. Last week Hugo had flown into London on his Jetset jet and she had met him – shaken him by the hand! She had almost passed out with the thrill! True, she had been a little disappointed by his taciturnity, his black glasses and his diminutive size, and those silly Women's Lib people had rather spoiled things by gathering outside his club and shouting 'Pimp!' as he went hurriedly in, but at least she had secured an interview for the following day. Who knows, she thought, I might even get into *Jetset* as Pussy of the Month . . .

'So I said to Charles, frankly I said, Rodney's such an absolute bastard at times.'

'Oh yes,' Jan said automatically at the blue hair she was brushing. She took a reassuring glance into the mirror. She was certainly beautiful, and somehow this mirror always seemed more flattering than the others; it must be the way it caught the light. At any rate, she had a long way to go before she would look like her blue-rinsed client. Now, what should she wear for her Pussy interview . . . ?

Jan finished late that evening, and Laurence promised to run her home, if she could wait for half an hour while he finished some business. Jan said she would; she couldn't face the tube tonight and her feet were aching. She made herself a coffee and waited for Laurence to come back.

She eased off her shoes and walked over to the window, looking out at the dark, rainy evening settling on the deserted road. Bored, she turned back into the salon, and sat down in front of 'her' mirror. Complacently she admired her face and figure; certainly good enough, she knew, to meet the Jetset standard. She pulled idly at a strand of hair, wondering whether to change its colour, and as she met her own eyes in

the mirror they seemed to grow larger, darker. Her face seemed finer-boned and more oval, her golden hair swept up into an exquisite, old-fashioned coiffure. Startled, she rose and clutched at the edge of the table, afraid that she was having hallucinations. The image in the mirror was changing still; bemused, hardly daring to breathe, Jan saw a light, elegant figure in a long gold gown shimmering in the depths of the glass. The face that emerged was sweet and smiling, gentle and sad. As Jan stood transfixed and fascinated, the graceful figure in the mirror moved, and soundlessly extended slim white hands outwards to her in a grave and appealing gesture. Slowly, Jan reached out and took the little, blue-veined hands in hers. The touch was soft and cool, and real. She did not know whether she was awake or dreaming; if this was a vision, it was a very beautiful one. Then, suddenly, the apparition's gentle grasp changed to a hard, clawlike grip. Jan looked up into its face . . .

Jardine and Bertie read about the murder in Laurence's salon the next day. Neither of them mentioned the mirror, though Bertie went white to the lips when he saw the headlines. A visit from Laurence himself, the afternoon following the murder, heightened his unspoken fears.

'What did I do to deserve this?' Laurence wailed, throwing himself into an arm-chair. 'The shock! I can't begin to tell you.' He accepted a large brandy.

'I've been with the police all night, not a happy experience – questions, questions, questions! I'm absolutely worn out.'

'What happened?' asked Bertie intensely.

Laurence took a gulp of his brandy.

'Poor Jannie – I was going to give her a lift home last night, and I popped out to see the accountant for a few minutes, and when I came back . . . there she was, sprawled in front of the mirror, strangled, dead. Well I nearly passed out; but I dialled 999.'

'She was in front of a mirror?'

'Yes, strangely enough, the one you sold me. You wouldn't buy it back I suppose? Jan always used it, you know, and I certainly don't want it around any more. Come to that, you

could buy the whole place, with what the publicity's going to do to us. Poor Jan, she was a lovely girl; a bit vain and dreamy sometimes, but so nice. Whoever did it must have been a maniac – her face was all black and clawed so she was hardly recognizable – '

'Clawed?' said Bertie, repressing a shudder.

'Oh, yes. God, it was awful.' Laurence turned to his drink, looking quite sick.

'So the police have no idea who did it?' asked Jardine.

'Not a clue, dear. How he got in is beyond them, let alone anything else. The doors locked, no money taken . . . it's a complete mystery. Yes, thanks, I will have another.'

The next morning, two things happened. Jardine brought the mirror back to the shop and Bertie went to see Sir John Bennison's executor, to find out more about the mirror. The executor was an old friend of the Bennison family, and he told Bertie a story that sent him racing back to tell Jardine.

Jardine hadn't opened the shop when Bertie got back, which was odd. As Bertie was unlocking the door he heard a great crash from, as he thought, inside. Fumbling with his key, and vaguely alarmed, he threw the door open and ran through. There was nothing in the shop, and he opened the back door and went into the yard. Jardine was lying before the mirror in a pool of blood, a hammer clutched in his hand. His arm was slashed open from wrist to elbow.

Minutes later Jardine was in the casualty department of the local hospital, where they picked out slivers of glass from his wound and sewed and bandaged the gash. The doctor wanted to keep him in for observation, but Jardine insisted on going home. Bertie paced anxiously around the tiled waiting-room, and was eventually allowed to go inside his friend's cubicle and wait with him for the doctor to give him the all-clear to go. Jardine, shaky from the wound and the anaesthetic, grasped his friend's arm with his good hand.

'It was lucky you came back when you did, Bertie, or I might have bled to death. But at least I got rid of the mirror. I should have waited for you to come back, but I kept looking at it and thinking, well, that it seemed to bring bad luck.

So I thought I'd destroy it once and for all. One of the pieces must have flown out and cut my arm, but it will be all right now. We'll burn the frame when we get back, and forget all about it.'

Bertie looked at the floor for a long moment.

'The mirror's intact, Jed.'

'What?'

'It's not broken. It's not even cracked. It's the same as it always was.'

For the first time, something like fear showed in Jardine's pale face.

'But I smashed it, Bertie,' he whispered.

Celia Bamford had been the beauty of her day, the toast of London society. She broke several hearts before she finally married Sir Edward Bennison, whom she loved for himself as well as his title and money, and in spite of the great difference in their ages. One of her wedding gifts, from a disappointed lover, was a full-length mirror in a rosewood frame. Celia was beautiful and very kind-hearted, but she was inordinately vain, and habitually spent hours in front of this mirror, admiring her lovely face and elegant figure. Her doting husband indulged her vanity. They were a happy couple with a lively social life, for they had friends in high and fashionable places, and it was an idyllic match until tragedy overtook them.

It was the night of the Duke's Bal Masqué, the highlight of the season. Lady Celia took a long time over her dress and jewels. Her husband walked in before she was finished, and she smiled at him through the mirror.

'Nearly ready now.' She dismissed her maid and examined her hair in the glass, and absently slipping on her rings she seemed to fall into a reverie, gazing at her reflection, with a strange expression in her large eyes.

Suddenly she started: 'Teddy, don't let's go tonight.'

'What? Why ever not?'

'I feel as if . . . I don't know . . . something unpleasant might happen.'

'Nonsense, darling. Why, everyone is going to be there. The

Duke especially asked me to bring my charming wife, so there you are – Royalty commands!'

'Yes, of course.' She smiled, twisting a fan in her slender hands. 'Just being silly, I suppose.'

'You are exquisite,' he murmured, kissing her white shoulders.

The evening was perfect. Celia was at her brightest, and her husband had never been so proud of his dazzling young wife as she danced and chatted and laughed the mild evening away. It was over too soon, and, blissfully tired, they drove home in their carriage. That was their last happy night together. On the way back through the dark country lanes something frightened the horses, and they bolted. Out of control, the carriage hurtled off the road and overturned into a steep ditch. The driver was killed, Bennison escaped with cuts and bruises – but his wife was flung against the shattering windows out into the road, where her dress caught in the wheels and threw her headlong into the ditch. They lifted her out of the wreck broken and torn, her face unrecognizably lacerated with broken glass.

The best surgeons in London saved her sight and her legs, but she lost a finger from each of her hands, which were badly mutilated. Her face remained incurably deformed. For months she lay in semi-darkness in her room, covered in bandages, all mirrors removed. As she gradually recovered, her heart-broken husband could hardly bear to hear her light, gay voice issuing from the twisted mouth, as she bravely assured him that she would soon be better and was longing to take up their social life again. He did not know how she would bear the shock of knowing that her face was a grotesque caricature of her former looks, but he was spared the pain of telling her. One day, when she was left resting, she decided for a surprise to dress, make up her face and walk downstairs to show him how much better she felt. She got unsteadily out of bed, and, walking with the help of a chair, went in search of her

favourite mirror. Bennison found her an hour later, staring at her reflection in the rosewood mirror, the bandages ripped from her ruined hands. In her eyes was a look of terrible hate, and her once-lovely lips were murmuring a steady stream of vicious curses.

Lady Celia's brain was irrecoverably turned, and her husband did not long survive the shock. She lived on ten years longer, amply provided for, and looked after by mental nurses in the house in the country. She made no attempt to leave her room, and spent her days chattering to herself of old times and peering into her mirror. If unattended, she would dress up in an old ball gown, and try to make up the shattered wreck of her face, and dance with imaginary partners to a tune in her mind. One day a nurse attempted to stop her, and Lady Celia turned on the woman with a maniac's fury and strength, and throttled her with her yellowed claws of hands. She was then removed to an institution where she eventually died, and the house in the country was locked up with all its contents until the last of the Bennison line, old Sir John, died in 1964.

Jardine sat back and considered the story when Bertie had finished. He was no longer sceptical.

'What I can't understand,' said Bertie, 'is why the thing doesn't always appear. I mean, you and presumably Laurence have been alone with the mirror at night, but you didn't see anything.'

'Vanity,' said Jardine.

'Vanity?'

Jardine nodded. 'I should think that it only appears to someone who's feeling conceited. This Lady Celia was always admiring her looks, remember; Laurence said that unfortunate girl was vain, and you – well anyway,' he continued hastily, 'I think that might be the link. The question is now, what are we going to do about the mirror?'

Their problem was resolved very soon. That same week a

monk wandered into the shop looking for second-hand furniture for St Bardolph's priory in Middlesex. They couldn't help him much, but they did sell him the mirror at cost price. Jardine reasoned that, as none of the Brothers was likely to be susceptible to the vice of vanity, and as the mirror was apparently indestructible, somewhere holy was the ideal place to keep the evil old ghost at bay.

'In fact,' he remarked happily, 'it will probably get itself exorcized there anyway.'

One Sunday morning, however, several weeks later, found them staring dumbly at *The News of the People* over breakfast.

'PRIORY SEX MURDER HORROR SHOCK PROBE' screamed the headline: 'Naked Monk Found Strangled.'

'Who'd have thought it, dear,' an awed Bertie said finally. 'In a Priory?'

'It's no use sulking,' said Jardine. 'We had to get it back. Think of the harm it might have gone on doing.'

'Yes, but to pay three times the price we sold it for,' grumbled Bertie. 'I thought these monks weren't supposed to be worldly-wise about material things?'

'Oh well, never mind,' said Jardine. 'Next stop, the river.'

They heaved the mirror out of the back of their van and trudged to the middle of Putney Bridge with it. The evening was dark and nobody was about. Taking a last look at the rosewood mirror they pushed it over the parapet and it splashed into the river, sinking without trace. Pleased with their efforts, Jardine and Bertie linked arms and went back to their shop, where they lived comparatively happily ever after.

A few weeks ago, the wife of Major Sanders-Gibb (Retd) was walking on Putney Bridge when her engagement ring, valued at ten thousand pounds, fell into the river. Although it was insured, the ring had great sentimental value, and the Major hired a small boat and a diver to try to recover it.

All that they found, however, was an Edwardian mirror in

a rosewood frame. It was rather like losing a pound and finding a penny, but the Major thought that the mirror might be worth something, at least; obviously it hadn't been in the river for very long, because it was in excellent condition. Anyhow, he thought, it would make an appropriate present for his wife; Heaven knew, she was vain enough.

THE LONELY INN

Thomas Burke

The tall man on the lawn outside the cottage gave the cottage a long look and nodded at it. 'Seems to be a perfect week-end cottage. Just big enough for us and easy to run. Ought to have some good week-ends here.'

The man with him agreed. 'Yes. Hasn't got everything but almost everything. Good view from the lawn. Stream over there. Woods on the left. Even the house-agent must have strained his Arabian vocabulary in listing it.'

'Yes. Village quite interesting, too. People seem a bit surly, though.'

'You must give country people time. We've only been here two hours, remember. Maybe the soil's got something to do with it. Certain soils make cheerful people; others make taciturn people, or hot-tempered people.'

Their wives appeared at the cottage door. 'Why don't you boys go and explore a bit? There's nothing to do in here. The maid's left everything. We've only got to heat the soup. Dinner'll be eightish.'

The tall man said, 'Right.' And then to the other – 'What about it, Mac? Shall we stroll and see if we can find the local?'

Mac nodded, and they went through the gate into the lane. To the right lay the village, a mile away. They had seen it an hour ago. They turned to the left. The lane here was little more than a grass-track. By its width it appeared to have been at one time a road, but now its surface was rough grass corrugated with wheel-tracks. The grass in the ditches on either side was of somewhat stronger hue.

It was a winding lane, and at no point did it disclose more than a hundred yards of itself. The hedges stood high, and afforded no view of the surrounding country. 'Almost like a shrubbery,' the tall man said. 'Wonder where it leads to eventually, and whether we've got to come back the same

way.' They followed its bends for some minutes, and then the tall man said 'Ha!' explosively. And then: 'The oasis. I see a sign. Let's hope it isn't a desert mirage. But I'm sure I saw a sign, just over the hedge-top.' At the next turn he gave his friend a facetious pat. 'There we are! Thought I wasn't mistaken. As we're in Derbyshire they ought to have some of the real Derbyshire ale. Step out, my lad.'

The inn's exterior was somewhat weather-beaten; almost uninviting; but it was an inn. It had known no paint for some years, and its doors and windows had a bedraggled aspect. The door and its stone front bore brown and black patches. It showed a faded sign of 'The White Cockade'.

The two men paused. The tall and talkative man said, 'H'm. Hardly one of the picture-postcard inns. But that's no fair test. All its good points may be inside. I've found several like that. Anyway, it's the only one, so . . .'

They went in. They found the inside no compensation of the outside. They entered a dim and silent tap-room. It contained the usual fixtures of a wayside public-house – old wooden benches, old wooden trestle-tables, an old and wide fireplace with the ashes of the last fire of winter, and an old and strong smell. Nothing in the place was grey in colour; yet it offered a general feeling of greyness. The landlord, standing listlessly behind the stained bar, was a man of heavy features and sunless eyes. The very type of man who ought not to keep an inn. His physical appearance accounted for, if it did not explain, the air of lost-heart and letting-things-go which hung over everything. One light, a shaded lamp, lit a small pool about the bar. The rest of the room was a muslin of shadow which gave common objects an uncommon shape.

They ordered their drink, and the landlord served them without 'Good evening' or other word. The beer was good. They drank, and looked about them. It was then, when their eyes, fresh from the bright evening, had become adjusted to the half-light, that they noted a slight stir among the shadow. Looking more closely, they saw that the room, which they thought was empty, held company. Some half-dozen dim figures sat along the benches and on chairs. No two sat together. They sat at intervals, each self-enclosed. They were men of ordinary appearance, in soiled or ragged clothes of

miscellaneous quality and style; but their silence and their attitudes made them extraordinary.

The horrific figures evoked by the lobster nightmare or the unchaining drug cannot so freeze the human mind as the sight of the ordinary creature in the extraordinary attitude or state. De-Quincey's picture of the fat man of Keswick sitting alone on his lawn in shirtsleeves on a bitter March midnight brings more of the authentic recoil than any of his laudanum visions.

And so these dumb and solitary figures affected the two visitors more than any scene of ugliness or violence. Something in their peculiar arrangement suggested that they were sitting like that with some reason. It was as though they had placed themselves like actors on a stage, awaiting the rise of the curtain. The silence of the place, which was underlined by the intermittent drip-drip of the beer-tap, also had an effect, and when the talkative visitor wanted to say something he found himself muttering.

He touched his friend. 'Queer place, Mac.' The other nodded. 'Must be a side-entrance somewhere, I guess.'

'Why?'

'Well, I didn't see anybody come in, but a minute ago I'd have said there were four people in the far corner.'

'So there were.'

'Well, there's six now. And there were two just behind us.'

'Yes.'

'There's three now.'

Mac looked about him, and found that his friend was right. He found, too, that the company, without moving, was exchanging signals. He saw a head nod, and then another head respond to it. He caught his friend's eye, and together they watched the invisible message pass visibly along the room in nods. It was as though a row of Victorian mantelpiece images had been set in motion. All these people, it seemed, knew each other; yet sat apart holding no communication beyond nods.

He brought his earthenware mug sharply to the counter. He expected it to make in that silence a startling report, and had made the motion deliberately in the hope of bringing a

touch of life to the room. But somehow, possibly by the shape of the room, it made only a faint noise, and the company ignored it. His friend turned to him: 'Wonder if there's a deaf-and-dumb institute near here. And if this is Founder's Day.' He looked at the landlord. 'Customers not very talkative,' he said. The landlord continued to stare at nothing. He looked at Mac, and they exchanged a smile.

It was while he was taking a cigarette from the packet held by Mac that he became aware that the silence was being very gently troubled. At first he thought it was the swishing of a curtain. Then he knew that it was a whisper. A whisper was passing along the benches and chairs, and once or twice he caught its burden. *That's him. That's him.* He saw that Mac had heard it, too, and as they turned and looked at the benches they found the dilapidated faces of the company fixed on them. It seemed to him, as he turned, that they were fixed on him, but with the next glance he saw that they were all looking beyond him, at Mac. The moment they saw that they were observed, the faces dropped, and each man resumed his former pose of looking at his knees.

Mac picked up his mug and finished it. 'Fit?' His friend nodded. They stepped out of twilight into orange sunset and scented fields and limpid light. They took some six paces from the inn; then the tall one stopped and said, expressively: '*Gawd*!' He took three deep breaths. Then: 'I'd like to show that place to some of those literary blokes who write about the old village inn, and the mellow company, and the rich rustic voices, and Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all.'

Mac agreed. 'Still, we can't have everything. The cottage is about perfect, so we shall have to put up with the local. But what a hole. And not merely dull and dingy. Something more than that about it. We must investigate again. A place like that in this gorgeous country must have a reason for being what it is. Some story behind it. And why were they so interested in me?'

'Lord knows. Don't look as though they could be interested in *anything* – let alone an everyday specimen like you. Perhaps they'd seen you in the village, though, and were thinking of giving you the village greeting – 'arf a brick.'

'Huh . . . Well, I've found some queer pubs in my ups-and-downs of England, but that's the queerest so far.'

The next day, Saturday, they spent in a motor-run of exploration, and got back to the cottage between six and seven. After a little pottering, Mac said, 'Coming down to the lousy local?'

'Not this evening, I think. I've got about four or five letters I want to answer, so's to have tomorrow free. You go.'

'Right. I'd like to have another look at it. Something about it fascinates me. It had the feeling of something going to happen.'

'Don't be long, though. I've got an appetite. Don't want to have to wait dinner.'

'Needn't worry. I've got one, too. I'll be on time.'

Mac stepped out of the door as the other settled himself at a table. As he passed the open window he heard his friend call, 'What's the date?' He answered, 'April thirty,' and swung down the lane.

And dinner was late. They waited until twenty to nine, and then, as Mac had not returned, they waited no longer. 'I suppose he's managed to get the deaf-and-dumb school talking, and can't tear himself away. He'll have to have what's left, and have it half-cold. Ethel can't go down and drag him out. Create a bad impression on our first week-end – wives pulling husbands out of pubs. "Father, dear Father, come home with me now."'

Ethel was dealing with soup. 'Oh, he'll turn up when it suits him. He's done it before. When he finds an interesting local, as he calls them, he forgets time.'

