BEST BLACK MAGIC STORIES

Edited by John Keir Cross

FABER paper covered EDITIONS

[*BEST BLACK MAGIC STORIES is also available in a cloth-bound edition at 16s net.*]

BEST BLACK MAGIC STORIES

edited with an introduction by

JOHN KEIR CROSS

From a particularly ripe and vintage crop of spine-chillers, John Keir Cross has selected a 'devil's dozen' of excellently macabre stories. For good measure, he has added his own personal experience of a diabolical experiment.

'. . . the stories are crammed with wax images and nasty goings-on.'

Siriol Hugh-Jones in the *Tatler*

1 4 5

FABER
paper covered
EDITIONS

Also edited by John Keir Cross

*

BEST HORROR STORIES

BEST BLACK MAGIC STORIES

Edited

with an Introduction

by

JOHN KEIR CROSS

FABER AND FABER

24 Russell Square

London

First published in mcmlx
by Faber and Faber Limited
24 *Russell Square London W.C.*1
First published in this new edition mcmlxiii
Printed in Great Britain by
The Pitman Press, Bath

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I once invited the Devil to broadcast.

It was a number of years ago, in a B.B.C. studio in Scotland. We were transmitting a programme for the night of Hallowe'en. It was a general survey of the occult, and in it we set out to explore, among many other things, the uneasy relationship between James VI—who was a Devil's Advocate without knowing it—and the mysterious Black Man of North Berwick; the smoky horrors of Gilles de Rais; the self-confessed vampirism of Elizabeth, Countess Bathory, and her ninety-nine man-eating cats; the curious evidence that Oliver Cromwell might well have been a wizard. And we considered too, without being able to delve too deeply in the particular medium, the possibility of present-day Black Magic activities in this very country, this very corner of it, sir or madam, in which you are reading these words, possibly in the same spirit as the woman in the old nursery rhyme who so harmlessly

—sat at her reel one night,
And still she sat, and still she reeled, and
still she wished for company;
And in there came—

but you know the rest (or might find out): what did come in—and what It came for.

It seemed a reasonable conceit to conclude the programme with what these days would be called a gimmick, of some pre-publicity value; and so, at the end of it, a genuine magic circle was drawn round the microphone, an actor (a volunteer) was handed a sealed envelope containing an authentic medieval incantation for summoning the Prince himself, and all the rest of us withdrew.

The actor read the words of the incantation and then retired from the studio himself, switching out all the lights as he did so. And we left the microphone open and alive, there in the darkness, for a space of two full minutes—open and alive to whatever cared to take advantage of the invitation to utter through it.

Nothing seemed to happen, although there were some curious letters from listeners in the course of the next few days. But all the same there was—I almost believe—a sequel; of which more anon.

In collecting together the stories in this book I have tried to illustrate some at least of the activities suggested by this bare old dictionary definition:

"The term Black Magic has been applied to the practice of those occult sciences which profess to invoke the aid of evil spirits or to make a compact with the Devil."

What precisely is the fascination of such tales?

In a previous collection of purely horrific stories, I put forward the idea that the appeal of horror lies in its turning of the familiar inside out: a good horror tale suddenly demonstrates a quite unsuspected *other side* of some innocent everyday thing which we think we know all about—as when, in that M. R. James masterpiece, *Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad* (the title perfect, by the way), the simple bed-sheet on the empty bed rears startlingly up and reveals itself to poor Professor Parkins as . . . well, what? That is the story.

But I think I would go so far as to say that where the occult is concerned, we are confronted by exactly the reverse. We know, at the very outset, what the bed-sheet really is—we know all about that dreadful face *of crumpled linen* that it displays. We feel it all in our bones, and are terrified lest those bones of ours should be quite independently right . . . that if we don't watch out, *they* will take full control. In the scriptural quotation from which one of the tales in this book derives its title:

"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin (i.e. the Devil) coucheth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

But we do not want that—not really, intriguing though the

idea may be to have "him" at our command. It bears its own punishment, as Faust found—and as Freud found. Yet we are still aware of him, couching at the door or lurking at the shoulder as the sempiternal Secret Sharer. We know very well the truth of that gentle song which Auden makes the Coucher and some of his associates sing:

Do not imagine we do not know
Or that what you hide with care won't show
at a glance;
Nothing is done, nothing is said
But don't make the mistake of thinking us dead;
I shouldn't dance,
For I'm afraid in that case you'll have a fall;
We've been watching you over the garden wall
for hours,
The sky is darkening like a stain,
Something is going to fall like rain
and it won't be flowers.

Do you cross your fingers to ward off the Evil Eye when you meet a man with a squint? Do you walk outside ladders? Do you burn your finger-nail clippings? Do you turn over the shell of your boiled egg and break it?

Yes: you do—in some form or another, outwardly or inwardly. Otherwise you might see old Linen Face again, as you thought you did last night; and you know what that might lead to:

I saw yestreen, I saw yestreen,
O, little wis ye what I saw yestreen—
"There's one may gar thee sick and green
For telling what ye saw yestreen! . . ."

But there are one or two who have seen, and have told; and here they are, in this book, with their findings. And that too is a form of exorcism, both for them and for us. Hence, in every sense, the charm of it all.

Some notes on the stories themselves:

We would be incomplete without a classic, and here there are two. *The Haunted and the Haunters* is a tale that was at one time anthologised *ad nauseam*; but I return to the attack because of late it has, by one of those paradoxes, become rather difficult to obtain (stories sometimes acquire a sudden reputation among editors for being too popular and are therefore avoided—and so, with the swing of the pendulum, they tend to disappear altogether). It has been classified as a ghost story, and indeed there are true and terrifying ghosts in it; but it really is a piece of genuine Black Magic, explored through the lost art of mesmerism. There is a most extraordinary flavour of authenticity in this strange narrative: it is impossible not to feel that in some way not *quite* defined (possibly deliberately) this is how some aspects of the occult really do work; and back we come to the old rumour that Bulwer Lytton was himself an adept—a pupil of the great Éliphas Levy, known as The Last of the Sorcerers. I think I would say that it was more than only a rumour, considering that full-length novel of Black Magic, *Zanoni,* or that other one, *A Strange Story,* for which *The Haunted and the Haunters* was a sketch.

The other Victorian story here presented is from no less a source than the genial Ingoldsby Legends. Again the true note rings through: if there *is* anything in it all, it is somehow, somehow, along these lines. (In this tale, by the way, I have presumed to make a change in title for easier reference purposes: Barham's original was the lengthy *Singular Passage in the Life*, etc., which I have used as sub-title.)

Both these classic tales date from the earlier Victorian days: the Barham story appeared in 1840, the Lytton in 1859. The later Victorians wrote many excellent ghost and supernatural stories—Dickens's monthly magazines are full of them—but very little about real Black Magic. It was not until the end of the century that the old subject began once more to blossom: something enchantingly poisonous crept into the literary air again (Wilde, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Robin de la Condamine and Company, to say nothing of Huysmans himself). Even B.M. stories written nearer to our own time have often a fumy *fin de siècle* setting,

like the powerful and unexpected D. K. Broster tale already mentioned, which was first published in fact in 1933.

Humour must have its place, even in this field; and so I have included a recent item by John Wyndham to provide something of a new twist on the old *Golden Asse* theme—one of the earliest and best of B.M. stories, with trappings in it strangely similar to those of the James VI accounts of demonology, not to mention again those of our own days. Unfortunately, the contemporary approach tends sometimes to be a little facetious; and there is perhaps just a trace of this in Wyndham's very neatly titled *More Spinned Against*—yet see Bergson: when we laugh, he says, or even smile, we are in reality baring our teeth in a little snarl of fear and enmity. However, the wry ending to this tale more than makes up, I submit, for any slight earlier solecisms to the demon-loving purist. And the sardonic side of the jesting Coucher emerges too in the John Collier anecdote of *The Lady on the Grey*. As both these stories show, the Devil's jokes—like God's in the poem —are all practical ones.

The question of atmosphere is important. The trappings may seem indeed to be mere trappings, but they are still enormously significant, as witness the emphasis that that expert, Huysmans, places on the smoking herbs and liniments used by Canon Docre. And the far smell of sulphur lingers beautifully in Margaret Irwin's haunting account of *The Earlier Service*, and in the typical macabre fantasy by Ray Bradbury, *Homecoming*. Even among the demons, in this latter, there are, it appears, the tragic misfits.