But he did not turn up. They left the door unlocked until one o'clock; then, as he had not turned up, they went to bed. 'If he turns up now he'll have to throw gravel at the window. Gone off on a binge, perhaps, with one of the deaf-and-dumbs, and staying the night. Probably turn up with a hang-over about church-time tomorrow.'

But he did not turn up. He did not turn up at church-time or at any other time. The trio left at the cottage never saw

their Mac again.

At about midday his friend went out to look about, and to enquire at the local and in the village. Just outside the gate he met the old man whom they had engaged to keep the garden tidy during the week.

'Morning. D'you happen to have seen anything of my friend?'

The man looked at him dully while the question sank in and wandered through his mind to pick up some association with 'my friend'.

'Your friend?'

'Yes; the man who came with me. You saw him yesterday.'

'Ar – 'im. What would he be like?'

'Stocky figure. Red hair. Horn-rimmed glasses.'

'Oh . . . 'im. No. I ain' seen 'im. I remember 'im. Scotty, I says to meself.'

'Yes. He is a Scot. Well, he went out yesterday evening – down to the inn here – and was coming back in an hour. But he didn't come back last night. Nor this morning. I wondered whether you'd seen him or heard anything of him.'

'No-o. I ain' seed 'im.'

'I was just going down to the inn to ask if he'd been there. Thought perhaps you might have been there last night and seen him.' He went into the lane and turned to the left. The man stopped him.

'This way, sir.'

'No. This way. The inn's down here. Down the lane.'

'You mean up the lane.'

'I mean down the lane.'

'You mean up the lane. The Green Man, just outside village.

'I don't. I mean down the lane.' He pointed to the left.

The man stared at him. 'Dinno of no public down there.'

'No? I see you don't know your own country. Often happens that the stranger finds what the inhabitant misses.' The man looked puzzled. He stroked the stubble of his chin. He seemed about to say something but didn't say it. He was dealing with a Londoner. Queer things, Londoners. Said what they didn't mean, and twisted words about, and called it wit. Played silly games called *pulling your leg*. Sometimes they weren't quite

right in the head. Zanies, some of 'em. This seemed to be one of that sort.

'I dinno of no – '

'Ah, but I do. I'm just going along there to ask if my friend called in last night. If you care to come along I'll show it to you. And you can sample the brew.'

'I'll come along with ye, but – '

They went along. They went down the twisting lane. The gardener held his puzzled expression, but made no remark. They went along until they came to the elm, through whose branches the sign had been visible.

'Just at the next bend,' the tall man said; and they made the next bend. Having made it he looked about him. 'Funny. Must have been the *next* bend.' They went on and followed the next bend, and this bend marked the end of the lane and its junction with a main road. The tall man now did some staring. 'Well . . .' He looked back up the lane. 'Can't have *passed* it, can we?'

'No, sir, we din pass it.'

'I remember it as just this side of that elm.' He took a few strides up the lane. 'Yes. This side of the elm. Just opposite that gap in the hedge. I could have sworn that – And I'm certain we never left the lane. But if so, what the devil – '

The gardener watched him with blank expression. He appeared to have no interest in the proceedings. He was humouring a Londoner. The tall man turned to him. 'Well, if it wasn't in the lane where was it? How did we lose ourselves? You – ' Then something in the man's blank face arrested him.

'There bent no public in this lane. Nor anywheres 'bout 'ere. Nothing 'bout 'ere for four miles. Not till ye come to the Golden Lion. And that be along the road – four mile.'

The tall man stared at him and then at the lane, and then shouted, 'But man, we did come to a pub here. We did have drinks in it. In the lane. A dismal place.'

The gardener looked sad and shook his head. With rustic civility, or polite contempt, he refrained from comment. He repeated only, 'Bent no public in this lane.'

'But, man, I tell you – ' He broke off. He realized that he could not insist on the fact of his pub, because nowhere in the

lane was there any pub. There had been a pub, and now there wasn't a pub. He strode backwards and forwards. 'What's happened here? What funny work's going on here? We can't both have been insane. We did come to a pub here, and we did have drinks. What do you make of it?'

The old man stared at the horizon. 'If there'd been a public 'ere I'd 'a known it. I come down 'ere twice a week. Never no public 'ere in my time. Nor in me faather's time. But I do remember me granfer telling me that 'is granfer told 'im there were a public down 'ere.'

'What!'

'There *were* a public down 'ere. I do remember me granfer telling me that 'is granfer told 'im it were burnt down. It were mixed up in sommin' in 'istry. Nigh on two unnerd year ago. I dinno the rights of it, but 'e did say sommin' 'bout some kind of war. And a lot o' Scotties come 'ere. And one of 'em sold the others. And the people set fire to the place, and they was all burnt. 'Cept the one that sold 'em. And 'im they cursed with their dying breaths.'

THE GREEN SCARF

Alfred McLelland Burrage

When the Wellingford family became extinct the days of Wellingford Hall as one of the great country homes of England were already numbered. The estate passed into the hands of commercial-minded people who had no reverence for the history of a great house. The acres around the old Hall became too valuable as building sites to be allowed to remain as a park surrounding a country mansion. So the fat Wellingford sheep were driven elsewhere to pasture, and surveyors and architects heralded the coming of navvies and builders.

All this happened many years ago. The old park became crossed and criss-crossed by new roads, and perky little villas with names like 'Ivyleigh' and 'Dulce Domum' sprang up like monstrous red fungi. Even these have since mellowed, and grown their own ivy and Virginia creeper, and put on airs of respectable maturity. The Hall itself, forlorn and abandoned, like some poor human wretch deserted in his old age, began slowly to crumble and decay.

Wellingford Hall was no more than an embarrassment to the new owners of the estate, who were willing to let it or sell it at the prospective tenant's or purchaser's own price; but to dispose of a great house with no land attached to it and surrounded by a garden city is no easy matter. It was too big for its environment. After some vicissitudes as a private school and the home of a small community of nuns, it was abandoned to its natural fate: 'for,' said one of the directors of the Wellingford Estate, Ltd, a gentleman not above mixing his metaphors, 'what was the sense of keeping a white elephant in a state of repair?'

Three years before this present time of writing came Aubrey Vair, the painter, as poor as most other painters, a lover of old buildings and all the cobwebby branches of archaeology, and took Wellingford Hall at a weekly rental of fewer shillings than might be demanded for the use of a gardener's cottage. He knew one of the directors, and he had discovered that a

few rooms in the middle of the block of buildings were still habitable. The directors, I suppose, wondered why anyone should wish to live in the damp-ridden, rat-riddled old hole, but they did not despise shillings, and they let him come.

Vair wrote me several letters, begging me to come down and rough it with him. It was just the place for a writer, he assured me; it would give me ideas. He had been searching after priests'-holes and had discovered no less than five. One of the great rooms made the finest studio he had yet painted in. And really, as regards comfort, he avowed, it wasn't so bad, so long as one came there already warned to expect only the amenities of a poor bachelor establishment. And then, he added temptingly, there were the historical associations.

I already knew something about the latter, having discovered my facts in a book dealing with old English country houses. Charles the First had spent a night there during the Great Civil War. Charles the Second was supposed to have ridden there after the battle of Worcester. But best of all was the romantic tale of the capture and execution of Sir Peter Wellingford in 1649.

Briefly, Sir Peter was a proscribed Royalist who lived hunted and in hiding after the failure of the royal arms. A wiser man would have crossed the Channel, but Sir Peter had a young wife at Wellingford Hall. He had often visited her in safety, and might have continued to do so, but for a traitor in his own household. This fellow, so the story went, betrayed his master by waving a green scarf from one of the windows, this being a prearranged signal to inform a detachment of Parliamentary troops that the head of the house was secretly in residence. The soldiers burst in at night, and ransacked the house before Sir Peter Wellingford was discovered in a hiding-hole – or 'privacie', as the old chronicle described it. The cavalier was dragged outside and shot in his own courtyard.

Here was a story romantic enough to inveigle the fancy of most men with a grain of imagination. I fully intended to visit Wellingford Hall, but circumstances caused me to defer my intention for the first summer and it was not until the following May, when Vair had been in residence a full year, that I paid him my deferred visit. I journeyed by road, driving

myself in my small two-seater, so that Vair had no opportunity to meet me, and I had my first view of Wellingford Hall before I could be biased by his enthusiasms.

Holy writ speaks of the abomination of desolation standing when it ought not; and here was this grim, forbidding, crumbling old ruin still surrounded by its moat and standing in the midst of jerry-built 'Chumleighs' and 'Rosemounts'. It was like finding the House of Usher in the middle of a new garden city. In spite of its moat the Hall had never been intended for a fortress and the bridge I crossed must have been nearly as old as the house itself.

Vair heard me coming and pushed open the great nail-studded door under the archway of the main entrance to come out and greet me with a grin and a handshake. He climbed up beside me and directed me round into the yard, where there was plenty of accommodation for a dozen cars. Strangely enough, the stables and coach-houses were in better repair than the old house itself.

The hall had once been magnificent, but most of the ceiling was gone, and the oak balustrade of the staircase, having had a commercial value, had been long since removed. A trail of sacking across broken paving stones pointed the way to Vair's apartments beyond. He ushered me into a fine room, in quite a reasonable state of repair, furnished with products of his speculations at country auctions. Although the month was May the weather was none too warm, and I was glad of the sight of the log fire which lent the room an additional air of comfort. Vair laughed to hear me exclaim, and asked if I were ready for tea.

He lived there, he explained, entirely alone, except that a charwoman came each morning to do the rough work and cook his one hot meal of the day.

'You won't mind putting up with cold stuff and tinned things of an evening?' he asked anxiously.

I hate tinned foods, but, of course, I could not say so.

After tea, Vair showed me the rest of the rooms which he had made habitable, and, really, he had managed to make himself much more comfortable than I had expected. He had contrived – Heaven knows how – to learn a lot of intimate history of the old place, and knew the name by which every

room had been called in the house's palmy days of dignity and prosperity. My bedroom, for instance, was known as 'Lady Ursula's Nursery', although history had long since forgotten who Lady Ursula was.

It was easy to see that Vair had a boyish enthusiasm for the place. He was a queer chap, with more than the average artist's share of eccentricities, and he believed in all manner of superstitions and pseudo sciences. He was one of those ageless men who might have been anything in the twenties, thirties, or forties. I happened to know that he was nearly fifty, but his thin wiriness of figure and boyish zest for life kept him youthful. Obviously his pleasure at having me down was not so much for my own sake as his. I was somebody to whom he could 'show off' the house. He was clearly as proud of it as if it had been restored to its former dignity and he were the actual owner.

'For Heaven's sake, don't go about the place by yourself,' he said, 'or you'll break your neck. I've nearly broken mine a dozen times, and I'm beginning to know where it isn't safe to walk. It must be rather rare to find damp-rot and dry-rot in the same house, but we've got both here.'

I promised faithfully that I wouldn't move without him. Even the main staircase did not appear too safe to me, but Vair assured me that it was all right.

After tea he took me over such parts of the house as it was safe to visit, but I shall make no attempt to describe most of this pilgrimage. My memory carries dreary pictures of damp and decay, of dust and dirt, and cobwebs, mouldering walls and crumbling floors. The old place must have been a warren of secret rooms and passages, and he showed me those he had discovered. All I can say is that the refugees of the bad old days must have been very uncomfortable, and those who escaped deserved to.

One large room under the roof, which we visited, had once been a secret chamber. It was called the Chapel, and here Mass had been said in defiance of the law throughout part of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

'There must be a lot more secret rooms,' Vair remarked. 'Little Owen, who was a master at constructing such places, is known to have spent months here during the reign of

Elizabeth. The house was always being raided, and the raiders had little satisfaction.'

'They got the poor old cavalier,' I laughed.

'Oh, yes. But he was given away, or sold, by a servant. I've shown you the place where I'm almost sure he hid – behind where the bedhead used to be in the room called the King's Chamber. We'll see if we can find some more while you're here, if you like.'

It suddenly occurred to me that Vair had always called himself 'sensitive', or psychic, and it was perhaps natural of me to put on the non-committal smile of the polite sceptic and enquire if he had seen any ghosts. Rather to my surprise, he shook his head.

'No,' he answered; 'it isn't at all that kind of place. The house is quite friendly. I should have felt it at once if it had been otherwise.'

'But I should have thought with its history – '

'Ah, it's seen troubled days, but they were always nice people who lived here. There are no dreadful legends of bloodshed and cruelty.'

'There is the story of the cavalier,' I objected. 'Surely his ghost ought to haunt the place.'

'Why? He was a good man from all accounts and he died a man's death. Only troubled or wicked people linger about the scenes of their earth-life. When he was taken out and slaughtered all the hatred and blood-lust came from *outside.* If any impressions of those spent passions remain, they're not inside the house, and I don't want them inside.'

I smiled to myself, knowing that, from Vair's point of view, the house *ought* to be haunted, and his excuses for the non-appearance of a ghost or two struck me as ingenious but far-fetched.

'That's a pity,' I said, tongue in cheek. 'I quite hoped to be introduced to a Grey Lady or Spectre Cavalier.'

He frowned, knowing that I was laughing at him.

'Well, you won't be,' he said, 'unless – '

'Unless what?'

'Well, unless something happens to alter present conditions. If, for instance, we were to find something which someone long forgotten desired should remain hidden.'

'I see.'

'I doubt if you do. And I doubt if anything could be done now to disturb any of the Wellingfords in their long sleep. They seem to have been an ideal family; I haven't been able to find a word of scandal on any page of their history. Where there has once been bitterness and hatred, there you may look for ghosts. There was none here. All that came from outside. That frenzied desire, for instance, to trap and kill a man because he had fought for his king, long after his cause was well lost; that bitter bigotry which sought to prevent folk from worshipping according to their consciences. It all came from outside, I tell you!'

Vair's voice had risen. Like most men with no particular faith he respected all creeds, and religious intolerance always moved him to violent anger. Respect for his deadly seriousness kept my face grave.

'Do you mean just outside?' I asked.

'How do I know? And so long as they remain outside what does it matter? I assure you, I don't want them brought in.'

To my relief, he then veered away from a subject which was hardly within my scope of conversation. There was little of the mystic in me. All the same, when at last I retired to bed in Lady Ursula's nursery, I was glad to remember that Vair had given the house a clean bill of health in the psychic sense. By the time I had been Vair's guest for twenty-four hours I had begun to feel with him that the old ruin had a kindly and friendly atmosphere, in spite of its apparent gloom, and that this might have been the legacy of good people who had lived and died within its walls.

At the risk of giving this narrative an air of being disconnected, I must pass hurriedly over the next two or three days of my visit, for they brought forth little that is worth recording. Sometimes Vair did a little painting, and then his preoccupation drove me to my own work. We did a little fishing and sometimes walked three-quarters of a mile to the Wellingford Arms where, according to Vair, who accounted himself an expert, the bitter beer was better than the average. Sometimes we risked our necks on rickety stairs and crumbling

floors, looking for more secret hiding-places, an occupation in which I soon became infected with some of Vair's schoolboy zest.

The place was quiet enough during the day, but the villas and bungalows which had marched almost to the edge of the moat made themselves audible at night. Every Lyndhurst and Balmoral seemed able to boast of a musical daughter or a powerful gramophone. The effect of sitting in one of those dignified old rooms with the windows open and hearing echoes from the musical comedies was grotesque in the extreme. Vair had evidently grown used to it, for he made no comment.

I had arrived on a Saturday, and it was on the afternoon of the Tuesday following that, between us, we made a discovery of historical interest; a discovery which we came afterwards bitterly to regret having made. We were on the first-floor landing, where long windows, deep in a recess, looked out over the Wellingford Park estate, when Vair mentioned that he had never examined the window-seats.

'Sliding panels,' he said, 'certainly have existed, but they belong mostly to fiction. They were too hard to construct and too easily discovered. Take the five hiding-places you've seen in this house. Three of them are behind fireplaces, one under the stairs, and the other must have been masked at one time by the head of a bedstead. Window-seats were very often used, and this one looks likely. Let's try it.'

We rapped it with our knuckles and, although it did not sound hollow, there was obviously an empty space beneath it. We pushed and tugged and teased the surface of the wood with our fingers. And suddenly I saw a crack widen, and part of the seat which had fitted into the rest of the woodwork as neatly as a drawer came away in my hands, and we stared at each other with laughter and curiosity in our eyes.

'Hallo, what's this!' Vair exclaimed.

The cavity disclosed was very small. It was obviously not the entrance to any place of concealment capable of holding a human being. I lit a match and thrust it down into the darkness. Then cheek by jowl we peered together into a cavity no more than three feet deep.

'Nothing here,' I said, breaking cobwebs as I moved my wrist to and fro.

'Isn't there!' exclaimed Vair.

He brushed me aside and his arm disappeared up to the shoulder. His hand was black when he drew it forth, and an end of something like a black rag was between his fingers. It was an old piece of silk, so rotten with age that it almost crumbled under our touch; but when we had blown on it and brushed it with our fingers we saw that it owed its present colour to the dirt of ages, and that it had once been green. On the instant the old tale leaped into the minds of both of us, and we exclaimed together:

'The Green Scarf!'

I forget what we said for the first minute or two. We were both excited and elated. There is some peculiar pleasure, difficult to analyse or explain, in discovering a relic which serves to corroborate some old tale or passage of ancient history. We neither of us doubted that we had discovered the green scarf by which Sir Peter Wellingford had been betrayed nearly three hundred years before.

'The traitor must have kept it here in readiness,' said Vair, his eyes dancing, 'and when he'd signalled he dropped it back again, and there it's lain from that day to this.'

'And most likely,' I added, taking the relic from his hands, 'this is the very window he waved from.'

The window was open and I leaned out and let the dingy rag flutter from my hand in the warm afternoon breeze.

'Don't!' said Vair sharply, and pulled me back.

The silk was so rotten with age that even the weak breeze tore it slightly, and I thought at the time that Vair's sharp 'Don't!' was uttered because of the damage I had unwittingly done. It was a relic of treachery and bloodshed, but we both regarded it with a queer sort of reverence, as if it were associated with something sacred.

I should think an hour must have passed before we mentioned anything else. We were both agreed that one of us should write to a newspaper announcing our discovery and that the scarf should be cleaned by an expert and offered to a museum. One remark of Vair's struck me at the time as a little strange, but the full force of it did not come to me until some hours later.

'I wish you hadn't waved it out of the window,' he said.

'It's what that damned traitor did. That's what made you do it, of course – trying to re-enact part of an old tragedy.'

'I don't see that it matters,' I returned lightly. 'Nobody saw.'

He turned on me at once.

'*How do you know?*' he demanded sharply.

I could not help laughing then.

'My dear fellow,' I exclaimed, 'are you afraid that the wife or daughter of one of your neighbours will think – '

'I wasn't thinking of *them*,' he returned curtly. 'When that rag was waved out of that window nearly three hundred years ago, you know what happened, you know what it brought into the house.'

I thought I had caught the drift of his meaning. Vair had always declined to walk under ladders or make the thirteenth of a party, and he was unhappy for days after he had spilled the contents of a salt-cellar.

'Oh, don't be an ass, Vair,' I begged. 'If there's any ill-luck about I give it leave to attack me and leave you alone.'

He did not answer, and in a few minutes the incident had passed temporarily from my mind.

I have tried to tell this story so many times by word of mouth, and been compelled at this point to pause and hesitate, as now I am compelled to pause and think. It is not that my memory fails me; memory, indeed, serves me all too well. But hereabouts I am brought to realize the failure of my small command of words. A bad speaker can at least convey something otherwise unexpressed by look, gesture, hesitation, tone of voice. But with nothing but pen, ink, paper, and a limited vocabulary, I see little chance of giving an adequate account of what happened to us that night; of how, with the twilight, depression was laid upon us, straw by straw, and how with the coming of darkness horror was laid upon us, load by load.

Even before supper I found myself restless and ill at ease. Something began to weigh upon my spirit as if my mind carried the knowledge of some ordeal which I had presently to face. Of course, I put it down to an attack of 'liver' and made up my mind to forget it. The intention was good, but it

was unjustified by the desired result.

My discovery that Vair was suffering from a similar malaise did not help my own case. His spirits were far below normal, and I think our mutual discovery that the other was 'below form' added weight to that which was already dragging at our hearts. To make matters worse we each began to act for the other's benefit, to force laughter, to crack heavy jokes, and make cumbersome epigrams. But when at twilight we lit the lamp and sat down to supper we tacitly agreed to give up pretending.

'Do you feel that there's a weight crushing you whenever there's thunder about?' Vair asked suddenly.

I was glad to think of some excuse to account for my mood and answer quickly:

'Yes, very often. And I wouldn't mind betting there's some thunder about tonight.'

Vair looked at me and seemed suddenly to change his mind over what he had been about to say. He shook his head.

'The glass hasn't gone down.'

I rose from the table without apology, went to the window, pulled aside the curtains, and looked out. It was just after sunset on a very perfect May evening. There was a red glow in the west, and around this glow there was an area of sky which was almost apple-green. This merged into a very deep blue in which one or two pale stars were already beginning to play hide-and-seek.

'No,' I agreed grudgingly, 'there isn't a cloud in the sky. Still, storms come up very quickly.'

'Yes,' said Vair, 'and so do other things.'

My lips moved to ask him what he meant, but I thought better of it. Whatever morbid imaginings he might be entertaining, they were scarcely likely to help my own mood. We ate in silence, continuing thus for a long time before I forced a laugh and exclaimed:

'Well, we're a jolly pair, aren't we? What the devil's the matter with us this evening? I only wish I knew.'

'I only wish I didn't think I know,' he answered strangely.

'Well, what do you think – '

'I think we ought to go out somewhere tonight and stay out.'

'Why? You haven't felt like this before, have you?'

'No. And it's because I haven't felt like this before – '

He came to another sudden pause, and we looked into each other's faces for a moment before he lowered his gaze.

'Now, look here,' I said, trying to keep my voice steady, 'let's be as honest as we can and try to analyse this thing. I'll say it first. We're both afraid of something.'

He went a step further.

'We're both afraid of the same thing,' he said. 'Well, what is it, then? Let's find it out and confront it. When a horse shies at a tree you lead him up to it to show him that it's only a tree.'

'If it happens to be a tree or something like a tree. But if it isn't . . . Look here, let's go out. Straight away now, while there's time. They've got bedrooms at the Wellingford Arms. Let's go and spend the night there.'

With all my heart I wanted to. But Pride borrowed the voice of Reason and spoke for me.

'Oh, don't let's make fools of ourselves,' I urged. 'I for one don't want to truckle to my nerves. If we give way like this once we shall always be doing it.'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Let's have a drink.'

He brought out the whisky. I am a temperate man with a weak head for spirits, and I admit that I exceeded my usual allowance, but it made no more difference to me than if it were water. We sat facing each other gloomily in silence which became increasingly difficult to break.

The unusual quality of this silence had already begun to impress me when Vair mentioned it, as if my thought had communicated itself to him.

'Don't you notice how extraordinarily still everything seems?' he asked presently.

'Yes,' I agreed, and snatched suddenly at a straw. 'The silence before the storm. There *is* a storm about, you see.'

He shook his head.

'No,' he said. 'It isn't that kind of stillness.'

And then, with a little leap of the heart and a tingling of the nostrils I suddenly realized a fact which seemed to me inexpressibly ugly. This stillness was not the hush of Nature before some electrical disturbance. For some time past we had

heard no sound at all from the outer world. The gramophones and pianos in the little houses around us were all silent. It was the hour when at many houses on the estate hosts and guests were parting for the night, yet there was not the faint echo of a voice, nor the comfortable workaday sound of a car droning along a road. It may seem ludicrous, but I would have given a hundred pounds just then to hear the distant shunting of a train.

Vair rose suddenly, went to the window and looked out. I followed him. For some while now it had been completely dark. Overhead in a very clear sky the stars looked peacefully into our troubled eyes.

'No storm about,' said Vair shortly.

He heard me catch my breath, and a moment later he was aware of what I had already perceived.

'Look! There aren't any lights! There isn't a light anywhere!'

It was true. The hour was not late, and yet from the rows of houses which began not so many yards distant, not a light was visible, nor was it possible to discern an outline of roof or chimney against the sky. We had been cut off from the lights and sounds of the outside world as completely as if we were in a cavern miles under the ground, save that our isolation – I can think of no other word – was lateral.

Vair's voice had risen high and thin. He made no effort to disguise the terror in it.

'There must be some fog about,' I said; and I was so anxious lest my voice should sound like Vair's that I spoke out of the base of my chest.

'Fog! Look, man!'

I looked. Truly there was not the least sign of fog or mist. Until we raised our eyes to the sky we stared into impenetrable, featureless darkness.

Vair let the window curtains fall from his hand. He turned to me in the oppressive stillness, and his face worked until by an effort he controlled the muscles.

'Try to tell me,' he said hoarsely, '*what* you've been feeling all the evening.'

'How can I? The same as you, I suppose!' A reminiscence of soldiering came back to me. 'It's been like waiting to go

over the top. A horrible aching anxiety. No, something more than that. A sense of being trapped, of being surrounded – '

'Surrounded!' He caught up the word with a cry. 'That's just what you are! That's just what we both are!'

I drew him away from the curtained window.

'Surrounded! By what?' I made myself ask.

He spread out his hands and shook them helplessly.

'The Powers of Darkness, Hatred, Blood-lust, Intolerance – they were all waiting, waiting for the signal. Do you think these things die like spent matches? Do you think the black act of treachery, which brought them into this house, left nothing behind it? *They* were waiting – all these years – I tell you!' Suddenly he bared his teeth at me. 'You fool, to have waved that rag at them!'

Just for a moment I felt my brain turning like a wheel, but I made a fight for my sanity and won it back.

'Look here,' I said, 'for God's sake don't let's behave like madmen. Let's get out of it if the house is going to affect us like this.'

He stared back at me, giving me a look which I could not read.

'No,' he muttered; 'you wanted to stay.'

'Let's go down to the Wellingford Arms.'

'They're closed now.'

'It doesn't matter. They know you. They'll open for you.'

I found myself lusting for the world beyond that unnatural girdle of darkness. The Wellingford Arms, with its vulgar tin advertisement of Somebody's Beer, and Somebody Else's Whisky, and its framed Christmas Number plates – at least there was sanity there.

But Vair suddenly turned on me the eyes of a hunted animal.

'You fool!' he burst out. 'It's too late! We can't pass through *Them*!'

'What do you mean?' I faltered.

'They're all around us. You know it, too. They'll break in – in their own good time – as they did before. We're trapped, I tell you!'

Against my will, and Heaven knows how hard I fought for disbelief, Vair had captured my powers of reason. In theory,

if not in action, I was now prepared to follow him like a child.

'What do they want?' I stammered.

'Us! One of us or both! What did Murder and Hatred and Blood-lust ever want but sacrifice?'

He fairly spat the words at me and I seized his arm.

'Come on,' I said, 'we're going to get out of this. We're going to run the gauntlet.'

'Ah,' said Vair thickly. 'If we can.'

We must have crossed the hall, although I do not remember it. My next recollection is of helping Vair in his fumbling with the bolts and lock of the great door. We wrenched it open and stood looking at an opaque wall of darkness.

I tried to force myself across the threshold, only to find myself standing rigid. As in a nightmare, my legs were shackled so that I could not move a step forward, but although terror clawed at me like a wild beast, my senses were keenly and even painfully alert.

I knew that this belt of darkness around the house was alive with whisperings and movements, with all manner of stealthiness, which lurked only just beyond the horizon of vision and the limits of hearing. And as I stood straining eyes and ears I knew that the barriers must soon break and that I should both see and hear.

We stood thus a long while on the edge of the threshold we could not pass, but whether it were seconds or minutes I could not say. To us it seemed hours ere the darkness passed, melting into the living forms of men. We could *see*, and there was movement everywhere; we could *hear*, and voices were shouting orders, although the actual words eluded us. They were human voices with strange nasal intonations, snarling and shouting. Even in my extremity I remembered having heard that the soldiery of Cromwell had affected a hideous nasal accent. And now the darkness was sundered and shivered by a score of lights, the lights of naked torches which nodded to the rhythm of men marching. I saw the glint of them on the metal heads of pikes, and on the long barrels of muskets outlined clearly now against a naked sky of stars.

Terror may bind a man to the spot, but another turn of the rack may torture him back into motion. So it was with

us. Blind instinct alone made me slam the great door and shoot the nearest heavy bolt. I saw Vair groping for me like a tear-blinded child and I took his arm. We ran futilely back into the room we had vacated and crouched in the corner farthest from the door, while great noises like thunder began to reverberate through the house, as pike-handles and musket-butts crashed sickeningly on the great outer door.

We must both have taken leave of reason then, for neither Vair nor I can remember anything more until the great nail-studded door, smashed off its hinges, fell on to the broken flags of the hall with the loudest crash of all. The tramp of feet, mingled with the sound of arms carelessly handled, thudding against the floor and wall, and with the sharp nasal snarling of voices. In a moment it seemed they were everywhere – in the hall, on the main staircase, in the room over our heads.

Vair had all this time the grip of a madman on my wrist, and suddenly he leaned to me and screamed into my ear:

'The Chapel . . . under the roof . . . it's consecrated . . . there's a chance . . . there's a chance, I tell you . . .'

'They're on the stairs!' I cried back in my despair.

'The back stairs! Come on!'

A second door in the old room gave access to a passage leading to the back stairs. Those stairs we knew to be unsafe, but ordinary human peril was something far beyond and beneath our consideration. I remember the rumble and murmur of sounds about the house as we rushed out into the passage. Footfalls and voices sounded everywhere, and musket-butts were smiting heavily against stairs and walls. As we stumbled and ran I expected at every step to be seized and overwhelmed by some horrible and nameless Power.

How we reached the attics I cannot say. The narrow, crumbling staircase creaked and swayed under us, and once I went down thigh deep through a rotten stair, with splinters of hard wood tearing clothes and flesh. But we were near the top ere the hunt had scented their game and sounds of pursuit began to clamour behind us.

Vair forced open the door of the little room which had once been a chapel. I blundered in over his body, which lay prone just across the threshold. He had fallen unconscious, and I had to force his legs aside before I could close the door.

I slammed it to in the faces of vague forms which filled the passage to the stair-head, and drove home the wooden bolt inside. And then it seemed to me that our pursuers recoiled from that closed door like a great wave from the base of a cliff and ugly cries outside died down to uneasy whisperings; and instinctively I knew that we were safe.

I must have fainted then, for I remember nothing more until I woke in bright sunlight. Vair was sitting beside me, watching me, with a chalk-like face. We hardly spoke, but sought each other's hands like frightened children.

Eventually we nerved ourselves to go downstairs into the ruin and disorder of the old house, through which, one might have thought, a whirlwind had passed during the night.

THE HOUSE OF DESOLATION

Alan Griff

I

The door which opened for Lady Merle revealed a beautiful hall, old and large, paved with alternate squares of white marble and black. It was sparsely furnished: the footman who held the door, in his grey livery, seemed to emphasize its economy. A carpet of rich black at the far end led to a staircase, wide, with shallow steps, guarded by a banister of hammered iron but otherwise as naked and impressive as the hall. Somewhere, away in the house, a clock struck four, and Lady Merle murmured, 'Mr Neath said three. I am afraid we have been delayed by the mist.'

The man inclined his head, then pushed gently a corner-panel from which a maid stepped out, of the same silence and gravity, dressed also in grey. She dropped a curtsy to the visitor and preceded her up the shallow stairs, along a corridor of figured oak, and into a bedroom most magnificently proportioned. It was a high room, simple, straight, lit by candles, its curtains drawn. The charm of the inlaid tables, the sweetness of the arched recess with its glazed and columned cupboard, the form of the chairs and the perfection of every piece came upon Lady Merle in a delight of discovery. She flitted about, making vague sounds, until she found herself looking into a sunk glass where the shadows condensed and grew queer. Awhile, before that, she paused. A tiny shiver shook her.

'My child has gone round with the maid and the chauffeur,' she said uneasily. 'I want her to be brought to me in the drawing-room the moment she comes in.'

The girl curtsied again and departed, leaving the visitor with the shadows of the sunk glass still in her mind. The room was beautiful – yes – but it had a cold beauty, a Lenten beauty as of snowdrops or narcissi. And why was the house so quiet? Lady Merle suddenly thought of it, standing forlorn in the midst of its Cambridgeshire miles, swathed in white mist, like

a house seen in a dream. Human hands long ago scattered loveliness all over it, yet the place was unhappy. Not a word had been spoken to her upon her arrival, no one had met her save sad, chill servants. Was it any wonder that Barbara Gretton died here? Neath was a strange man, exact in the quality and ordering of his house, intensely subtle in his grasp of mental reactions; nevertheless, sharp and hard as a stone. Lady Merle took out his letter of invitation and examined the scrawl, already fading in a way that suggested the use of watered ink: 'The sixteenth anniversary of my marriage to Barbara . . . a few friends of those days . . . Colonel Edgbaston, Mr and Mrs Moore, John and Flora Howett, Miss Thriplow . . . your own adorable little daughter, if you will bring her . . . I count upon you more than these words can convey . . .' The letter was sincere enough, but why should he become absorbed in his wife's memory when he had treated her always as a foe? Regret? The frustrated desires of age? Lady Merle allowed the paper to slip to the floor, and sat down, meditating deeply. The quietness began to beat once more in her ears and she fancied she could see old Mr Neath bowing enigmatically in the candle-light at the foot of the bed.

She rose, went out into the corridor which was now quite dark. She descended the stairs but, with the footman absent, the hall seemed bleaker than ever and the fanlight over the door had turned dull. For a space she hovered, half ashamed of her flight, considering direction, then she tried a passage on the left. It wound interminably past silent rooms, its walls decorated very freely by antlered heads, each exhibiting that patient sneer which is the vengeance of the hunted and the stuffed. No lamps were lit, no windows were open. She entered one of the rooms, only to find it sheeted and faintly foul like an abode of the dead. Her uneasiness changed to terror: she called aloud, and in answer a door was flung back at the end of the passage and light streamed towards her.

'Hullo, hullo!' she said, almost weeping with relief, for there in the drawing-room, exactly as the letter had promised, were John and Flora Howett and Laurie Moore and his wife, ruddy in the glow of an enormous fire, staring after Colonel Edgbaston who had sprung up at her cry.

'Is it really you, my dear?' the Colonel began. 'My eyes

are so blinded by gazing at that mist beyond the windscreen I can hardly believe 'em. You look tired.'

'Scared!' Lady Merle exclaimed. 'The place might be a morgue. Does Neath employ no one but mutes these days? They bowed and bobbed and showed me to my room – and vanished completely just as it was getting dark!'

She pulled a chair nearer the blaze, struggling for mastery over the emotions which assailed her. There were perhaps a dozen candles about, two in silver sticks on the mantel and several in sconces, flooding the room quite brilliantly and showing its unusual shape. It was nearly circular, having a domed ceiling painted cream, and windows all along the curve of one wall. The deeply woven rugs, the rare flowers superbly placed, the gay hangings and bright silver certainly helped this roundness to spread an air of comfort; but when Lady Merle observed that no less than five doors opened out of the room her thoughts went travelling once more, down the corridors they served, radiating like weird and wicked arteries in the gloom. It was a dismal house: despite the perfection of detail she was sure it was a dismal house.

Alarm also had touched her fellow guests. They clung round the fire in an anxious sort of way, their faces set, their words fumbling tactfully with the thing that had surprised them. Shortly after three Jason the butler had entered and apologized for Mr Neath's absence, saying he had gone by car into Cambridge upon some urgent business just before luncheon. 'But he has come back, angel!' Laurie Moore cried in a comic voice. 'I saw him not ten minutes ago going into a room on the first floor.' Jason's expression, then, had been odd. He bowed very stiffly, and with an unanswerable, 'Some mistake, I'm sure, sir,' had departed, leaving the company perplexed. All were certain that Neath was in the house. Mr and Mrs Howett, arriving promptly at three o'clock, had seen him from the hall looking over the banisters. John Howett had waved to him, but Neath seemed to take offence at his friendly action and hurried off. The evidence grew stronger: Flora Howett saw him emerge from the very room Laurie had seen him enter, and Mrs Moore volunteered the confession that her door had been standing slightly ajar and that

Mr Neath had rapped very softly on it and looked in and smiled. Why, then, was Jason sent with so extraordinary an excuse? The Colonel, it was true, had not seen Neath, but he had met his dog, Tingo, the companion of his every movement, and had even called to the animal without getting a response.

'Oh, Jason must be a bit off it!' Laurie said. 'Probably the old boy came in whilst he was kissing the third parlour-maid. Neath didn't barge into your room, Lady Merle, did he?'

'No.' Lady Merle was definite. The quiet, ugly memory stalked up to her again, but she thrust it aside. 'I should say there would be no difficulty in entering this house unseen by servants. There's scarcely a light in the place beyond these candles, and most of the rooms are sheeted and shut.'

The firelit faces turned to her in sudden dismay.

'Shut?' the Colonel queried. 'Are you certain, my dear?'

He went no further, for at that instant Lady Merle's child, Margaret, came bounding in, followed by Lady Merle's maid.

'Mummy, Mummy, I've got a spring in my foot! Nanny says it's with sitting in the car. Look! Look!'

The child held up the leg in which circulation had suffered a check, and dashed it upon the carpet, repeating the movement a number of times, dancing about, laughing.

'Be more gentle, my lamb,' Lady Merle remonstrated. 'We call that pins-and-needles. It will pass in a moment. Margaret, *Margaret*, be still!'

Everyone was smiling, suspicion had vanished. A servant entered, rolling in tea on little low wagons, and the tinkle of spoons and the accomplished cutting of cake by Mr Howett took them all into a mood of superficial content. Colonel Edgbaston was encouraged to speak of a former visit to the house, when Barbara was alive and a party of guests had decided that manor-folk ought to attend the manor-church service. They applied to Neath for books, of which he had a fine collection, bought in many cases for the sake of their bindings rather than their contents, and as the first hymn was announced he produced some of these gorgeous objects and handed them round. 'They were anything but devotional

books,' the Colonel concluded. 'Mine was full of outlandish formulæ, lilies plucked in the beams of the new moon, potion-brewing, and the like, so I turned to Barbara, who also was slyly amused. "I've got Geography," she whispered, "what have you got?"'

'Jografy! Jografy! Jografy!' Margaret chanted, leaping gaily, ready for the horseplay with which children greet the night; but somewhere, away in the house, a clock struck six and Lady Merle's maid returned.

'Have her bed put into my room, Gunson,' the mother said. 'I want her with me tonight.'