M. R. James, out of gratitude for many splendid moments of discomfort, simply had to be included. He is often referred to only as a writer of ghost stories; but *Casting the Runes* brings the world of the conjurers very close indeed—again authentically; and what more satisfactory familiar could any worthwhile wizard wish for than an Edwardian tramcar?

We are back now, for a moment, at, in the other sense (yet the same one after all?), the familiar. A simple walking-stick, for an example. Dennis Wheatley is one of the foremost of all present-day tellers of "what he saw yestreen". *The Snake* is the very first

story he ever wrote . . . and it is still a tremendously powerful piece of genuine B.M. Compare its central idea with this account from Sir Walter Scott of one of the most notorious wizards of all time, Major Weir, who flourished in East Scotland some three hundred years ago as opposed to East Africa to-day:

"It appears that the Major was peculiar in his gift of prayer, and was often called to exercise this talent by the bedsides of the sick, until it came to be observed that he could not pray with the same warmth and fluency of expression unless he had in his hand a stick of peculiar shape and appearance. When this stick was taken from him his wit and talent appeared to forsake him. And so he was seized by the magistrates on a strange whisper that became current respecting vile practices . . . and he confessed that the stick had come from the Devil, and that he was a warlock and could not tell a hundredth part of the crimes and magic he had indulged in. So he received sentence of death, which he suffered 12th April, 1670, at the Gallowhill between Leith and Edinburgh . . ."

The Hill, by R. Ellis Roberts, also illustrates this long and wide tradition of unity through time and space behind occult practices; and the masterly contemporary piece by the curious Mr. Theodore Sturgeon, *A Way of Thinking*, brings the old voodoo doll theme right up to date. This indeed is the very Blackest of Magic—the true, the blushful Hippocrene itself: unutterably horrid, and not least because of the terrifying innocence of the poor little witch, and even of the simple, forthright wizard. (I am not sure but that in some dreadful way *all* witches are innocent . . . and that is the real innermost awfulness of the whole subject.)

Once again the publishers have flatteringly insisted on the inclusion of a story of my own; and so I offer a tale called *Mothering Sunday* as a paradoxical example of a rather oblique kind of white magic.

The last item is not really a story at all, although it is quite self-contained. It is an excerpt from a novel, one of the most darkly-celebrated of all novels with an occult background: *Là-Bas*. Time and time again one hears of this terrible and exotic

book, as one hears too of its companion-piece by the same author, *À Rebours*—the book that Dorian Gray loved as "the strangest book he had ever read".

I include the excerpt because it is indeed so famous, and yet *Là-Bas* itself is extremely difficult to obtain; and also because it is undoubtedly a description of a genuine Black Mass as it was celebrated towards the end of the last century and, with variations, as it is still celebrated to-day. Joris-Karl Huysmans dabbled deeply —and finished as a convert to the Church. That he did take part himself in such a ceremony as he describes is certain. The repulsive Canon Docre in the excerpt had a counterpart in real life: he was one Canon Roca, a renegade Belgian priest who had once been chaplain to a shrine in Bruges; and Hyacinthe too was real— *"une Espagnole satanique"*, once Huysmans's mistress; and who else was Durtal but Huysmans himself?

The description is to say the least unsavoury. But that, after all, is what any of the doings of the Devil must be. It is also, perhaps, in an odd sense, when all is done, disappointing—the unholy feast, so often hinted at in the other stories, seems in reality to be no more than a mere saturnalia of drugged hysterics. But that is the Devil's weakness, and yet, in another sense (if you read it twice), his hideous strength. For it may well be, as a wise old theologian once remarked, that it is the Prince's greatest feat of all to succeed in getting himself denied.

So here they are, these watchers by the threshold. The book aims, in a general way, to progress from the first gentle hints to the last murky realities. And as a small but necessary gesture to the Onlie Begetter, there are, you will notice, thirteen contributors: a round Devil's Dozen.

Margaret Irwin

THE EARLIER SERVICE

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 heretics 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 with which she had jumped up 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 an habitual and almost an unconscious part of their lives. Jane stole in past her mother, and knelt for an instant, her red pig-tail, 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 dream-like 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."

"In the name of the Father and the Son and 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 specially. 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 inquired. "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 is 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 at 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 your father, 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 the 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 to-day. 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 distinguished 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 choirboys, 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.' 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 after, 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.

"Humph. 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 to-morrow?" asked York, maliciously. He had been told that to-morrow 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 daresay 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 terrible 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 backward and forward 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 would they 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 shuffle 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 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 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 good-bye. 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 come 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 made 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."