Time dragged its slow length. The clock proclaimed six-thirty and seven, but no host appeared. Lady Merle went upstairs to make sure her instructions were carried out, and she came back to the circular chamber as to a prison. The Colonel's tale had brought Barbara into the conversation, poor Barbara Gretton, frail and fair, whose marriage to Neath they were so strangely commemorating. All had known her from childhood, each one had received a very cogent letter from the host begging them to week-end in Cambridgeshire and help him to honour her memory; but suspicion was harshening their judgement now. It was useless to evade the truth that she had died unhappily. At first, indeed, Neath had treated her with the deepest respect, offered her ease and riches and delight, but as soon as it became sure she was childless he withdrew. He devoted himself to doubtful studies, spent colossal sums in the pursuit of the occult, and betrayed no emotion when the years grew too heavy for her. None of the company had met her during this last period, and her letters were few, but every possibility was examined in the talk. Neath's rude absence gave occasion and the guests discussed him, openly. They began to ask if regret were really likely in such a man. They grew indignant and sent again for Jason.

Had Mr Neath come back yet? He was sorry: no. Could enquiries be made through the phone? He was sorry: there was no instrument in the house. Talk languished, the company became almost stupefied, and for a long time the only sound in the room was the crackling of the fire. Lady Merle took to

prowling to and fro, watching the ruddy lights on the dome of the ceiling and the idiotic mantel-shadow advancing and receding there as the flames moved. She pressed her forehead to one of the window-panes; and she was seized by a pity for the sheep out in the tufted park, facing up to the mist, a few lying down, but the majority standing patient and very still. The sense of the house was like that, she thought: the guests were patient as the sheep were, facing up to the menace which would presently pass and leave them untouched.

'Dinner is served.' Jason's voice quavered as he made the announcement, and apprehension was somehow manifest in his figure. 'Mr Neath said we were to serve at this hour if he had not returned.'

The Colonel offered his arm to Lady Merle. They went across to the dining-room where a lavish table awaited them, of oak and flowers, tall bottles and silver, where from their branched sticks the candles put a short flame in each knife and scattered high-lights among the glasses. The chair at the head was empty. Throughout the meal it threatened them, as Banquo's chair had menaced the Scottish King. Laurie Moore bombarded it with jests, but its import steadily grew more terrible and during the fish course a candle suddenly went out and the man who was serving gave a little cry and dropped his fork and fled. It was too much for the company's overwrought nerves. Everyone stood up. Colonel Edgbaston rang the bell and when Jason appeared he pointed silently to the blackened wick. He might no less horribly have been pointing to an open grave, for the butler simply froze where he stood. At the Colonel's sharp enquiry, however, he struck a match to light it again. As he did so the very next candle in the stick also went out, and Jason sprang back as though stung.

'It's Mr Neath!' he cried in wildest panic. 'It's the master! the master!'

'What the devil do you mean?' the Colonel demanded. 'Neath is miles away in Cambridge.'

'You might tell us the truth at once, Jason,' Lady Merle coldly said. 'You're as white as a sheet.'

'He is in Cambridge, m'lady,' the terror-stricken butler

replied, 'and has been these seven weeks. He's – he's in the cemetery.'

Laurie Moore leaned far across the table, upsetting a glass and sending a tongue of purple wine over the cloth. 'He's not – ?'

'Yes, sir,' Jason said. 'Mr Neath's dead, sir.'

II

Softly, slowly, in the pause that followed, footsteps could be heard approaching down the corridor. Jason turned his face towards them, with a curious inward stare, the whole of his body taut.

'Who is that, walking?' snapped Colonel Edgbaston. 'Come, Jason; we're too old to believe in ghosts.'

The butler's answer, when it came, was as simple as a child's. 'It is only Mr Neath.'

Flora Howett screamed and stepped back against the table.

'Jason, Jason!' Laurie cried. 'The ladies don't appreciate your odd humour. If that is Mr Neath, go and bring him here: we've been waiting for him all the evening, you know.'

'It's nonsense,' Lady Merle said. 'Probably one of the servants is carrying lamps.'

The footsteps drew nearer; then there was a loud rap on the door.

'Go on, Jason,' Laurie Moore exclaimed. 'We want to see the old boy.'

'Dead or alive,' said Mr Howett.

But the Colonel was intent on exposing the hoax. He marched across and without a tremor flung open the door. 'Nothing!' he announced. 'Two lamps and an empty corridor. Will you oblige us, Jason, by stepping into the drawing-room and explaining yourself?'

His courage restored confidence, and Flora Howett led the way. The stir of the returning guests sent the candles of the circular room fluttering madly, casting long shadows upon the walls and doubled outlines on to the dome of the roof. The place seemed homely after the chill and doubt of the big

dining-room, and the Colonel dropped into his chair with a sigh.

'You've been making some very remarkable statements, of course, Jason,' he said. 'I suppose you can prove 'em?'

'No, sir.'

'What the blazes do you mean – no, sir?'

'Well, sir, we all saw the empty corridor, sir.'

'But that Neath – ah – that Neath is dead, although he invited each one of us here by letter?'

'I can only say it is so, sir. The funeral was kept quiet by his order, but there is a small note in one or two of the papers, sir, and the will has been properly proved – '

'And the letters?'

At that question terror seemed to come down upon the butler once more. 'If you please, sir: I posted them,' he whispered, looking over his shoulder with something of the former inward stare. 'It was his wish, sir.'

'But surely, Jason, it was a very singular wish,' John Howett broke in, 'and perhaps even more singular of you to fulfil it. Do Mr Neath's executors know?'

The firelit circle drew closer.

'No, sir. It was a secret order he gave me just before he died. He – ' Again the butler stopped and looked round with his quite extraordinary stare, clenching and unclenching his fists in a mute agony.

'He offered you money?' the Colonel asked. 'Left you a small legacy?'

'A large one, sir, for *this*.'

'Getting us here?'

'For posting the letters he wrote months ago. He made me promise, on oath, on a very strong oath, sir; and he said – '

'Yes?'

'That if I failed him, sir, he'd come again, sir . . .'

A candle winked just then and a wave of panic went over the company.

'I think you used to assist Mr Neath in his – experiments, Jason,' Lady Merle said in the cold voice she was unable to avoid when she was alarmed. 'Isn't it possible that your master's whims and the stillness of this enormous house, so

often surrounded by mist, have worried you a little? A few minutes back we heard a footman walking, and you at once believed it was Mr Neath.'

'It couldn't be, m'lady: I see that now. I did what I promised. Why *should* he come?'

'You believe if he "came",' Laurie Moore asked, 'it would only be for you?'

'No! No!' Jason cried loudly. 'I can tell now it would be for something else! That's why he chose you all so carefully. Miss Thriplow knew him too well: she guessed.'

'By thunder!' the Colonel took him up. 'His letter mentioned Miss Thriplow. Why did she refuse?'

'She didn't refuse, sir. She didn't reply at all. She guessed.'

'There was some little affair between them,' Flora Howett said: 'before the war.'

'Yes, ma'am. And I never thought she'd come here again. She knew the master, Miss Thriplow did.'

'Knew he was dead before the letter was sent?'

'No, ma'am. She lived too far away. If you'll notice, ma'am, you all come from a distance: Lady Merle from Warwick, Colonel Edgbaston from Cheltenham, yourselves from Hereford, and Mr and Mrs Moore from the North. He designed it all wonderfully.'

'But why?' Mr Howett asked.

'The anniversary of his wedding, sir. He talked of nothing else just before he died. He – '

The footsteps in the corridor broke out again, and Jason's face had an effect of turning grey. Slowly, half muffled, they approached. The fire suddenly began to die down, leaving the candles alone to flicker and dance in the gloom; and it became present to the mind of everyone that should those candles, by some gust, be blown out, then indeed would horror stalk upon them, forcing them to scream and cry aloud like children in a nursery panic. But the candles did not go out. The footsteps came nearer and passed away, the fire resumed its glow.

'Please can you excuse me now, sir,' Jason begged in a tiny voice. 'The whole staff is on edge, sir: we've been hearing those footsteps for weeks, sir, and the executors will not let us go until the end of the month because of the will. We just

hang together down there, sir. Mr Neath, he left us all money, but only one or two will stop to qualify for it after tonight.'

'Then all the servants guess?'

'Guess, sir! You saw Lush who was serving you with fish when the candle went out. They're all like that, sir, if a knife drops, sir.'

The Colonel waved him away with a quick impulse of sympathy; and again the company was left in the circular room, clinging uneasily round the fire, the questions on their lips more sinister than before. Jason's tale fitted with so much they had seen, his fears were so genuine, his answers so unstudied, that some sort of acceptance was inevitable. The clock, away in the house, struck hour after hour, but the talk went on and no solution was reached. Mr Howett proposed that they should drive all together from the place and spend the night in some Cambridge hotel: he went to look out of the window, but the mist forbade them, pressing against the panes almost eagerly. The time for bedroom candles came, and singly or in couples the guests glimmered away up the shallow stairs. Lady Merle entered her beautiful room and for some minutes stood looking down at her child, innocent in sleep. Could she believe all that she had heard? Was Margaret really in the midst of a situation unprecedented in all the memory of man? She undressed slowly and got into bed. She did not expect to sleep: round and round throbbed her thoughts, a whirlpool of anxieties. She heard the clock which was now like some taskmaster calling out the burdens still to be borne before she could order her car and drive along the crisp January roads in the comfort of the day. After a long time her thoughts became less definite: she mixed her sequences in a manner that preluded sleep, the silence became acceptable, the warmth of the bed seemed to rise and embrace her: everything faded.

Then a scream split her peace.

'Mummy, Mummy! There's a man in the room, a man, a horrible man!'

She was out of bed in a second. 'Nonsense, Margaret! You've been dreaming, my lamb.'

'A man, a man, such a horrible man,' the child whimpered. 'I found him stroking my hair, and when I held up my hand

it went right through his fingers. Mummy, I don't *like* men with smoky fingers!'

The poor child wept in the completest misery, and Lady Merle sought to comfort her. 'You *see* it was a dream, angel,' she said, though panic indeed had gripped her. 'No men have smoky fingers. No one could get in: the door is locked.'

'There!' Margaret screamed. 'There!'

And Lady Merle turned to see Mr Neath bowing enigmatically in the candle-light at the foot of the bed. 'You,' she whispered, and he smiled bitterly and walked off into the shadow.

Reason ended for her then. She threw on some clothes, wrapped Margaret in a dressing-gown, seized a candle and fled down the dreadful corridor. The staircase made her feel dizzy and sick. She thought she would never reach the circular room with her weeping burden; but at last she was there, wildly stirring the sunk fire, kindling the wicks, and sitting aquiver in the hugest blaze of light she could muster.

III

There were five doors in the room, and each in turn yielded its surprise. Barely ten minutes after her flight the second door was flung back and John and Flora Howett came through, John closing it behind him with the air of one shutting out a pursuing danger. Husband and wife seemed disconcerted to see Lady Merle sitting with her child by the fire: they were vaguely dressed, Flora was in a dressing-gown and Mr Howett's hair was ruffled and his tie askew. Once the door had been closed they appeared to shy at meeting a fellow guest and they put on negligent attitudes; Flora, indeed, affecting to treat their sudden arrival in the dead of night as a tremendous lark.

'Well, well!' she began. 'Who would think of meeting you here?'

Lady Merle said: 'Did you see Neath?'

'Why, yes,' Mr Howett replied, and instantly changed to the reality. 'He came into our room. It was pretty awful.'

'He smiled?'

'He grinned. Like this!'

John Howett was setting his features into an expression of amazing ferocity when the third door opened and Colonel Edgbaston appeared, thumbing his moustache, coughing characteristically.

'You folk here, eh?' he said. 'Neath get on your nerves? I hope nothing is wrong.'

'Everything is wrong,' Flora Howett declared.

'You mean – ah – you've seen him?'

Lady Merle said: 'We have all seen him. He is everywhere about this house, like a desolating cloud, like an ugly thought. We are marked down, for some strange reason, and we are helpless before him. How did he come to you, Colonel?'

The tough old warrior was taken aback by her intensity. 'I woke to find him leaning over me. "You are wanted in the drawing-room, dear Colonel," he said with the most blackguardly sneer. "Oh, dear Colonel, you are wanted so badly!" And he had gone before I could even sit up.'

'It all goes like a plan,' Mr Howett remarked. 'See how we gather here at this unusual hour, driven as sheep are driven. How long is it to daybreak?'

'My dear fellow, it is January!' the Colonel replied. 'The time is quarter to three.'

Words began to ring in Lady Merle's head: she fancied she could hear her own voice murmuring again, 'Mr Neath said three,' and an insupportable horror of the hour came upon her. If everything was planned, as John Howett imagined, then three o'clock without doubt was the time of climax. Mr Neath said three! She gathered a handful of Margaret's fair hair, agonized. 'What can we do?' she wailed. 'What *can* we do?'

The child began to whimper again. 'Take me home, Mummy! Let us go home.'

'Yes, something must be done now,' Colonel Edgbaston said; but the words were scarcely out of his mouth before the door nearest the windows burst open and Laurie Moore rushed in, clad in pyjamas.

'Has Neath come through here?' he shouted. 'We've been plagued by the footsteps all night, and just now I saw a figure moving down our corridor. Listen!'

The footsteps had broken out in Lady Merle's passage, slow and menacing, and Mrs Moore, who came in behind her husband, said: 'They are the same, Laurie. He has passed right through this room.'

'He has not!' Laurie exclaimed with a return to his normal self. 'I can see the whole thing now. Sit down, everyone, and have a nice peaceful smoke before turning in. We've been fooled by the butler.'

'How? Why?'

'Obviously,' Laurie said, lighting a cigarette at one of the wicks. 'Jason is out there now in the darkness, tramping up and down like a ninny. He wants to frighten us all away, for some little private business of his own. Perhaps he has murdered Mr Neath. Couldn't he have a man to stamp in each corridor? Couldn't Lush have made the footsteps, after he ran away from the dinner-table? What proof have we? It's a strange, forlorn old house and an extraordinary tale like Jason's would make anyone see ghosts in his bedroom. Come on, Colonel; come on, Howett: we must find this Mr Jason and talk to him again.'

The men were seized by his enthusiasm. Through three doors they went away, separating in the hope of finding him the quicker. 'Jason!' they called, in turn. 'Jason, you're wanted!' Their voices roared weirdly down the long dull corridors; then one by one they stopped. Their feet could be heard, running back. Their faces, when they re-entered the room, were ghastly.

'Neath is waiting out there,' Laurie Moore said in a hushed sort of whisper. 'Oh, it's Neath all right!'

'He was in my corridor, too,' Mr Howett almost screamed. 'I could not get past. He just stood in the midst of an unearthly coldness, and he wagged his head.'

'Steady, Howett, steady!' the Colonel protested. 'There is a child.'

All turned to her, but Margaret's head had fallen at a queer angle and she was fast asleep in her mother's arms. Lady Merle smiled wanly and stroked her hair. 'It is better so,' she murmured. 'Sleep cleanses the mind and brings freshness to the limbs . . .'

But to that room there were five doors, the last of which

now opened. Jason rushed through it, the image of terror, collarless, clad only in trousers and shirt. He made straight for the fire and he crouched there, suppliant, in the most abject pose.

'It's the master!' he groaned. 'He came into my room. Laughin' he was. And he said – '

'*What* did he say?' Lady Merle asked in the pause which the butler seemed unable to break.

'That he'd 'ave a child, m'lady!' Jason cried out at last in an enormous voice. 'All his life he waited, 'e said, and now – now he can get his wish!'

IV

A candle went out and another followed it, far from the fire. In a moment Laurie Moore had struck a match to relight both, but as he did so a couple near the windows flickered and died.

'He'll do that now, sir!' Jason exclaimed. 'He'll 'ave us in the darkness. Look!' he yelled, and four candles went out together, utterly defeating the match which Laurie carried.

The Colonel grabbed a candle from its stick and hurried with it to Laurie's aid. The effort was vain. Each candle expired now with a faint hiss and no power could rekindle the flame. It was as though invisible drops were falling; and the company was forced to sit in the grimmest silence, watching that tide of darkness creep towards them. The fire began to smoulder from flame into grey smoke, and in a little while the room was completely blacked out. No one spoke. A paralysis stole over feature and limb, so that when all five doors were thrown open and the house staff came crying in the company received it as would a collection of mummies. And presently, too, the servants fell silent.

Into this pause, so tense, so necromantic, walked the footsteps. A stupefying cold came with them, a long blast of iciness that seemed to reach from beyond the world. Then in a moment it passed, the footsteps faded away, the candles burned up, the fire took flame, and staff and butler and guests sat blinking at one another in a confusion which no words

could dispel. In all that house of desolation only one woman, Lady Merle, found voice.

'Margaret,' she sobbed gently, whilst two great tears coursed down her face. 'Wake up! Wake up! How can you lie there, my darling, so cold and so still?'

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

Sydney J. Bounds

The atmosphere in the Castle had turned sour. There was a chill in the air that hadn't been there an hour before; and it wasn't just because the local man had lost.

Doug Hone admitted to himself it was his own fault. He knew, and always forgot in the heat of battle, that his obsession showed; it upset people. Of course he was good. There was no point in denying that – but he didn't have to ram it down everyone's throat, did he?

He had always been the same about chess. Nothing mattered except that he won; good manners ceased to exist.

Hone, on holiday and driving down from London to Somerset, had stopped at a village off the main road and popped into the Castle for a drink and a meal. Fascinated to find that the local game was not darts or skittles but chess, he'd promptly booked in for the night, bought a round of drinks and got himself invited to a game.

He'd won the first game, and the second – and now his third. And the atmosphere had soured the moment he opened his big mouth and began to talk about his London club and the brilliant games he'd played.

He looked round for something to relieve the tension. The room was neat and snug with wood panelling and four tables in the middle. A bench ran along one wall and there was a door leading to a passage. A mirror hung behind the bar counter on which was perched a glass case containing an old chess set.

Hone had noticed it earlier, when he entered, but only casually; now he went over and inspected it.

'Nice pieces,' he commented, struggling to inject some warmth into his voice.

They were too. Castles that looked like real castles, knights on horseback, bishops with mitres, both kings and queens properly crowned. As he admired the workmanship, he coveted the set for his collection.

'Hand-carved, of course. Are they for sale?'

'No, mister, that there set's not for sale.' It was his last opponent speaking. 'That be old Stew's set.'

Taverner, the innkeeper, frowned and called hastily: 'Last drinks . . . you want one, Bert?'

Hone volunteered to buy a round but no one was interested. He ordered a final gin for himself.

Bert moved closer, a sly look on his face. 'Ar, doubt you'd beat old Stew – '

Taverner turned, voice sharp. 'Cut that out, Bert.'

Bert stared past him, into the mirror. 'It's not your set, it's the property of the club. And we can take our custom elsewhere.' He turned back to the visitor. 'Stew was the local champion, good as any London man – that's his picture on the wall.'

Hone glanced at a faded print in a black frame. It showed an old man with white hair and moustache sucking on a briar pipe; he didn't look a nice old man. Printed in neat lettering beneath was the legend:

THOMAS STEWART
Club Champion 1959–1963

'Died of heart failure here in this very room,' Bert informed, 'in the middle of a game. No one's played with that set since. Haunted it is, them pieces move on their own. Old Stew still likes a game, you see.'

Hone mistook the information for a joke and laughed. 'A haunted chess set, that's a good one!'

Nobody else laughed. The atmosphere became even more strained.

'You willing to sit here at midnight, alone, mister?' Bert challenged. 'See for yourself if you ain't scared silly.'

Hone shrugged and sipped his gin. 'Suppose I do? What do I get out of it?'

Bert appeared to consider him at some length. 'Well, you fancy that set, don't you? You beat old Stew tonight and the set's yours. Club makes you a present of it.'

'And if your ghost doesn't show up?'

'Just stay and see,' Bert insisted.

Hone looked at the chess set. It was a fine set and worth a lot of money. 'All right, you're on. I'll play your ghost – and win.'

'I wouldn't be too sure about that,' Bert replied.

He brought a key from his pocket and unlocked the case. Reverently he took the pieces out and set them up on a board on the centre table. There was a chair each side.

'You don't mind black?' Bert asked. 'Old Stew signals he's ready by starting off.'

Hone drained his gin and returned the glass to the counter. 'I'm easy.'

Bert and the players left; the innkeeper locked and bolted the door.

'Are they serious?' Hone asked. 'I can really keep the set if I stay here till midnight?'

Taverner said: 'Forget it, Mr Hone. Go up to bed and forget about it, that's my advice.'

'Not me, I've never turned down a game in my life. And it's true, I do fancy this set.'

The innkeeper seemed on the point of saying something more, but he only shrugged, switched off the lights except for one above the centre table, and left through the door behind the bar.

Alone, Hone took up the pieces and examined them. A local wood, finely carved and hand-polished. And all he had to do was stay awake till midnight and the set was his. He was grinning, well-pleased with himself, as he sat down in the hard-backed chair on the black side of the board.

'Don't keep me waiting, Stew,' he murmured. He was tired from the drive and the three games he'd played and his head nodded . . .

A cold draught stroked the back of his neck, waking him with a start. He sat up, turning in the chair. The door from the passage was slowly closing.

'That you, Mr Taverner?' he called.

He received no answer.

Boards creaked as if someone walked across the floor from the door to the table. The chair opposite moved back, paused, then was drawn forward again. The village clock began to strike midnight.

Hone stared with disbelief at the empty chair, his skin prickling. A white pawn rose in the air, rapped sharply on the table. His scalp moved.

Hone stared blankly as White's king pawn slid forward two squares. He moistened his lips and countered pawn to king four himself. In the silence he thought he heard faint breathing across the table. He glanced round the room; he was truly alone. Nothing stirred in the shadowed corners beyond the circle of light over the chess table.

White's king-side knight rose in the air to sail over the pawns, moved two squares forward and one sideways. In a dream, Hone moved his queen knight.

White's bishop slid along the diagonal to knight five. The *Ruy Lopez.*

Hone moved a pawn to queen rook three and sniffed the air; he could have sworn someone was smoking. It had to be a trick – but how was it done?

Nerves quietening a little, he passed a hand carefully above the board; no black threads. He pushed back his chair and looked under the table; nothing. He lifted a piece and scraped the base with his pen-knife; no magnets.

Clever. He played on, trying to fathom the trick. The middle-game became complicated and he was forced to concentrate. His unknown opponent was not one to simplify by exchanging pieces. Hone was caught up in the game, realizing he was playing against someone worthy of his talent.

The invisible player, too, seemed wrought up. Once, the empty chair was pushed back and the sound of pacing feet echoed. Hone sat tense, his heart erratic – until he remembered there were such things as tape-recorders.

He forced his attention back to the game, determined to win and claim the set. White had gained a small advantage and in well-matched play that could be decisive.

A distant clock chimed once.

Hone began to sweat. The pressure was coming on him and he was forced to sacrifice a piece. He began to doubt he could win. His hand trembled as he moved his king out of danger. It wasn't fair. They were playing on his nerves with this ghost trick.

He fought on doggedly, knowing the best he could manage

was a stalemate.

White's passed pawn was going to reach its queening square; there was nothing he could do to stop it. Reluctant to resign, Hone dragged out the game. White's moves came at shorter intervals as confidence grew.

A castle pinned Black's king to the eighth rank. The new queen swooped down the board. Checkmate!

Doug Hone pushed back his chair, feeling savage. As he turned, his glance took in the mirror behind the bar counter. The reflection showed his opponent sitting over the board, gloating; an old man with white hair and moustache sucking on a briar pipe. He spun round to stare at the empty chair.

In the moment it took him to work out that he'd seen only a reflection of the picture on the wall, Hone's heart stopped. His body slumped across the table, spilling pieces as the room filled with mocking laughter.

THE ATTIC

Pamela Vincent

'Here it is. Now, what do you think of it?'

Frank proudly threw open the door at the top of the narrow stairs and there before her was the dim, dusty room that was to occupy her thoughts so menacingly for an eternity of days and nights.

Silent. Brooding. Waiting?

Sybil stood in the doorway and peered into every gloomy corner. *What* was it waiting for?

'You can't possibly come up here,' she said flatly.

Frank's face fell.

'Why ever not? It'll be fine when it's cleaned up.'

'It's not that –'

'What, then?'

Sybil stared uneasily at the beams which stretched across the arched space under the roof. Nothing there. What gave her the idea she'd seen a movement when there wasn't even a curtain to flick in the airless room? Not *mice*, please!

'What is it, Syb?' persisted Frank, puzzled.

She forced a laugh.

'It's so eerie up here. Sort of dead.'

'Oh well, if you don't like it –' Frank shrugged, and started down the stairs.

Dismayed, Sybil turned to follow – and again there was that shadow of a movement, a shape half-seen out of the corner of her eye . . .

Nothing. Only a speckly shaft of light from the dingy window.

With a final shudder, Sybil slammed the door and hurried after her fiancé.

'It's been a grand old house in its time.' Frank's eyes were pleading with her as he spoke.

In its time, yes. She'd been looking forward to starting married life in a tiny modern flat, but Frank's godmother had recently died and left him this decayed old terrace house in

an unfashionable square, and he – dear, impractical dreamer – had immediately seen himself as a prosperous landlord.

'We can make a fortune letting it in flatlets,' he had enthused, 'and live rent-free ourselves. And there's a marvellous attic where I can get out of your way and work.'

Sybil had smiled indulgently, but she hadn't felt happy. Now she had seen the house, she liked it even less.

'Darling, the house is too old,' she began, gently, 'it'll swallow up all our savings just making it habitable, never mind converting it, and we'll still be spending money on it all the time.'

'But the atmosphere, the solid, eternal feel about it,' persisted Frank. 'It's ours, our very own, not a little box that we pay for all our lives.'

What could a fiancée, very much in love, say to that? All the same . . .

'Well, I wish you'd forget the idea of shutting yourself up in that awful old attic, that's all. There's something downright unhealthy about that place.'

'Nonsense,' smiled Frank, 'it'll be all right when it's aired. You just want to keep me under your eye all the time.'

'Of course,' Sybil smiled back, and the subject was dropped for more interesting preoccupations.

But she couldn't forget how she'd felt in that long-disused room. It wasn't just the grime of a century and the smell of neglect, there was something more – well, *personal* about it, as if the room didn't want them. Didn't want *her*. Hated her.

She was being absurd. She just didn't like that house, that was all.

Yet sleep came reluctantly, and every time she drifted off she was there again in the attic, and the half-seen shape was with her. It was different now because she could see it clearly, hanging from a beam and gently swaying to and fro, to and fro – until she started into wakefulness, sick with dread.

The sunlit Sunday morning vanquished her fears of the night.

'Now I know how people drive themselves dotty,' she told herself, sternly. 'Let's face it, we wouldn't get much if we sold the damned house. *If* we could sell it.'

Determined to make the best of things, she hurried to meet

Frank so that they could go to the house again – their house! – and start making plans.

'We'll have to get professionals on the job,' Frank admitted.

Sybil tactfully said nothing.

'Still, perhaps we can fix up a couple of rooms for the time being?' added Frank, hopefully. 'With a roof over our heads, there's nothing to stop us getting married – '

'Yes, darling,' sighed Sybil, making for the antique kitchen.

It wasn't long before Frank announced he was going to slip up to his attic. Sybil's heart lurched. Then she gave herself a mental shake and spoke to him lightly enough:

'Go and play with your cobwebs on your own, then, while I see if I can coax this monster to boil a kettle without blowing up!'

But hardly had Frank clattered up the stairs before she found herself following him. She hesitated outside the attic door, her imagination taking over with the night's half-remembered dreams: suppose there really were a body, Frank's body, hanging from the beam, blotting out the square of light from the window and swaying – ?

There was a muffled sound from inside and Sybil flung open the door. Then she gasped and clutched at the wall. She was right, the light was screened by a body just as she had imagined it!

Frank turned, and sunshine dazzled her.

'Just trying to open the window,' he explained, 'but I need a tool.'

Sybil remained leaning weakly against the doorpost, gazing at the empty rafters.

'Darling, what's the matter?' Frank's voice was all concern as he hurried across to her.

'I was wondering – ' Sybil heard her own voice from an immeasurable distance – ' if anyone had ever hanged himself in this room.'

'What an extraordinary thing to say!'

'Frank, please, don't stay up here,' she said, urgently, pulling at his sleeve. 'To please me, darling, let's forget this room, lock it up. There's something horrible about it.'

Frank shook his head in bewilderment.

'I don't know what's got into you. I've never known you

to be unreasonable before.'

'I'm sorry, but there *is* something wrong with this place. I don't know whether it's haunted or what it is, but there's *evil* in the very atmosphere.'

Frank made a noise of disgust.

'So now you're psychic all of a sudden?'

She stared at him with stricken eyes and his clenched fist thumped the wall with exasperation.

'Oh, have it your own way!' he exclaimed. 'I'll come downstairs now – but only because I want to find something to open that window.'

He'd never sounded like this, hostile.

'I wish you'd never inherited this hateful house,' she burst out, tears gathering.

'So it's hateful, is it? And I suppose I am, too?'

Frank turned his back and gave a last, irritable tug at the window, which promptly shot upwards with a screech of protest.

Warm, bright sunlight flooded the room. Sybil felt her spirits lift, and Frank instantly forgot their quarrel.

'There's quite a view from here – look, Syb, you can see right across to the park through those chimneys.'

Sybil crossed to lean out beside him. Just for a moment she mistrusted the invitingly open window; then she realized the room had lost its sinister animosity, it felt a different place.

Frank drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

'I bet your kettle's boiling its head off; let's go and have some tea,' he suggested, leading the way.

Sybil paused in the doorway. The sunny room smiled upon her, she thought. Shaking her head ruefully, she followed Frank. He was right, as usual: it just needed airing.

'I'd better take a broom up there,' she offered, surprising them both.

'Oh darling, that would be sweet of you.'

Frank was delighted; their quarrel might never have happened as they toiled laughingly up those endless stairs again.

'You'll be strictly on your own up here, I can promise you,' panted Sybil.

'That, my love, was rather what I had in mind.'

They reached the attic door and, as Frank opened it, all the horror flooded back over Sybil.

'Don't go in there!' she screamed.

But Frank was already charging across to the window.

'Damn! It's fallen down again, I can't shift it,' he grunted, straining.

Sybil stood rooted in the doorway, her eyes closed, shudders passing through and through her body.

'Sybil, you're as white as a ghost – for goodness' sake, what's wrong with you now?'

She swallowed and tried to speak, but no words came. With an effort, she lifted her heavy feet and stumbled away.

The atmosphere was uncomfortable when Frank joined her for their makeshift lunch. They didn't refer to the morning they had just spent and Frank seemed almost relieved when Sybil went home to nurse a headache.

It soon blew over, of course, and they went to the house from time to time, but the attic was never mentioned and gradually it haunted Sybil's daytime thoughts less although she still sometimes awakened in the night with a clear picture of the shape that hung from the beam. Its face was always turned away from her, yet, in her dream, she knew that she would recognize it. One day she would see.

As soon as Sybil and Frank were married they moved into the redecorated ground floor. The rest of the house would have to wait.

They were both working and at first they spent all their leisure time together, enjoying each other's company. It wasn't such a bad old house after all. Until the evening Frank carried a table and chair up into the attic and declared his intention of starting on the textbook he had always meant to write.

'After all, I have to teach the little blighters and it's not easy with the books I'm given. People who write textbooks just don't seem to know how children's minds work.'

Sybil couldn't stop the protest that rose to her lips.

'You know I want you to write, Frank, but why can't you stay down here where it's comfortable? I'll keep quiet, I promise.'

'It's not the same, Syb.'

He couldn't explain but he knew he couldn't concentrate with someone near him 'keeping quiet'.

Sybil sat tense and uneasy throughout the evening, unable to settle to any of the hundred-and-one things she had to do. She was tempted to go upstairs but –

'I *must* get over this! I'm just being neurotic!'

It didn't help.

Frank rejoined her, cheerful and well-content after his undisturbed labours.

'Didn't I tell you the attic would be good for me?' he said, stretching his cramped limbs.

It was all right; there was nothing to worry about. The attic was just another room. Of course.

That night Sybil fell asleep easily.

Then suddenly she was wide awake, the moon shining into her face and cold terror washing over her. She couldn't recall her dreams, only that they were terrifying – and concerned the attic room three floors above. The room that was just another room.

Except that it *wasn't* the same as any other room, and now she wanted to see it for herself. Had to see it. It was calling her, drawing her to it.

She stretched out a hand to Frank's sleeping form and lay rigid, fighting the awful compulsion.

'But I must know!' she exclaimed, aloud.

She had to find out the attic's hidden purpose, for purpose there must be or why was she being compelled to share its dreadful secret?

The night was warm but she shivered as her bare feet climbed the dark staircase. Tonight she knew that she would see the hidden face, but what would follow she dared not even guess.

Slowly, she approached the final landing. The door was open, welcoming, and moonlight streamed through.

And there it was, the hunched shape silhouetted against the window. Swaying. Turning a little as it swayed.

Her hand groped unsteadily for the light switch but darkness closed around her like a suffocating blanket. Her heart pounded in her throat, she was stifling, choking. A million lights hurtled towards her and there was a roaring in her ears

as she surrendered to the blackness and the silence.

She returned at last from the limitless distance and saw again the familiar room. The limp corpse still hung there, its neck twisted to one side, its face dark.

Fearlessly she crossed the space between them and stared into the contorted countenance.

Now she knew the purpose of the attic room, the room that hated her, and nothing would frighten her ever again. For they were her own lifeless eyes that gazed back at her.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

Peter Hackett

The annual audit had taken all day and most of the evening.

Jeffrey Layne closed the last ledger at fifteen minutes to ten, rang his wife to explain why he was so late, than went round to the little Italian restaurant, where he ate a small steak and drank two glasses of wine. Finally he caught the five minutes past eleven train from Fenchurch Street station, settling back in the corner seat of the fourth carriage from the front. Worn out by the day's events, he closed his eyes and slipped into the dark mists of sleep.

He woke up with a start and at once became aware of a wet, clammy coldness that seemed to drain the strength from his limbs and send a wave of inexplicable apprehension across his brain. Then he saw the old lady. She was dressed entirely in black. A long black cape lay in bulky folds over the seat and reached down almost to the top of her shiny black shoes. The tasselled ends of a black silk scarf hung over her shoulders, and thin fingers, covered with matching leather gloves, held the cloak in position over her shrunken breast. A large black hat that bore some resemblance to an old-fashioned bonnet completely obscured her face. She swayed back and forth as the train raced through the night, her face turned to the window, staring out into the impenetrable darkness.

Jeffrey looked at his wristwatch. The first stop was at Benfleet, and they were not due there until twelve-thirteen: the time now was eleven-forty. As the carriage had been empty when he had got in at Fenchurch Street – where on earth had the old lady come from? He could only assume that while he had been asleep, the train had stopped at Barking. On reflection, he decided this could be the only explanation.

But he could not dismiss the notion that there was something wrong about that gently swaying figure. Apart from the antiquated style of dress, he seemed to detect a kind of – what

was it? – lifelessness; a rigidity that rightfully belonged to a wax model, or – and the thought flashed unbidden across his brain – a corpse. The silence, broken only by the rattling chatter of the moving train, became oppressive, and he knew he must say something – anything – if his imagination was not to go wandering into a dark country.

Jeffrey slid his cigarette-case from his jacket pocket, and after glancing at the NO SMOKING sign, called out in a voice that was unnecessarily loud: 'I beg your pardon – do you mind if I smoke?'

The figure became still. But the head did not turn or display the slightest sign that his question had been heard. He decided to try again. 'Excuse me – do you mind if I smoke?'

Again there was no response. Perhaps she was deaf – or frightened at being so addressed by a total stranger. But the urge to make some kind of conversation – no matter how frivolous – became irrepressible. Without waiting for the requested permission, he lit a cigarette and sent a ring of smoke across the carriage.

'I often travel on this line late at night and I know it's a bit off-putting when people insist on talking, but at the same time it can be rather uncomfortable when they don't . . .'

Was it his imagination or had there been the slightest suggestion of movement? A quiver of the head? The merest jerk of the shoulders? The meaningless words continued to roll off his tongue. '. . . and if one doesn't say something, all manner of thoughts come into being. I said to my wife . . .'

The head jerked round. It was as though a button had been pushed, a string pulled, or the last word had triggered some hidden mechanism into sudden action. It was then that the eleven-forty from Benfleet roared past on the up-line, pushing a wedge of air against the train with a heavy crunch. The frantic diddly-da – diddly-da of two trains travelling in opposite directions mixed their thundering rhythms and a wall of sound crashed in around him, as black terror came shrieking across the lighted carriage.

Jeffrey was looking at a dead-white face in which the eyes were gleaming pools of fire-tinted madness, and the skin was stretched tightly over a framework of bones, the black lips

parted in a ferocious grin. Even in the midst of his brain-freezing terror, he realized that once it had been a beautiful face; in fact if the eyes were to lose that flame of madness, the mouth that awful grin, youth and beauty would not be all that far away. Her appearance of advanced age was the result of experience – not the passing of years.

Minutes sped by as he gazed upon that face of horror, looked into the blazing eyes, and felt the clammy coldness grow more intense. Then the clenched teeth parted and a harsh whisper came rasping across the carriage.

'He . . . lost . . . his . . . head . . .'

The roaring clatter of the passing train suddenly ceased, the overhead lights flickered and went out – and Jeffrey Layne threw back his head, opened his mouth – and screamed.

He came back to consciousness in an empty, lighted carriage, and sat perfectly still for an entire minute, while he tried to remember, to consider – to understand.

Memory returned on reluctant feet, and with it came a mental picture of a dead-white face, with mad-bright eyes and bared teeth. Understanding arrived a little later.

He had seen a ghost.

There was absolutely no manner of doubt in his mind. A ghost – an apparition – a time-image – call it what you like – he had seen it, felt the clammy coldness that was as much part of its make-up as the black cloak, the bonnet, the tasselled scarf; and – heaven preserve him – heard it.

Reaction began to take its toll. He began to shake violently; sweat ran down his face and there came to him the certain knowledge that he was terribly – horrifyingly – alone. Shut up in a small metal box that was hurtling through the night at sixty-odd miles an hour. He glanced up at the communication cord, and once even reached up a trembling hand towards it. Then he slowly withdrew it and huddled back in his corner of the carriage as he accepted the bitter truth. The seer-of-ghosts is never believed, particularly by a guard of a suddenly halted train.

But he would get off at the next station, wheresoever it

might be, and trust to luck that he would catch a late bus, or hire a taxi for the remainder of the journey.

Chalkwell Station was shrouded in darkness.

Jeffrey Layne staggered along the deserted platform, dimly aware that his legs felt like sagging rubber, and that now he was out in the open air, a nasty red mist was obscuring his vision and threatening to bring him to his knees at any moment. He came to the tiny square of light that pinpointed the ticket-collector's box, and it was here that the returning weakness had its way with him, for he suddenly swayed, then sank down in the little open gateway.

A tall man with rimless glasses and a slim, pencil-line moustache looked down at him, with an almost comical expression of grave concern. His deep voice was friendly, sympathetic, but above all, human – alive.

'Gracious, sir – let me help you up. Are you ill or . . .' He did not finish the sentence, but Jeffrey knew the missing word had been 'drunk'. Assisted by the man's outstretched hand, he clambered to his feet and leaned against the ticket-box.