John Collier

THE LADY ON THE GREY

Ringwood was the last of an Anglo-Irish family which had played the devil in County Clare for a matter of three centuries. At last all their big houses were sold up, or burned down by the long-suffering Irish, and of all their thousands of acres not a single foot remained. Ringwood, however, had a few hundred a year of his own, and if the family estates had vanished he at least inherited a family instinct, which prompted him to regard all Ireland as his domain, and to rejoice in its abundance of horses, foxes, salmon, game, and girls.

In pursuit of these delights Ringwood ranged and roved from Donegal to Wexford through all the seasons of the year. There were not many hunts he had not led at some time or other on a borrowed mount, not many bridges he had not leaned over through half a May morning, nor many inn parlours where he had not snored away a wet winter afternoon in front of the fire.

He had an intimate by the name of Bates, who was another of the same breed and the same kidney. Bates was equally long and lean, and equally hard-up, and he had the same wind-flushed bony face, the same shabby arrogance, and the same seignorial approach to the little girls in the cottages and cowsheds.

Neither of these blades ever wrote a letter, but each generally knew where the other was to be found. The ticket collector, respectfully blind as he snipped Ringwood's third-class ticket in a first-class compartment, would mention that Mr. Bates had travelled that way only last Tuesday, stopping off at Killorglin

for a week or two after the snipe. The chambermaid, coy in the clammy bedroom of a fishing inn, would find time to tell Bates that Ringwood had gone on up to Lough Corrib for a go at the pike. Policemen, priests, bag-men, game-keepers, even the tinkers on the roads, would pass on this verbal *pateran*. Then, if it seemed his friend was on to a good thing, the other would pack up his battered kit-bag, put rods and guns into their cases, and drift off to join in the sport.

So it happened that one winter afternoon, when Ringwood was strolling back from a singularly blank day on the bog of Ballyneary, he was hailed by a one-eyed horse dealer of his acquaintance, who came trotting by in a gig, as people still do in Ireland. This worthy told our friend that he had just come down from Galway, where he had seen Mr. Bates, who was on his way to a village called Knockderry, and who had told him very particularly to mention it to Mr. Ringwood if he came across him.

Ringwood turned this message over in his mind, and noted that it was a very particular one, and that no mention was made as to whether it was fishing or shooting his friend was engaged in, or whether he had met with some Croesus who had a string of hunters that he was prepared to lend. "He certainly would have put a name to it if it was anything of that sort! I'll bet my life it's a pair of sisters he's got on the track of. It must be!"

At this thought, he grinned from the tip of his long nose like a fox, and he lost no time in packing his bag and setting off for this place Knockderry, which he had never visited before in all his roving up and down the country in pursuit of fur, feather, and girls.

He found it was a long way off the beaten track, and a very quiet place when he got to it. There were the usual low, bleak hills all around, and a river running along the valley, and the usual ruined tower up on a slight rise, girdled with a straggly wood and approached by the remains of an avenue.

The village itself was like many another: a few groups of shabby cottages, a decaying mill, half a dozen beer-shops, and one inn at which a gentleman, hardened to rural cookery, might conceivably put up.

Ringwood's hired car deposited him there, and he strode in and found the landlady in the kitchen and asked for his friend Mr. Bates.

"Why, sure, your honour," said the landlady, "the gentleman's staying here. At least, he is, so to speak, and then, now, he isn't."

"How's that?" said Ringwood.

"His bag's here," said the landlady, "and his things are here, and my grandest room taken up with them (though I've another every bit as good), and himself staying in the house best part of a week. But the day before yesterday he went out for a bit of a constitutional, and—would you believe it, sir?—we've seen neither hide nor hair of him since."

"He'll be back," said Ringwood. "Show me a room, and I'll stay here and wait for him."

Accordingly he settled in, and waited all the evening, but Bates failed to appear. However, that sort of thing bothers no one in Ireland, and Ringwood's only impatience was in connection with the pair of sisters, whose acquaintance he was extremely anxious to make.

During the next day or two he employed his time in strolling up and down all the lanes and bypaths in the neighbourhood, in the hope of discovering these beauties, or else some other. He was not particular as to which it should be, but on the whole he would have preferred a cottage girl, because he had no wish to waste time on elaborate approaches.