'No . . . I've had a rather nasty shock – ' this was surely the understatement of all time – 'but if I could rest somewhere for a few minutes, I'll be all right.'

'Of course, sir, let me help you into the office. There won't be another train for half an hour and I always make meself a cup of tea about this time.'

Jeffrey was assisted into a small, green-painted room, equipped with an oil-stove, two battered-looking armchairs and a solid, deal table. The ticket-collector dropped two tea-bags into a brown teapot, then eyed a singing kettle which sat on the oil-stove.

'This nasty shock – something personal was it, sir? Bad news, maybe?'

'No.' Jeffrey wiped his moist forehead and succumbed to the overwhelming urge to tell his story. The fellow would probably think he was mad. 'As a matter of fact – I don't expect you to believe this – I saw a ghost on the train.'

The ticket-collector poured boiling water into the teapot,

replaced the kettle on the stove, then nodded gravely.

'That would have been the Woman in Black, no doubt.'

Jeffrey stared up at the man with sagging mouth and bulging eyes. 'You know about her . . . ?'

The ticket-collector poured tea into two china mugs, then added milk from a half-full bottle. 'Sugar, sir?'

Jeffrey nodded. 'Yes. Two spoonfuls.'

'You've a sweet tooth, sir. Same here. Now, you drink that down, and you'll soon feel yourself again. Nothing like sweet tea when you've suffered a bit of a shock.'

'You know about her?' Jeffrey repeated.

The ticket-collector nodded very slowly as though admitting to a deplorable weakness. 'That I do. I've heard about her for more years than I care to remember, although I've never seen her myself. But a lot of people have and they can't all be liars or madmen. It's rather sad, really.'

'Sad!' Jeffrey exclaimed.

'Yes, sir. Sad. Imagine – the pretty child, who grows up to be a beautiful woman – who becomes a ghost on a train out of Fenchurch Street. Don't you think that's sad?'

Jeffrey nodded and took a deep swig from the mug. Then he asked the obvious question: 'I suppose there is a story?'

The ticket-collector chuckled. 'Bless your heart, sir, of course there is. Can't have a ghost without a story, can you now?' He paused and looked reflectively at the little red window on the oil-stove. 'Her name was Clara Bowman.'

Jeffrey was feeling much better. The train was now miles away, the experience seemed to have happened in a different time dimension. Now he was inclined to be jocular.

'Suits her,' he said.

'You're right there, sir,' the ticket-collecter agreed. 'A fine upstanding wench. Came from a good family, met up with a young fellow from down Benfleet way. Got herself in trouble, if you follow my meaning – a terrible thing back in those days. Particularly as he was by no means acceptable to her family. They ran off together, meaning to get married in Southend, and spend their honeymoon at Thorpe Bay. Ever been there, sir?'

Jeffrey said he hadn't and waited impatiently for the rest of the story.

'Lovely place – particularly in spring. Any road, on the way down from London, the young fellow decides to look out of the window. Just then a train comes round a bend, intended husband has his head sticking out like a balloon on the end of a stick – and bash – the train knocks it off.'

Jeffrey said: 'Good God!'

'Your feelings do you credit, sir. The headless body falls back on to the lap of the prospective bride and in no time at all she's soaked in blood. When the train drew into Southend they found her cradling the headless body in her arms and singing a lullaby to it.'

'Mad, of course,' Jeffrey suggested.

'As a hatter, sir. She had her baby in a looney bin – if you will pardon the expression. But that's not the end of the story.'

Jeffrey looked meaningly at the teapot and the ticket-collector obligingly refilled his mug.

'There's more?'

'Has to be, doesn't there, sir? Otherwise, she wouldn't be haunting the 23.05 from Fenchurch Street. These things run to a pattern. One year later she got out. Maybe somebody was careless, or maybe she was very cunning. They say mad people are. Anyway, she caught the same train, and at the very spot where her poor young man had his head knocked off, a few seconds before the up train came round the bend, she opens the door and throws herself out. I bet it upset the other passengers no end.'

'That I can believe,' Jeffrey observed with deep sincerity.

They did not speak again for some time and Jeffrey was wondering if he could find the courage to climb aboard the next train, when the ticket-collector murmured:

'I expects you're curious as to how I know that story so pat, sir?'

Jeffrey shrugged. 'I assumed you had been told.'

The man chuckled. It was a deep, rich, almost sinister sound. 'You're right there. You haven't forgotten the baby, have you, sir? The one she had in the asylum? It grew up and became my old dad, sir.'

Jeffrey's flagging interest was now fully revived.

'Good God, man, that means . . .'

The ticket-collector smiled gently. 'That's right, sir. The

Woman in Black is my grannie. Interesting, ain't it?'

Jeffrey looked up at the tall thin figure and for the first time noted the pale skin, stretched so tightly over the framework of bones, saw the bright glitter in his eyes, observed the white teeth bared in a near-ferocious grin. A long, lean hand, that had more than a passing resemblance to a claw, reached out and grasped his arm. The deep voice was wistful.

'She must come through this old station every night, sir. But never once has she got off to see me. I mean to say . . . I am her own flesh and blood. Showing herself to strangers . . . Gracious me, are you off, sir?'

For a man who had suffered a recent terrible experience, Jeffrey made very good time down the platform and out through the ticket-barrier.

He now travels to town by Green Line bus.

HAUNTED GROUND

Oliver la Farge

George Waterson stood up uncertainly. He was shaky and bitterly cold; the nor'wester blew clear through him; by the last faint daylight he could see sparse dry snowflakes driven under the leaden sky. Well, that had failed, too, and the immediate business was, apparently, to continue living.

He looked around. By God, with the whole bay to choose from, he had to go ashore on the beach of the Hales' place – Haunted Ground, the country people's by-name for it, said itself in his mind. Under his dominant consciousness of cold and misery was a conviction that his luck had irrevocably turned, that now every last chance was viciously levelled against him.

For the moment, at least, he must continue living. This was too cold. There was nothing for it but to go up to the Hales', to Haunted Ground. Wouldn't you know something like that would happen? He climbed the familiar path up the steep bluff behind the beach, and at the top, where locust trees broke the wind, stopped to look back. The *Lucy* was just bits of wood and spars twisting on the rocks, mouthed by the breakers; there was no longer even the shape of a boat. He didn't want to look. He faced inland.

He heard his heart beating clearly, almost thunderously, and very slow. Exhaustion, he thought. There was a good half-mile of ascending road before him, leading up to the crest of the hill topped by the big, high-shouldered old Hale house against the last grey of the western sky, with the elms on one side that always bent away from it, shaped by sea winds. It never did make a cheerful picture. But there were lighted windows.

He supposed Sue would be laid out in one of those rooms – Sue, Sue! Each fresh recollection of her death struck him with the force of the first impact. That damned old house so packed with death! Old Jasper Summers with a mouth full of broken teeth eagerly and bluntly telling him: 'Did ye hear abaout Susan Hale? A burglar come into their haouse, first

one's ben in the taownship in twenty years, last night and shot her dead.' He saw again the triumphant gossip's face in a mist of horror, and heard the calm voice continuing about Mrs Hale being sick from the shock, and so on, and on, and on.

Sue and John and himself having a snowball fight with hydrangeas. Mrs Hale would probably have her in the sitting-room. In a coffin – oh! Sue riding his pony while he led and John envied. That must have been one of the few times when his money gave him an advantage over the country boy. A still picture and a remembered pain when Sue told him that she was engaged to John. Sue sobbing and clinging to him when John was lost with his boat off Brenton's reef. He had been shocked and ashamed then at a fierce joy that mingled with his sorrow for his friend and for her sorrow. She had said: 'Anyway, living in Haunted Ground, I'll see him again when I'm old, the way Granny used to do.'

That quiet assumption had made him feel chilly.

He heard his heartbeats again, clear and slow. Vaguely he thought that he had left something of great importance on the beach. It was terribly cold. The high wind had blown his clothes dry.

It hit him again. She was dead – dead – dead. He would have won her in time, and she was dead. The first burglar in Quonochaug in twenty years had shot her through the heart. An unknown man casually in the course of his trade blotted out the sun and disappeared. A hole over her heart spreading red. Sue, Sue! Oh, God!

The house loomed gaunt and dark above the two lighted windows; the wind swooped around it, and the bare trees, twisting away, complained. He knocked and waited, shivering, then knocked again. His heartbeats sounded very loud, and he resisted an almost overwhelming impulse to turn and race back to the beach. He had left something vital there. Still no one answered him.

He turned the knob and entered. The sitting-room door was open, letting grateful warmth into the hall. Just as he had thought, the coffin was in the centre of the sitting-room. Mrs Hale sat in a rocker opposite. It was unusual to see her with idle hands, not knitting or sewing.

'Please excuse me for coming in like this, Mrs Hale – '

'That's all right, George; if I'd known what you were I'd have let you in. Sit down.'

Odd way of putting it. She looked pale and weak, and her speech, for all its New England precision, had a quality of vagueness. George moved toward the coffin.

'Don't disturb her.'

What on earth did she think he was going to do?

'I figured she was tired, and she's laid out so pretty I'm just letting her rest awhile. She's to be buried Thursday.'

An unpleasant feeling came over George that the shock had unbalanced the old lady. He gazed at the girl's uncovered face, the rich golden-brown hair, long lashes making shadows on the cheeks, delicate, warm mouth. He thought in trite adjectives, chiefly repeating 'lovely'. He was glad for the macabre skill of an undertaker who had touched her mouth with lipstick. She had never been a pale person, Sue. The plants of winter were about her, bittersweet, pine branches, even thorny barberry that she loved.

He stood looking for some minutes, not really thinking. His heartbeats seemed yet slower, and again he was troubled about something forgotten on the beach. At length he sat down.

'How did you come here?' Mrs Hale emphasized the 'you'.

'When I heard, I – I didn't want to live any longer. I took the *Lucy* out and cracked on sail till she went. We were driven aground here, I was cast up on the beach, and – and here I am.' He said the last words dully. 'I hated it when I saw I was on your shore, but I'm glad I came now.'

'It's hard for you, George. She'll be seeing John after church on Thursday.'

'I know.' Curious way she had of talking about it.

'It'd 'a' been better . . .' Her voice became inaudible, although her mouth continued in the motions of speech.

The shock had undoubtedly harmed her. He was in none too good shape himself. Those couldn't be heartbeats he heard, they were too slow, and they seemed to come from outside, or from something in his ears from being knocked around so. They were both of them unwell.

Mrs Hale became audible again. 'I don't know what will come of the house when we're all gone. People won't buy it.

I tried to sell it before, just after Mr Hale died. It's got a bad name. The Hales 've always been too friendly with their dead. And this – this holocaust it is, really – all centred round the house will make it worse. My cousins will get it, the Warwick Hales, you know. They'll subdivide, I guess. I thought you . . .' Her voice died again.

Decidedly, she needed rest and distraction. So did he. He was being positively haunted.

'Mrs Hale, please don't think me officious, but I'm sure you need rest; we both do. I'm nervous, and I feel badly, and I'm sure you're overtired.'

'I'm not tired. I feel spryer than in a long time, now it's over.'

'Well, you know, at moments, when you're talking your voice fades into actual silence, although you go on speaking.'

'What?'

'Don't be offended. You become inaudible. I'm sure it's fatigue. I know I'm hearing things, so many that I'm frightened. I can hear something like very, very slow heart-beats, and just now I've started hearing footsteps, and I have a strange idea that someone is pulling at my shoulder.'

The old lady was sitting bolt upright, staring at him. 'My Lord! Then you aren't . . .' Her voice died out again; he could see that she was doing her utmost to tell him something, to make herself heard. She became clear, 'Get back to the beach, get back to the beach, you still have time!'

It made his hair rise. And his shoulder *was* being shaken. The beats were very slow. 'I don't understand.'

She made another desperate attempt to penetrate the silence that shut down between them. At last, with a tremendous effort, she rose and flung open the door to her bedroom. 'Look.'

'Oh, God!'

Mrs Hale's body lay, serene and pale, on the bed.

Now very faintly he heard her voice.

'They've found you on the beach, that's what you hear, what's shaking your shoulder. Your heart's still beating. You've got time to go back, to live, to find someone else than Sue. Sue's meeting John on Thursday. Go back to the beach.'

Now he knew what he had left behind on the shore, half

in and half out of the water. Panic and black horror seized him. He turned blindly toward the outer door, and found himself against Sue's coffin. He could see her sleeping face, clear, through a surrounding darkness.

'Hurry! You'll live and forget and find someone to take her place. Hurry!'

'She's in there?' He pointed to Sue's body.

'Yes, but don't stop to wake her. Hurry.'

He stared at the dead girl. He stared into an infinite future. Someone to take her place.

'You know, Mrs Hale, John was my best friend.' He sat down. 'Those heartbeats are very slow; they'll be over in a minute.'

THE MAN WHO SOLD GHOSTS

Roger F. Dunkley

Imprisoned in their heavy frames, chilly smiles frozen unconvincingly on their impassive features, the dead forebears of the ninth Earl of Snood watched his lordship far below in the echoing gloom of the dining chamber ineffectually juggling peas on his knife.

Lady Snood watched him too. A hint of regret stirred in the placid shallows of her apathy; it *was*, after all, the best silver. There would have been a time when the family crest gleaming dully on the blade would have been reproach enough for such plebeian table manners.

Her husband negotiated the knife unsteadily towards his mouth.

No wonder fashionable society was fashionable in their absence these days, she thought. An ancient admonition hesitated on her lips. The shrouds of resident silence shivered and braced themselves for her voice. But a distant peal forestalled her reproof.

Lady Snood waited.

Several peas fell back on to the Snood plate. They bounced.

Then she wiped a corner of her mouth with unnecessary exquisiteness, put down her napkin and sighed along the bleak expanse of the table.

'The door, Godfrey,' she said.

Lord Snood breathed in; spiders froze in dark crevices; the hall tensed.

'The door *bell*,' he corrected.

She stiffened. 'Tipton. What's the matter with Tipton?'

'Deafness,' said Lord Snood succinctly, and with unaccustomed alacrity snared a quick mouthful of peas.

'He *never* hears it, Godfrey.'

'He's *always* deaf, Eleanor.' With equal accuracy he might have pointed out that it never rang.

Eleanor Snood wondered whether to embark on a routine enquiry about why they bothered to pay Tipton at all,

remembered that they didn't, pursed her lips, heard a second chime, paused, rose disdainfully and left the dining hall.

Her husband, roused out of an habitual torpor only by his meals, proceeded to savage his steak with the family silver and was assisting the disposal of his dinner with copious, if clumsy, draughts of red wine, when she travelled back across the room.

The air was sluggish with bored expectancy.

'There's a man at the door,' announced Lady Snood.

'Send him away,' said her husband and reached out for a cigar. 'Pegs. It's probably pegs. Or onions. He's bound to be selling something. Unless,' he blanched, 'unless he's one of those Revenue chaps.'

'Ghosts,' said Eleanor Snood.

Her husband's teeth closed abruptly over the end of his cigar.

'He's selling ghosts . . .'

The Earl of Snood spluttered, wiped the frayed ends from his lips. Shreds of tobacco embellished his moustache.

'. . . So he says.'

'Ghosts?' demanded the Earl.

'Ghosts,' insisted the man, shooting his cuffs and thrusting his chin forward in a vain attempt to free his neck from the restrictions of his tight, brightly patterned collar.

'And crystal balls, horoscopes, love potions. Ghosts a speciality, though.' He peered sharply at them. 'Warts?'

Lord Snood stared.

'Got any warts?'

Eleanor Snood studied her rings with uncharacteristic zeal, wondering where Tipton was and whether he would have the strength to remove this impertinent little man anyway.

'No warts? No matter. One of the privileges of having the blue blood, no doubt. But if you're ever troubled, I've got these charms. Most efficacious. Work a treat. Especially good with pigs.'

'These ghosts . . .' began the Earl, labouring under the alien challenges of doubt and bewilderment.

'Speciality of the House,' repeated the man.

'The House?' Lady Snood lifted a languid eyebrow.

'By Appointment. To the very best circles.'

Her Ladyship nodded. 'I see.' A glint of nostalgia and thoughts of emulation quickened in her tired eyes.

The man watched her closely. 'Don't tell me,' he said, with skilled casualness, 'you're like the rest. Already got them. The ghosts. Oozing out of the panelling. Materializing all over the breakfast table. Jumping out on the milkman. Haunted up to here.'

His eyes flashed.

'I knew it. Just like the Gore-Pendleshams.'

'*The* Gore-Pendleshams?' murmured Lady Snood.

'Right. Laughed in my face only yesterday. Didn't even fancy a mini blood stain. One of those ever-ready, self-renewing jobs. That's a very profitable line. Very popular with your American tourist. Gets them flocking.' He paused. 'And brings the money in,' he added nonchalantly. 'Spending dollars like water. But you hardly need me to tell you that, of course.'

The ninth Earl of Snood grunted. His mind lingered on his tax returns, fled to seductive tropical climes – the Bahamas once more would be nice – and lurched unhappily back to his overdraft and the deserting retainers. He conjured the myriad rustling of dollar notes in his otherwise stale imagination.

The man waited, affected to straighten a jaded crease in his right trouser leg, studied a moribund potted palm with suitable fascination and, with impeccable timing, rose abruptly as if to depart.

Eleanor Snood, unused to the exercise of communication, struggled to prompt her husband with a significant glance.

Puzzled, Lord Snood glanced over his shoulder, shrugged and began again: 'These ghosts . . .' He stopped, thinking of the queues for English teas, his trampled begonia beds, the potential horrors of a Safari Park . . .

The man nodded helpfully.

'*The* Gore-Pendleshams,' reminded Lady Snood.

'What sort of – ah – ghosts are particularly popular these days?'

The man glanced at his watch, compressed his lips to indicate politely that he had more profitable business to engage

him elsewhere, and sat down again. The cuffs were adjusted.

'Anything you fancy. Made to measure – within limits. We do a very comprehensive range. It depends on the clientele really.' He narrowed his eyes, appraising them and the drab, funereal hall which daily entombed them.

'There's the chains,' he suggested. 'Your tourists like a nice rattle. A sinister hint of nocturnal clanking. No?'

'Noisy,' suggested Lady Snood.

'Ah. Then you won't care for any of our assorted night novelties; we offer a rich variety of things that go bump.'

Lady Snood shook her head.

'Something rather headless might be interesting,' mused the Earl. 'In a conventional sort of way, I suppose.'

The Countess stirred uneasily. 'I don't think we want anything – well, untidy, Godfrey. Spare heads lying around frightening Tipton . . . That sort of thing. Something quieter, perhaps.' She searched the bleaker recesses of the room for inspiration.

'You name it,' said the man. 'Anything from your screaming nuns and thwarted lovers to your solitary hanged personage. He's popular, your guilty suicide. But it's your jealous lovers that really draw the crowds, we find. They come in a set, slightly reduced. You can't beat jealousy and thwarted passion. Romantic, you see.'

He looked from one to the other, then elaborately consulted his watch.

Lady Snood cleared her throat, frowned. 'Aren't they at all – dangerous?' she enquired casually. 'For domestic purposes.'

'Lord, no!' the man chuckled. 'Tamed and house-trained, you might say. We've had no complaints.'

Her Ladyship's frown persisted. 'But they all sound a bit – extreme. Rather ostentatious. Rather, well, *vulgarly* emotional.'

'Ah.' The cuffs were briskly exposed. 'A perceptive customer, if I may make so bold with a compliment. That's *it*, isn't it? That's what the Spook Trade – pardon the jargon – is all about, isn't it? Emotions. Passions. You see?'