It was on the second afternoon, just as the early dusk was falling; he was about a mile outside the village and he met a straggle of muddy cows coming along the road, and a girl driving them. Our friend took a look at this girl, and stopped dead in his tracks, grinning more like a fox than ever.

This girl was still a child in her teens, and her bare legs were spattered with mud and scratched by brambles, but she was so pretty that the seignorial blood of all the Ringwoods boiled in the veins of their last descendant, and he felt an over-mastering desire for a cup of milk. He therefore waited a minute or two, and then followed leisurely along the lane, meaning to turn in as soon as he saw the byre, and beg the favour of this innocent

refreshment, and perhaps a little conversation into the bargain.

They say, though, that blessings never come singly, any more than misfortunes. As Ringwood followed his charmer, swearing to himself that there couldn't be such another in the whole county, he heard the fall of a horse's hoofs, and looked up, and there, approaching him at a walking pace, was a grey horse, which must have turned in from some bypath or other, because there certainly had been no horse in sight a moment before.

A grey horse is no great matter, especially when one is so urgently in need of a cup of milk, but this grey horse differed from all others of its species and colour in two respects. First, it was no sort of a horse at all, neither hack nor hunter, and it picked up its feet in a queer way, and yet it had an arch to its neck and a small head and a wide nostril that were not entirely without distinction. And, second—and this distracted Ringwood from all curiosity as to breed and blood-line—this grey horse carried on its back a girl who was obviously and certainly the most beautiful girl he had ever seen in his life.

Ringwood looked at her, and as she came slowly through the dusk she raised her eyes and looked at Ringwood. He at once forgot the little girl with the cows. In fact, he forgot everything else in the world.

The horse came nearer, and still the girl looked, and Ringwood looked, and it was not a mere exchange of glances, it was wooing and a marriage, all complete and perfect in a mingling of the eyes.

Next moment the horse had carried her past him and, quickening its pace a little, it left him standing on the road. He could hardly run after it, or shout; in any case he was too overcome to do anything but stand and stare.

He watched the horse and rider go on through the wintry twilight, and he saw her turn in at a broken gateway just a little way along the road. Just as she passed through, she turned her head and whistled, and Ringwood noticed that her dog had stopped by him, and was sniffing about his legs. For a moment he thought it was a smallish wolf-hound, but then he saw it was

just a tall, lean, hairy lurcher. He watched it run limping after her, with its tail down, and it struck him that the poor creature had had an appalling thrashing not so long ago; he had noticed the marks where the hair was thin on its ribs.

However, he had little thought to spare for the dog. As soon as he got over his first excitement, he moved on in the direction of the gateway. The girl was already out of sight when he got there, but he recognized the neglected avenue which led up to the battered tower on the shoulder of the hill.

Ringwood thought that was enough for the day, so made his way back to the inn. Bates was still absent, but that was just as well. Ringwood wanted the evening to himself in order to work out a plan of campaign.

"That horse never cost two ten-pound notes of anybody's money," said he to himself. "So she's not so rich. So much the better! Besides, she wasn't dressed up much; I don't know what she had on—a sort of cloak or something. Nothing out of Bond Street, anyway. And lives in that old tower! I should have thought it was all tumbled down. Still, I suppose there's a room or two left at the bottom. Poverty Hall! One of the old school, blue blood and no money, pining away in this God-forsaken hole, miles away from everybody. Probably she doesn't see a man from one year's end to another. No wonder she gave me a look. God! if I was sure she was there by herself, I wouldn't need much of an introduction. Still, there might be a father or a brother or somebody. Never mind, I'll manage it."

When the landlady brought in the lamp: "Tell me," said he. "Who's the young lady who rides the cobby-looking, old-fashioned-looking grey?"

"A young lady, sir?" said the landlady doubtfully. "On a grey?"

"Yes," said he. "She passed me in the lane up there. She turned in on the old avenue, going up to the tower."

"Oh, Mary bless and keep you!" said the good woman. "That's the beautiful Murrough lady you must have seen."

"Murrough?" said he. "Is that the name? Well! Well! Well! That's a fine old name in the west here."

"It is so, indeed," said the landlady. "For they were kings and queens in Connaught before the Saxon came. And herself, sir, has the face of a queen, they tell me."

"They're right," said Ringwood. "Perhaps you'll bring me in the whiskey and water, Mrs. Doyle, and I shall be comfortable."