They looked. They didn't see.

'The two P's. Passions and Places. Take your suicide. Despair. Guilt. Desperation. Noose tightened round the neck, right? Tension. Outflow of emotion, unusually intense emo-

tion, quick burst of psychic waves – like electricity – ' he gestured vaguely – 'and there you are. Passions burned into the panelling. Misery, anger, fear imprinted in the walls. In living memory. A ghost is born!'

His voice echoed triumphantly, eddying amongst the disembodied armour and rusty weaponry that eternally lined the sombre, museum walls.

'Once made, it's like a record. Always playing the same tune. Same passion. Same place. With me?'

'Emotions,' pondered Lady Snood.

'Bit much,' said her husband. 'We don't really go in for that sort of thing here, you know. Emotions. Quiet, respectable house, this.'

Lady Snood thought of the barren years snubbed by the best society, remembered and extravagant psychic assets of the Gore-Pendleshams, caught a glimpse of light amid her encircling domestic gloom and, more to her surprise than the salesman's, announced:

'I'd like a man.'

The salesman took out his order book, glanced for authority at Lord Snood and licked his pencil. A blue streak appeared on his tongue. 'Any distinctive features?' Lady Snood hesitated. 'Handsome?'

'Handsome, yes.'

'Rugged, hero type?'

'Rugged. Muscular.' Lady Snood's memory stirred and blossomed. 'Active. A man of action. Tall, dominant.' Her eyes appraised her husband mistily, from a great distance. 'Yes, and rather arrogant too.' She remembered the tense droning of the cicadas, the violence crouched behind the balmy, sub-tropical, Bahamian night. 'Young. And passionate,' she said. 'He ought to be passionate, with a streak of . . .'

She broke off; the man was staring at her. What remarkable impudence. She looked away. Such penetrating eyes. Staring right inside her.

'Cruelty, perhaps? That sort of streak,' he suggested, and scribbled on his pad.

Lady Snood flushed and lapsed into a sullen silence. She ripped a palm leaf and tortured it in her left hand.

'Lord Snood?'

The Earl emerged from his own reverie. 'Quite so,' he grunted. 'A young woman, yes. Absolutely. Pale, submissive type. Sort that knows a man when she sees one. Shy, inexperienced – but plenty of, you know, energy.' He surveyed his wife's figure, stooped over the palm, across a gulf, without seeing her. 'Lively. Know what I mean? Sort to get a man's blood up. Make him feel alive . . .' He sighed heavily, reminiscently. 'Why're you looking at me like that?'

The man rose briskly to his feet. 'Right, sir – my lord – we'll see what we can do. Two ghosts, one of each gender, with the aforementioned attributes. I take it this is a firm order?'

'Two?' The high-born moustache twitched.

'Yes, Godfrey . . .'

'Tell you what. Special customers. Personal friends – now – if I may take the liberty. Two for the price of one! How's that for a special offer?'

'Price?' The Earl tugged unhappily at his whiskers.

'Now you're talking,' said the man. 'Ghosts don't come cheap, of course. Not weighed and packaged like your supermarket commodities, naturally.'

'Naturally,' said Godfrey Snood. 'How much?'

The man coughed. 'Shall we say two thousand?'

The stillness was sepulchral while the Earl's face took on colours more appropriate to apoplexy.

'We shall not,' he growled.

'Shall we say one?' suggested the man more cautiously. 'Five hundred?' he tempted. 'Can't say fairer than that, now. I'm cutting my throat for you as it is. Well?'

Lady Eleanor patted her husband's arm encouragingly and the man exhorted his lordship to remember those Americans queueing twenty deep to view his haunted room and disburden themselves of innumerable, surplus dollars, as the Earl, with some misgivings, wrote out the cheque.

The man held out his hand.

The Earl proffered the paper, retracted it abruptly. 'How do we know,' he demanded slyly, suspicions congealing in the slow but lordly brain, 'how do we know if we've got them? Ghosts! Damnit, they're invisible, aren't they?'

The man essayed an expression of hurt pride. 'You'll know,'

he said, smiling and extending a hopeful hand again.

'How?' The Earl was obstinate.

'Signs,' said the man. 'Usual signs. Room goes chilly. There's an atmosphere. Unaccountable noises. Pictures drop to the floor. Usual sort of things.'

The Earl vacillated, preened his moustache, looked fondly at the cheque. 'Look,' he said, 'we're not fools, you know. Some people will believe anything. Tell me this: how do you deliver the goods? Make a spell? Some sort of crate arrive? When do we get it?'

'You'll take delivery soon enough.' He clicked his fingers impatiently. 'They'll materialize when you've handed over the cheque, and not before.'

The ninth Earl of Snood formally surrendered the money. My lady inclined her head.

'Don't you worry,' said the man, though they hadn't moved; 'I always find my own way out. Don't forget: if ever you need any love potions or get the warts . . .' And deftly pocketing the cheque, he disappeared with a shrill, cheerful laugh into the shadows thickening round the walls of the ancient hall.

Silence settled back, dark and brooding, over the room.

'A ball,' thought Lady Snood. 'We'll hold a ball.' She patted a stray curl with a limply elegant hand. 'Invite the Gore-Pendleshams.'

The Earl was counting dollars. 'Replenish the family coffers,' he mused, repressing just in time something akin to a baronial titter. 'No more hiding from the Revenue chaps. Or fobbing off Tipton and the rest.'

They smiled and nodded vacantly at one another.

The shades lengthened.

Slowly the corners of the Earl's mouth sagged back into more routine contours; his forehead puckered with heavy thought. A cumbersome sigh heaved itself out into the panelled gloom of the chamber.

'A man,' he pronounced, 'selling ghosts.'

'He just came to the door,' said Eleanor Snood.

'Then he went away again,' said the Earl ponderously.

'I didn't hear a car, Godfrey . . .'

'With my cheque!'

'We did buy – ah – something, though.'

'Say it,' commanded his lordship. His wife noted a premonitory quivering of the hereditary moustache. 'Say it!'

'Ghosts, dear,' whispered his wife. 'Two ghosts,' she added. 'For the price of – '

Pain, anger and an obscure sense of shame rendered the Earl inarticulate. He paced the room with unaccustomed energy, making primitive growling noises into the worn carpet.

'Charlatan!' he exploded venomously, and ground his fist into his left palm. 'Rogue!' he hissed, and kicked the mahogany table, which was harder than he had calculated. 'Trickster! Taking advantage of our good natures . . . Preying on the upper classes . . .'

The spiders scuttled, the air grew vibrant with old tensions. Tremors of sadness and excitement began to pulse along my lady's slow veins.

'*Two* ghosts, damnit! Damnit, why *two*?'

'I ordered a man,' said Eleanor Snood simply. 'You weren't listening. You never do. You haven't listened for years.' Her eyes glittered in the darkness. 'And you! You ordered . . .' She remembered: Young, submissive. A mere girl. Someone to make a man feel alive.

'Brute!' she said.

The Earl stopped, turned.

'A man, eh,' he said. 'Yes, by Jove. A youth, bristling with biceps and passion. I remember.' The moustache trembled, the Snood fingers bit into his clenched palms, the ninth pair of baronial eyes appealed to the judgement of his watching ancestors.

'Strumpet!' he roared.

The shadows cringed flat against the walls. The air sang about their heads.

'Lecher!' shouted Lady Eleanor Snood. 'Don't you dare lay hands on me, you vicious brute!'

The Earl grasped her slim arms again, felt them struggling in his rough grip once more. She wrenched herself free. Cicadas hummed extotically in his ears. With an excited cry she delivered an impressive blow to the Earl's astonished left cheek.

Godfrey Snood swayed unsteadily, rage and primal frenzy

thundering strangely in his head. His chest expanded, his muscles flexed and with a roar, summoning the vestigial energies of his youth, he lowered his head, charged the solid dining table, seized the knife athwart his plate and, regardless of peas and family honour alike, pursued my lady in a primitive, headlong rush, as exhilarating as it was undignified, around the hall.

Panting, apopleptic with passion, he caught her up, seized her by the waist, brought his face close to her angry, protesting, yielding lips. Then she glimpsed the knife, flung back her head, emitted a scream that scorched the very air and set the armour ringing, and swooned appropriately in his arms.

The Earl, dropping the unused knife, tottered backwards with gathering momentum. Together they arrived with a bump at the wall and sank abruptly to the floor, where they were noisily joined seconds later by the ancestral portrait which they had unexpectedly dislodged from his rest immediately above them.

His lordship blinked.

Dazed but undamaged, he reached up a tentative hand to investigate the soreness on his head where the picture had struck him. He glanced at his crumpled wife, first with guilt, then with guilt and relief.

Her ladyship stirred and blinked too.

As the room reassembled about her, the Countess found herself propped up by the fireplace in her customary chair. The Earl, having laboriously restored both his wife and the portrait to their respective and hallowed places, was sitting opposite her, as always. He reached for his bedtime cigar, muttering unhappy apologies.

'It won't ever happen again, old thing.'

'No,' thought Lady Snood, offering a mechanical smile, 'I don't suppose it will.' She rearranged the dusty folds of her dress and suppressed a sigh.

The shades settled comfortably down; the potted palms sagged steadily; the spiders relaxed. Aloft, the ancestors, their company complete again, resumed their cheerless vigil.

Lady Snood surveyed the room thoughtfully. 'Passion,' she

murmured sadly, 'and places.'

'Mumbo,' said Lord Snood, 'and jumbo. Passion indeed!' His guilt fed his indignation. 'In the House of Snood!'

'A living memory.' The sigh slipped out. 'Like a record, he said. Perhaps he was some sort of gramophone salesman too, Godfrey.'

'The man was a simple charlatan,' muttered her husband. 'Didn't even leave his address.' He drummed his fingers morosely on the arm of his chair. 'Not that we really needed any ghosts anyway. Far too disruptive. Flamboyant.'

The Countess nodded. 'So energetic,' she said, 'in such a vulgar way.'

And they lapsed into an accustomed silence.

The Earl stirred. 'Ten o'clock. Time for the port.'

'Shall I ring,' asked his wife, as she asked every night, 'for Tipton?'

The Earl shook his head mechanically. 'He never hears,' he said.

'Deafness,' said Lady Snood. 'He's always deaf.'

With its nightly dyspeptic whirring, the aged grandfather clock launched into his announcement of the hour. On the final stroke, a door in the panelling opened and a dark figure moved towards them with a slow, familiar tread.

'Port, m'lord,' announced Tipton wearily. 'Port, m'lady.' He raised the decanter. Then he flung it, complete with tray and the Snood family crystal glasses, on to the floor in front of them.

'Tipton!' said my lord.

'Perhaps you should sit down,' said my lady.

The old retainer lifted his hands to his grey face. He covered his ears.

'Can't you hear it?' he demanded, his voice shrill with fright. 'That unearthly scream?'

He shuddered as if exposed to a sudden, wintry draught.

'Look there!'

He pointed a palsied finger across the room.

'By the table. Chasing after each other. He's threatening her. Those whiskers! My lord! He's going for her – with a family knife!'

They turned to look. Lady Snood saw the yielding, helpless

figure of the woman and shivered with a recent apprehension and pleasure. The Earl preened his moustache and swelled, despite himself, with pride as he recognized that firm, aggressively manly behaviour. Fascinated and appalled they watched the passionate display.

'Only ghosts, Tipton,' said Lord Snood.

'We ordered them,' explained Lady Snood vaguely.

As they spoke, one of the Snood forebears appeared to squirm in his frame and, without invitation or warning, plunged with resounding violence to the floor on to the fading figures for the second time that evening.

MATTHEW AND LUKE

R. Chetwynd-Hayes

There was quite a crowd on the bank when they pulled Matthew Bayswater out of the river.

He was turned over on to his stomach, had his arms pumped up and down; then someone placed a hand on either side of his waist and pressed it in and out – all in the approved style. Water came out of his mouth, but there was no sign of returning life. Eventually, he was pulled over on to his back, and the by now considerable crowd looked with morbid curiosity at his white face, gaping mouth and glazed eyes.

'He's a goner,' said the man with horn-rimmed spectacles. 'Nothing else anyone can do.'

For a while it seemed that this was indeed the truth, and all was over bar the burial service. Then a tall, lean man pushed his way through the onlookers and knelt down beside the still body. He laid his fingers on the limp wrist, examined the staring eyes, then sighed.

'I suppose it won't do any harm to try.'

He placed a handkerchief over the gaping mouth, lowered his head and gave Matthew the kiss of life. To his great surprise, after the lapse of some three minutes, his efforts were rewarded by a faint moan and a flickering heart-beat. Presently the patient had recovered sufficiently to sit up.

'You're dead lucky, mate,' observed a burly young man in a cloth cap.

'I could have sworn you were a goner,' exclaimed the man in horn-rimmed spectacles, who rather gave the impression that he felt cheated. 'Never believed you'd be up and about again.'

The crowd began to drift away, and the tall, lean man who had performed this major miracle helped Matthew to his feet.

'How d'you feel?'

'A bit shaky,' Matthew admitted. 'But I'll be all right.'

He was alive. His heart was beating seventy-two times a

minute; his blood was again circulating round his body in a most satisfactory fashion; his liver was fully active and performing its duties as was proper to a self-respecting organ. To all intents and purposes, Matthew Bayswater was once again a healthy, fairly intelligent, go-ahead young man.

But – he had been dead for seven and a half minutes.

Jenny said Matthew would be late for the office, and she helped him on with his coat, brushed him down, kissed him, then saw him off from the red-tiled doorstep. He waved to her from the street corner, feeling proud and happy, as was only natural for a young man but recently married – whose life had been miraculously restored the day before.

He walked quickly to the station and said 'Good morning' very brightly to everyone he knew, or thought he knew, or indeed anyone who looked at him. He had once attended a business management course, and the instructor had stressed the importance of looking and sounding alert every minute of the working day. He had also pointed out that every person who walked, talked, and, most important, had an overdraft-free bank account, was a prospective client.

Matthew boarded the eight-fifteen train and instantly looked round for a suitably elderly or late-middle-aged person to whom he could surrender his hastily acquired seat. People of advanced years – and from Matthew's point of view that was anyone over forty – often had valuable connections, and they might well remember what appeared to be a kindly action. On this occasion, an old man of forty-five gratefully accepted his sacrifice.

He got off at Oxford Circus, ran up the escalator – a wonderful example of boundless energy – and emerged out into Regent Street, where, after walking some hundred yards, he crossed the road and turned into a doorway. Matthew, of course, did not join the queue for the lift. He scorned lifts. They were for the idle, those who lacked the fire-in-the-guts so essential if one was determined to rise to the top of the mercantile tree. He ran up the first flight of stairs, two steps at a time, and shouted a cheery 'Good morning' to the decrepit old janitor who, at fifty-five, had no other direction

to travel but downwards. By the time he had reached the third landing he was a little winded, although the threat of instant demotion would never have forced this admission from him. When he was half way up to the fourth, something happened that almost sent him running back down again.

A young man in swimming trunks, with a dead-white face, glazed eyes, gaping mouth and an unexplainable transparency around the feet and ankles, was coming down the stairs. It was difficult to determine if he walked or floated, for he appeared to slide from one step to the next, without once picking up the terrifyingly transparent feet, and Matthew was in no condition to give the matter any great consideration. The creature, who was against the left-hand wall, turned its head and stared at him with those glassy eyes; there was a suggestion of recognition – a very small nod, a twitch round the open mouth – and then a deep, rather hollow voice said quite distinctly: 'Oh, my God!'

Now, Matthew was without any manner of doubt a practical, non-imaginative young man, who, up to that moment, would have dismissed any reference to the supernatural as a rather weak joke. But now, like Adam after he had taken his first bite from the apple, he saw, heard – and understood.

The thing in the swimming trunks was a ghost.

This alarming – one might say sleep-murdering – fact might have become acceptable had there not been an extra, very important factor. The ghost was a perfect replica of himself. Trendy haircut, mole just below the right shoulder, appendix scar, slightly knobbly knees, and a painful bunion on the joint of the left big toe. The ghost also wore a pair of blue swimming trunks, which were in every respect a duplicate of those that had adorned the person of Matthew when he was pulled out of the river.

He made a very interesting noise, that was half way between a scream and a croak, then continued his interrupted journey up the stairs, with a speed that made his previous effort seem like a tortoise practising the slow-march.

He rushed into his office and slumped down behind his desk, having lost – at least temporarily – all claim to be an energy-packed, go-ahead young man, and now resembling a without-it, frightened never-has-been, who had spent a life-

time cringing in the shadow cast by the bottom rung of the managerial ladder. He shuddered several times, and when his secretary – usually lamentably lacking in energy – came bustling through the open doorway, he yelped like an injured puppy and all but fell out of his chair. The young lady hurriedly removed her hat, hung it on a stand, then turned a worried face in the direction of her boss.

'Sorry I'm late, Mr Bayswater, but the trains were simply awful . . . I say – aren't you feeling well?'

If Matthew had been in full control of his faculties, he would never have blurted out the statement that he did. As it was he gulped and said: 'I've just seen a ghost.'

Susan Kelby – for such was the secretary's name – sat down in a very abrupt manner, and allowed her worried expression to gradually fade into one of non-comprehension. She knew that Matthew rarely made jokes, particularly first thing in the morning, and never told lies, although he had been known to bend truth in the cause of commercial expedience. Therefore, before the rising tide of fearful excitement swept over the plains of reason, she ventured to ask a question.

'Not . . . not a real ghost?'

But Matthew was fast recovering from the first effects of severe shock, and the knowledge that a junior member of the staff was, so to speak, seeing him with his professional trousers down, did much to hasten the process.

'I think so – but of course, I might have been mistaken. Now, let us get on with the morning post.'

But Susan was not to be so easily drawn away from a subject that promised to provide material for innumerable coffee-breaks, and entertainment for her boy-friend in his off-moments.

'But if you *really* saw a ghost. Gosh! I always said this place was eerie. What did it look like? Did you . . .' she looked anxiously round the office, '. . . did you see it in here?'

'No.' Matthew took up a pen and assumed a resolute air. 'I met it on the stairs as a matter of fact. Now we really must get on.'

'On the stairs! Great balls of fire! I knew . . . just knew there was something wrong with those stairs! Was it an old man with a candle? I always *felt* that there is an old man

with a candle stalking about. I can't wait to tell Mavis . . .'

'Miss Kelby.' Matthew succeeded in looking very severe. 'You will oblige me by not repeating a word of what I have – most unwisely – told you. Is that understood?'

Susan, her eyes still wide with excitement, nodded gravely, and lowered her voice to a confidential whisper. 'Of course, Mr Bayswater – you may trust me. But please – what did it look like?'

It would have been sheer cruelty to deny her this information, so Matthew admitted reluctantly: 'If you must know – it – looked rather like me.'

'Gosh! A double-ganger!'

'I beg your pardon!'

'A double-ganger. A mirror ghost. I read a story once where a man was haunted by one and . . .'

She was interrupted by Matthew's terse: 'Thank you, that will be quite enough. Now, *do* you suppose we could get down to some work?'

'Yes, Mr Bayswater, but . . .'

'Not another word.'

As the morning grew old, memory began to fade and so lost some of its sharp overtones. Common sense – of which Matthew had an abundant fund – began to assert itself, and declared that there was a perfectly reasonable scientific explanation for the experience, and it was up to him to find one. By lunch time his brain had obligingly come up with a solution that more than justified Matthew's good opinion of his own mental powers.