He had an impulse to ask if the beautiful Miss Murrough had anything in the shape of a father or a brother at the tower, but his principle was, "least said soonest mended", especially in little affairs of this sort. So he sat by the fire, recapturing and savouring the look the girl had given him, and he decided he needed only the barest excuse to present himself at the tower.

Ringwood had never any shortage of excuses, so the next afternoon he spruced himself up and set out in the direction of the old avenue. He turned in at the gate, and went along under the forlorn and dripping trees, which were so ivied and overgrown that the darkness was already thickening under them. He looked ahead for a sight of the tower, but the avenue took a turn at the end, and it was still hidden among the clustering trees.

Just as he got to the end, he saw someone standing there, and he looked again, and it was the girl herself, standing as if she was waiting for him.

"Good afternoon, Miss Murrough," said he, as soon as he got into earshot. "Hope I'm not intruding. The fact is, I think I had the pleasure of meeting a relation of yours, down in Cork, only last month. . . ." By this time he had got close enough to see the look in her eyes again, and all this nonsense died away in his mouth, for this was something beyond any nonsense of that sort.

"I thought you would come," said she.

"My God!" said he. "I had to. Tell me—are you all by yourself here?"

"All by myself," said she, and she put out her hand as if to lead him along with her.

Ringwood, blessing his lucky stars, was about to take it, when her lean dog bounded between them and nearly knocked him over.

"Down!" cried she, lifting her hand. "Get back!" The dog cowered and whimpered, and slunk behind her, creeping almost on its belly. "He's not a dog to be trusted," she said.

"He's all right," said Ringwood. "He looks a knowing old fellow. I like a lurcher. Clever dogs. What? Are you trying to talk to me, old boy?"

Ringwood always paid a compliment to a lady's dog, and in fact the creature really was whining and whimpering in the most extraordinary fashion.

"Be quiet!" said the girl, raising her hand again, and the dog was silent.

"A cur," said she to Ringwood. "Did you come here to sing the praises of a half-bred cur?" With that she gave him her eyes again, and he forgot the wretched dog, and she gave him her hand, and this time he took it and they walked toward the tower.

Ringwood was in the seventh heaven. "What luck!" thought he. "I might at this moment be fondling that little farm wench in some damp and smelly cowshed. And ten to one she'd be snivelling and crying and running home to tell her mammy. This is something different."

At that moment, the girl pushed open a heavy door, and, bidding the dog lie down, she led our friend through a wide, bare, stone-flagged hall and into a small vaulted room which certainly had no resemblance to a cowshed except perhaps it smelt a little damp and mouldy, as these old stone places so often do. All the same, there were logs burning on the open hearth, and a broad, low couch before the fireplace. For the rest, the room was furnished with the greatest simplicity, and very much in the antique style. "A touch of the Kathleen ni Houlihan," thought Ringwood. "Well, well! Sitting in the Celtic twilight, dreaming of love. She certainly doesn't make much bones about it."

The girl sat down on the couch and motioned him down beside her. Neither of them said anything; there was no sound but the wind outside, and the dog scratching and whimpering timidly at the door of the chamber.

At last the girl spoke. "You are of the Saxon," said she gravely.

"Don't hold it against me," said Ringwood. "My people came here in 1656. Of course, that's yesterday to the Gaelic League, but still I think we can say we have a stake in the country."

"Yes, through its heart," said she.

"Is it politics we're going to talk?" said he, putting an Irish turn to his tongue. "You and I, sitting here in the firelight?"

"It's love you'd rather be talking of," said she with a smile. "But you're the man to make a blunder and a mockery of the poor girls of Eire."

"You misjudge me entirely," said Ringwood. "I'm the man to live alone and sorrowful, waiting for the one love, though it seemed something beyond hoping for."

"Yes," said she. "But yesterday you were looking at one of the Connell girls as she drove her kine along the lane."

"Looking at her? I'll go so far as to say I did," said he. "But when I saw you I forgot her entirely."

"That was my wish," said she, giving him both her hands. "Will you stay with me here?"

"Ah, that I will!" cried he in a rapture.

"Always?" said she.

"Always," cried Ringwood. "Always and forever!" for he felt it better to be guilty of a slight exaggeration than to be lacking in courtesy to a lady. But as he spoke she fixed her eyes on him, looking so much as if she believed him that he positively believed himself.

"Ah," he cried. "You bewitch me!" And he took her in his arms.

He pressed his lips to hers, and at once he was over the brink. Usually he prided himself on being a pretty cool hand, but this was an intoxication too strong for him; his mind seemed to dissolve in sweetness and fire, and at last the fire was gone, and his senses went with it. As they failed he heard her saying "For ever! For ever!" and then everything was gone and he fell asleep.

He must have slept some time. It seemed he was wakened by the heavy opening and closing of a door. For a moment he was all confused and hardly knew where he was.

The room was now quite dark, and the fire had sunk to a dim glow. He blinked, and shook his ears, trying to shake some sense into his head. Suddenly he heard Bates talking to him,

muttering as if he, too, was half asleep, or half drunk more likely. "You *would* come here," said Bates. "I tried hard enough to stop you."

"Hullo!" said Ringwood, thinking he must have dozed off by the fire in the inn parlour. "Bates? God, I must have slept heavy! I feel queer. Damn it—so it was all a dream! Strike a light, old boy. It must be late. I'll yell for supper."

"Don't, for Heaven's sake," said Bates, in his altered voice. "Don't yell. She'll thrash us if you do."

"What's that?" said Ringwood. "Thrash us? What the hell are you talking about?"

At that moment a log rolled on the hearth, and a little flame flickered up, and he saw his long and hairy fore-legs, and he knew.

Richard Barham

A ROOM IN LEYDEN

Being a Singular Passage in the Life of the Late Henry Harris, Doctor in Divinity, as Related by his Friend, Thomas Ingoldsby.

In order that the extraordinary circumstance which I am about to relate may meet with the credit it deserves, I think it necessary to premise, that my reverend friend, among whose papers I find it recorded, was in his lifetime ever esteemed as a man of good plain understanding, strict veracity, and unimpeached morals—by no means of a nervous temperament, or one likely to attach undue weight to any occurrence out of the common course of events, merely because his reflections might not, at the moment, afford him a ready solution of its difficulties.

On the truth of his narrative, as far as he was personally concerned, no one who knew him would hesitate to place the most implicit reliance. His history is briefly this: He had married early in life, and was a widower at the age of thirty-nine, with an only daughter, who had then arrived at puberty, and was just married to a near connection of our own family. The sudden death of her husband, occasioned by a fall from his horse, only three days after her confinement, was abruptly communicated to Mrs. S—— by a thoughtless girl, who saw her master brought lifeless into the house, and, with all that inexplicable anxiety to be the first to tell bad news, so common among the lower orders,

rushed at once into the sick-room with her intelligence. The shock was too severe: and though the young widow survived the fatal event several months, yet she gradually sank under the blow, and expired, leaving a boy, not a twelve-month old, to the care of his maternal grandfather.

My poor friend was sadly shaken by this melancholy catastrophe; time, however, and a strong religious feeling, succeeded at length in moderating the poignancy of his grief—a consummation much advanced by his infant charge, who now succeeded, as it were by inheritance, to the place in his affections left vacant by his daughter's decease. Frederick S—— grew up to be a fine lad; his person and features were decidedly handsome; still there was, as I remember, an unpleasant expression in his countenance, and an air of reserve, attributed, by the few persons who called occasionally at the vicarage, to the retired life led by his grandfather, and the little opportunity he had, in consequence, of mixing in the society of his equals in age and intellect. Brought up entirely at home, his progress in the common branches of education was, without any great display of precocity, rather in advance of the generality of boys of his own standing; partly owing, perhaps, to the turn which even his amusements took from the first. His sole associate was the son of the village apothecary, a boy about two years older than himself, whose father being really clever in his profession, and a good operative chemist, had constructed for himself a small laboratory, in which, as he was fond of children, the two boys spent a great portion of their leisure time, witnessing many of those little experiments so attractive to youth, and in time aspiring to imitate what they admired.