Shock. That was the key word. Yesterday he had almost died and the resulting shock had caused his brain – excellent organ that it might be in every other respect – to project a mental image of himself. Doubtless, a few early nights and a protein diet would put the matter right in no time at all. Matthew felt much better after arriving at this estimable solution, and curtailed his lunch to grilled steak and button mushrooms, followed by black coffee.

Meanwhile Susan had, under the strictest confidence, imparted the news to her best friend Mavis Brown, who in turn had passed it on to the friend-she-hated-the-most in the typing pool, who was soon relating the entire business – with

considerable embellishments – to a large and extremely interested audience. By the time Mrs Jarvis the tea lady came round with her trolley, the entire staff of Newman & Sons (1869) Ltd knew that the up-and-coming Mr Bayswater had met his own ghost coming downstairs, and the apparition had a blue face, bulging eyes and was completely naked. This final extra had been added by an office boy, who thought if one must paint a picture, one might as well use some bright colours.

At four-thirty the internal telephone on Matthew's desk informed him that he was to pay an immediate visit to the managing director's office. He allowed Susan to brush him down, combed his hair, adjusted his tie, then departed with seemly haste to the font of managerial power. When he entered the large office, Mr Henry Newman Jr – Newman Sr had long since become a ghost in his own right – was standing in front of a giant fireplace, giving his famous impersonation of Napoleon on the eve of Austerlitz.

Mr Newman was a very go-ahead person indeed. He never sat down when he could stand up. He barked rather than spoke, had an impressive list of terse enjoiners, which included such gems as: 'Think – decide – act'; 'Brightness – Shine. Slackness – Sack'; 'Be with-it today – or without it tomorrow'. He had never been known to smile. Matthew presented himself to this paragon with a grave mien, while at the same time maintaining an alert, keen-as-mustard expression that suggested he was fully prepared to seize any fortuitous opportunity that might slide from the great man's desk, and transform it into a signed contract at the blink of an eye.

Mr Newman growled and spat out five words with the rapidity of a machine-gun. 'What's-this-that-I-hear?'

Matthew shuffled his feet, then remembering that this could be interpreted to mean indecisiveness, became still.

'I don't know, sir . . .'

'Don't know! Know – or go. Think – don't blink. I know. Always know. You've departed from the path of exactitude.'

'Good heavens, sir, I do assure you . . .'

'Ghosts! What! Place in uproar! Typing pool waiting on stairs for something to happen! Don't wait – make! Shocked!

Surprised! Had me eye on you! Expected great things! What!'

Matthew realized that he had been betrayed and endeavoured to forge his positive thinking into a weapon of defence.

'Sorry, sir. An accident yesterday. Thought I saw something on the stairs. Was unwise. Mentioned it to someone. Admit bad judgement. Won't happen again, sir.'

The economy of words, the unfaltering voice, had the desired effect. Mr Newman ceased to frown. 'Right. 'Nuff said. Remember this. No wastage. See ghost – put it on the payroll. Give it an order book. Send it out on the road. Week's trial. No returns – exorcize. Clear?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Good.' Mr Newman shifted his position and resumed his frown. Now it was deeper, much more severe and there was a steely glint in the great man's eyes. 'Now for the serious matter. Disgraceful! Shameful! Unbelievable! What!'

Matthew almost said, 'I don't know' again, but checked himself just in time. 'May I have the facts, sir?'

Mr Newman widened his eyes, pushed out his not inconsiderable stomach, and exploded into a storm of righteous anger.

'Facts! Pretending innocence! State of undress! Swimming trunks? Flaunting yerself! What! Those are the facts.'

Matthew said: 'Oh, no. It's not possible,' which was not a shining example of positive thinking.

'No! No! Saw you meself.'

It was really too much and Matthew fainted.

Jenny enjoyed looking after her ailing husband.

She had been reared by a mother who believed in the old-fashioned remedies, which included beef-tea, cod-liver oil, malt, bread poultices, red flannel next to the skin, and a steam kettle for congested bronchial tubes.

When Matthew was sent home in the care of Mr Denfield of the accounts department, Jenny insisted that he be instantly put to bed, then sat down and tried to decide which

of the above remedies would be suitable under the circumstances.

'Mr Denfield said you fainted in Mr Newman's office. Was it because of something you ate?'

'No – saw. Or rather I saw first, then Mr Newman afterwards.'

This was too deep for a girl who viewed life through a kitchen window and thought that all ills could be cured by putting something in or on the stomach. She said: 'Oh, dear!' and wrinkled her brows into a pretty frown of perplexity.

Matthew tried to explain.

'I know it sounds silly, but I met my own ghost coming downstairs. Afterwards Mr Newman saw it walking along one of the corridors. At the time it was very distressing and I fainted.'

Jenny said: 'Ghost!' in the tone of voice she might have used had the milkman presented her with a bottle of green milk.

'Yes. I thought at first it might be a mental image, but as Mr Newman saw it as well – I must be wrong. But I am still of the opinion that there is a perfectly reasonable explanation, if we don't panic and talk the matter over sensibly.'

'Ghost! You don't mean a thing that's transparent and goes round clanking chains?'

Matthew managed to conjure up a hollow laugh. 'Would I go round clanking chains? No, I'm wearing the blue swimming trunks you brought me from the Swan & Edgar sale, and I look rather miserable. Also, I'm not very substantial around the feet. Nothing very alarming – once you've got used to the idea.'

Jenny began to get to grips with the situation. 'Am I to understand that at any moment, I'll see you – your ghost – walking round the place, looking as miserable as sin and wearing those nice trunks?'

'Well – yes.'

Jenny thought the matter over for a few minutes. 'How can there be a ghost when you're not dead?'

Matthew took a deep breath and made his confession.

'I didn't want to worry you, but yesterday when I went

swimming in the river, I had a touch of cramp and sort of – drowned.'

'Drowned!'

'And I must have – somehow – shed a bit of my personality.'

Jenny promptly burst into tears, wringing her hands in a gesture of complete despair. Matthew groaned and tried to comfort her.

'There's no need to carry on like that. I'm sure if we get together, we can lick this thing . . .'

'Your poor head.'

He sat up and stared at her with rising anger.

'What do you mean – my poor head?'

But Jenny only continued to cry, then jumped to her feet and ran from the room. A little later she returned with a plastic bag filled with ice-cubes, which she laid gently on the suspect head, and refused to enter into further discussion.

Jenny's mother was a very young woman of fifty-three.

Dieting had reduced her figure to that of a seventeen year old; tinting – not to be confused with dye – had restored her hair to a blonde glory that put nature to shame, and a certain amount of discreet padding created an illusion that might have given a serious investigator a severe shock. Summoned by telephone, she walked seductively into the lounge, sat down, crossed her legs, than bared an exquisite set of false teeth in a simpering smile.

'Well now, dear,' she spoke with a low, husky voice, 'what is all this about?'

Jenny dabbed her eyes with a lace handkerchief. 'Matthew has seen himself wandering about in blue swimming trunks.'

Mrs Cornfield never permitted herself to be surprised. Surprise meant a frown: a frown made lines.

'I shouldn't let that worry you, dear. Your father often saw double.'

'But, Mother, you don't understand. He says he saw his own ghost and that Mr Newman saw it as well. And he thinks it's a bit of his personality – and I feel so miserable.'

'A double-ganger,' Mrs Cornfield nodded. 'Several quite famous people have seen them in the past. I expect you'd like

me to have a talk with the dear boy?'

Jenny clasped her hands. 'Would you?'

They went upstairs to the bedroom where Matthew was sitting up in bed, an ice-bag perched on his forehead, and a basin of untasted beef-tea standing on the bedside table. He greeted his mother-in-law's entrance with a scowl.

'Good Lord! What do you want?'

Mrs Cornfield sat on the edge of the bed and allowed her skirt to ride half way up her slender thighs. 'I am sorry to hear you haven't been quite yourself. Now, what can Mummy do to help?'

'Push off.'

Although Mrs Cornfield looked appealingly fragile, she had a very tough skin, and dismissed this unkind suggestion with a playful shake of her head. 'Jenny has told me all about it. It must be very upsetting seeing your own ghost – particularly when it is in a state of undress. Have you tried talking to it?'

'No. The only time that I saw it – I ran.'

Mrs Cornfield patted her hair. 'I cannot believe that was wise. I have always been given to understand that the dear departed only return because they have a problem. Chat it up, dear, and I'm sure you'll come to an understanding.'

'But it's not the dear departed,' Matthew pointed out. 'It's me.'

'Yes, that's rather awkward. Rather like talking to yourself. Still – a little chat never did any harm. Tell it to stop wandering around. Sort of – come home.'

Matthew thought this advice quite worthy of consideration. He turned to Jenny.

'That's not a bad idea. If you see it belting round the place, direct it in here.'

Jenny shook her head most violently. 'No fear. If I see it, I'll shut myself in the loo.'

'Then I must get up.'

The ice-bag was dropped on to the floor, Mrs Cornfield was pushed off the bed, and Matthew began to remove his pyjamas, a course of action that so alarmed his mother-in-law, she was unable to tear her eyes away.

'Get back into bed at once,' Jenny ordered.

'No. I've been slacking. After all it's only a matter of selling myself to myself. Back – or sack. Contribution – not distribution. It's dead simple.'

Fired by the urge to be up and doing, with every sense alert and prepared to take full advantage of any opportunity that might present itself, Matthew was dressed in two minutes. He strode resolutely out on to the landing and raised his voice in a resounding challenge:

'Where are you? Don't hide – confide. Come home – don't roam.'

But the ghost-self, the detached fragment, refused, or was unable, to put in an appearance.

Matthew looked everywhere.

He took to wandering from room to room, haunted the river bank, stalked the echoing swimming baths, staring at blue-trunks-clad strangers in a way that excited adverse comment. He walked up and down the draughty stone stairs in the familiar Regent Street building, secretly dreading to meet the sad, other self, but bitterly disappointed when he did not.

A watched kettle never boils. The expected rarely occurs. But it is a well-known fact that the unexpected attacks when the doors are unlocked and the sentry asleep. Matthew was beginning to relax; his burning need to face a bizarre problem and resolve it with decisive promptitude, gradually dimmed down to a flickering desire.

Then, one Sunday afternoon when Jenny was away having a cosy chat with her mother, the unexpected revealed itself in the form of a pathetic whimper. Matthew was working in the small box-room that he had fitted up as a study, when he heard the distinct sound of someone crying in the rooms below. It was a harsh, gulping sound, that could only have been made by a man struck by the mailed fist of misfortune, or driven mad by the soft-footed approach of grief.

Matthew crept down the stairs and his ears located the sound; it came from the ultra-modern lounge – one of the proud status symbols of his growing success. Fear, which had been banished beyond the barricades of brash self-confidence,

came howling across his brain. But no man is courageous who is not first afraid, and Matthew, after taking a deep breath, opened the lounge door and stepped boldly into the room beyond.

The ghost-self – the detached portion – still clad in blue swimming trunks, was seated in the Easi-Relax armchair, tears pouring down its pale cheeks, and looking as solid, as real, as a delayed train on Monday morning. Matthew – with a certain, completely justifiable pride – walked firmly across the mauve-striped carpet and sank down in another chair, situated on the opposite side of the artificial-coal electric fire. He cleared his throat and experienced a disconcerting shiver when the apparition turned its tear-filled eyes in his direction.

He said quietly, with the merest tremor in his voice: 'This won't do, you know. Won't do at all.'

The ghost-self gulped, then wiped its eyes on a bare arm. The voice which answered was a near reproduction of Matthew's own, but it lacked his decisive, I-know-where-I'm-going tone.

'No, I suppose not. But what am I to do? I never imagined . . .' And the ghost-self broke down and produced a fresh flow of tears, looking so forlorn that Matthew's fear melted like an ice-cube on a hot summer's day. He leaned forward and emphasized his remarks by a jerking forefinger.

'Right – let's get down to basic facts. You are a bit of my personality that got loose after I was nearly drowned in the river . . .'

'No.'

The denial was delivered in an apologetic tone, but it was no less decisive for that. The ghost-self again wiped its eyes, then shook its head very slowly as though appalled at the necessity of contradicting a superior being. Matthew smiled patiently and went on.

'Lacking my reasoning powers, you probably haven't got the hang of all this. Let me explain. You are – forgive my frankness – a weak, snivelling part of myself, that I suppose I could well do without. However – when we are united, you possibly provide an element of caution – a dash of sentimentality that is essential to a well-balanced personality.'

Matthew felt quite proud of this speech and therefore was

not at all pleased when the ghost-self again shook its head.

'I am very sorry, but it's not like that at all. I'm the ghost of your dual-self.'

Matthew said: 'What!' quite sharply and glared at the miserable creature that was scratching its head.

'Yes, I'm awfully sorry, but your mistaken assumption is quite understandable. It's only since I've been wandering around that I stumbled on the truth of the matter. I gather you had an accident – almost – if not quite – drowned.'

Matthew nodded. 'Yes. Cramp, as a matter of fact. Chap said he thought I was dead. Anyway, they brought me round.'

The ghost-self shivered and Matthew wondered if he should offer it a blanket. 'They didn't bring me round. Also, I didn't have an accident – I committed suicide. I swallowed sleeping pills and then went for a swim. I'm so sorry, but I wasn't to know you would go swimming at the same time.'

There followed a strained silence. Then Matthew said: 'Perhaps I have gone mad.'

The ghost-self hastened to correct this assumption.

'Oh, no, you're the perfectly sane half. You see – it's hard to explain and I was never much good at working things out – we are – were – the same person living on two streams of consciousness. Two opposite halves of a complex whole. Do you understand?'

'No,' said Matthew with deep sincerity.

'Let me explain. What is your name?'

'Matthew Bayswater.'

'Mine is Luke Bayswater.'

'Good God!'

The ghost-self was acquiring a little more self-confidence, and actually displayed some of that I-know-what-I'm-talking-about air that was Matthew's crowning asset.

'Were you bright at school?'

Matthew smiled complacently. 'That is not for me to say. But I did win two scholarships and ended up with a first-class degree.'

'I,' admitted the ghost-self sadly, 'was considered the dimmest pupil in Clapham Secondary Modern. I suppose you've got a good job?'

'Executive manager in charge of all home sales and a

promise of a seat on the board in five years.'

'I,' stated the ghost-self with an even deeper air of melancholy, 'sold pots and pans in the local branch of the Klean Easy Kitchen Emporium. After five years they gave me the sack.'

Matthew suddenly began to remember the fears, the nagging anxieties, that had sometimes writhed like tormented snakes behind the bright façade of worldly success, and often haunted his dreams. Life is a comedy, but to be complete it must be interlaced with pathos. Against a background of laughter must be heard weeping – the cries of anguish, the whimpering ghosts of what-might-have-been. The voice of the ghost-self went on, and Matthew knew it came from within himself – not from the figure opposite.

'I am your nightmares – you are my daydreams. Your wife is beautiful, understanding, loving and respects you. Mine was a sour bitch who despised me. Her salary was three times greater than mine and enabled us – her – to buy this house. You have called it Happy Lands: we named it Dark Country. At first it was a kind of black joke because Jannie had that kind of humour, but later I realized that we both knew what it meant.'

Matthew waited. The question became a burning agony that seared his mind and demanded to be dressed with words.

'How . . . how did it all end?'

'End!' The ghost-self laughed and the mirthless sound went crashing through the dark corridors of Matthew's brain. 'Does anything end? I killed her. Strangled her in this room. Her body lies on that sofa – only ours was not – is not – so modern as yours. Jannie had very mundane taste. The best I could hope for was Broadmoor. So I took the only way out.'

Matthew glanced at the sofa and experienced a twinge of surprise that there was no black-faced corpse lying there. The voice spoke for the last time.

'I have spent twenty-eight years in hell. Perhaps now I am to be permitted a glimpse of heaven. I feel stronger – happier – brighter . . .'

A wave of horror drew Matthew into its cold embrace, and made his limbs tremble like dead leaves flailed by the winter wind. The ghost-self no longer looked so pathetic; a smile

was struggling for existence on the pale face, and a rose-tinted dawn of understanding slowly lit the sombre eyes. Then came the sound of a key turning in a lock and the voice of Jenny calling him.

'Hullo, darling – I'm back.'

Matthew jumped to his feet and rushed out into the hall, and there she was – more beautiful than he realized: young, not very bright, but loving him, ready to do anything that would add to his cup of happiness. He pulled her into his arms and whispered a heart-rending appeal.

'Don't leave me. Don't ever – ever leave me.'

Jenny was surprised, even gratified at this demonstration of affection, and she kissed him gently before slowly disengaging herself from his embrace. 'You silly old thing, I have no intention of ever leaving you. I say, you do look strange. Goodness, have you been seeing that . . .'

She could not finish the sentence but stared up at him with wide-open eyes, and he had to lie – pretend.

'No, darling. Don't worry – it was only a nightmare – not real. Imagination run wild.'

He was rewarded with a smile. 'I'm so glad. Now, I'll get tea ready. You'll feel much better after a nice cup of tea. Then we'll have a quiet evening in front of the telly.'

She went into the kitchen and Matthew first looked fearfully into the now empty lounge, then wandered round the house, opening and closing doors, taking comfort from the familiarity of it all. He went upstairs and entered the main bedroom, examined the built-in wardrobes, the king-sized bed – saw the brightness, the neatness – but most important, the unmistakable reality. He turned about and whispered. 'It's all right. There's no need to worry.'

But some inner urge made him turn again. The built-in wardrobes had gone. In their place were two ugly walnut affairs, that stood on either side of an unmade bed. The Regency wallpaper faded and became dirty blue distemper; the soft Wilton carpet quivered, then took on the appearance of well-worn linoleum. Matthew cried out and Jenny's voice floated up from the kitchen.

'Matthew – is there anything wrong?'

He rushed down the stairs and out into the hall – merciful

God, it had already changed and become drab, neglected – and shouted her name: 'Jenny . . . Jenny . . .' There was a pang of relief when she answered:

'I'm coming, darling. I'm com . . .'

Silence. A thick curtain had come down, the scene had changed; the bright trappings of love and laughter had gone, and had been replaced by the dark backcloth of drama. He crept into the kitchen. Grease-stained walls, a pile of unwashed crockery on the drainboard, the odour of long-dead meals. But no Jenny – no one at all.

He was drawn to the lounge as a mesmerized bird to a poisonous snake. Heavy old-fashioned furniture, magazines and newspapers lying like giant moths on chairs, table and floor; and way over at the far end of the room, before an ash-choked fireplace, lurked a high-backed, damask-covered sofa. It was on this – with congested face, bulging eyes and protruding tongue – that he found Jannie.

So like Jenny, yet so unlike. Memory rose up from its green-tinted nest and unfolded scarlet wings. He remembered the shrill voice, the waspish face, the selfishness, the scorn, the hate, the revolt – and the never-ending dream.

He looked down at the thing he had destroyed and screamed the terrible words: 'If only . . . if ONLY . . . IF ONLY . . .'

Luke Bayswater went up the stairs – the very same Matthew Bayswater had recently descended – entered the awful bedroom, took a pair of blue swimming trunks from a chest of drawers, then put a bottle of sleeping pills into his trouser pocket.

A little later he let himself out of the house and began his last journey to the river.

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LADY CELIA'S MIRROR

He stood stupefied, rooted in front of the mirror as his reflection faded, dwindled . . . and was superseded by the dim image of an old woman in a long, filmy dress. Its face was grey, deeply seamed and scarred, and in the little, half-closed eyes and distorted red mouth there was an expression of limitless malice. From the lacy sleeves protruded hands like claws; yellow, lined, from which extended long, ragged nails.

Then the thing in the mirror moved jerkily, and he thought it stretched out its withered, mutilated claws to him . . .

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