In such society, it is not surprising that Frederick S—— should imbibe a strong taste for the sciences which formed his principal amusement; or that, when, in process of time, it became necessary to choose his walk in life, a profession so intimately connected with his favourite pursuit as that of medicine should be eagerly selected. No opposition was offered by my friend, who, knowing that the greater part of his own income would expire with his life, and that the remainder would prove an insufficient resource to his grandchild, was only anxious that he should follow such a

path as would secure him that moderate and respectable competency which is, perhaps, more conducive to real happiness than a more elevated or wealthy station. Frederick was, accordingly, at the proper age, matriculated at Oxford, with the view of studying the higher branches of medicine, a few months after his friend, John W——, had proceeded to Leyden, for the purpose of making himself acquainted with the practice of surgery in the hospitals and lecture-rooms attached to that university. The boyish intimacy of their younger days did not, as is frequently the case, yield to separation; on the contrary, a close correspondence was kept up between them. Dr. Harris was even prevailed upon to allow Frederick to take a trip to Holland to see his friend: and John returned the visit to Frederick at Oxford.

Satisfactory as, for some time, were the accounts of the general course of Frederick S——'s studies, by degrees rumours of a less pleasant nature reached the ears of some of his friends; to the vicarage, however, I have reason to believe they never penetrated. The good old Doctor was too well beloved in his parish for any one voluntarily to give him pain; and, after all, nothing beyond whispers and surmises had reached X——, when the worthy vicar was surprised on a sudden by a request from his grandchild, that he might be permitted to take his name off the books of the university, and proceed to finish his education in conjunction with his friend W—— at Leyden. Such a proposal, made, too, at a time when the period for his graduating could not be far distant, both surprised and grieved the Doctor; he combated the design with more perseverance than he had ever been known to exert in opposition to any declared wish of his darling boy before, but, as usual, gave way, when, more strongly pressed, from sheer inability to persist in a refusal which seemed to give so much pain to Frederick, especially when the latter, with more energy than was quite becoming their relative situations, expressed his positive determination of not returning to Oxford, whatever might be the result of his grandfather's decision. My friend, his mind, perhaps, a little weakened by a short but severe nervous attack from which he had scarcely recovered, at length yielded a reluctant consent, and Frederick quitted England.

It was not till some months had elapsed after his departure, that I had reason to suspect that the eager desire of availing himself of opportunities for study abroad, not afforded him at home, was not the sole, or even the principal, reason which had drawn Frederick so abruptly from his *Alma Mater*. A chance visit to the university, and a conversation with a senior fellow belonging to his late college convinced me of this; still I found it impossible to extract from the latter the precise nature of his offence. That he had given way to most culpable indulgences I had before heard hinted; and when I recollected how he had been at once launched, from a state of what might be well called seclusion, into a world where so many enticements were lying in wait to allure—with liberty, example, everything to tempt him from the straight road —regret, I frankly own, was more the predominant feeling in my mind than either surprise or condemnation. But here was evidently something more than mere ordinary excess—some act of profligacy, perhaps of a deeper stain, which had induced his superiors, who, at first, had been loud in his praises, to desire him to withdraw himself quietly, but for ever; and such an intimation, I found, had, in fact, been conveyed to him from an authority which it was impossible to resist. Seeing that my informant was determined not to be explicit, I did not press for a disclosure, which, if made, would, in all probability, only have given me pain, and that the rather as my old friend the Doctor had recently obtained a valuable living from Lord M——, only a few miles distant from the market town in which I resided, where he now was, amusing himself in putting his grounds into order, ornamenting his house, and getting everything ready against his grandson's expected visit in the following autumn. October came, and with it came Frederick; he rode over more than once to see me, sometimes accompanied by the Doctor, between whom and myself the recent loss of my poor daughter Louisa had drawn the cords of sympathy still closer.

More than two years had flown on in this way, in which Frederick S—— had as many times made temporary visits to his native country. The time was fast approaching when he was expecting to return and finally take up his residence in England,

when the sudden illness of my wife's father obliged us to take a journey into Lancashire; my old friend, who had himself a curate, kindly offered to fix his quarters at my parsonage, and superintend the concerns of my parish till my return. Alas! when I saw him, next he was on the bed of death!

My absence was necessarily prolonged much beyond what I had anticipated. A letter, with a foreign post-mark, had, as I afterwards found, been brought over from his own house to my venerable substitute in the interval, and barely giving himself time to transfer the charge he had undertaken to a neighbouring clergyman, he had hurried off at once to Leyden. His arrival there was however too late. Frederick *was dead*!—killed in a duel, occasioned, it was said, by no ordinary provocation on his part, although the flight of his antagonist had added to the mystery which enveloped its origin. The long journey, its melancholy termination, and the complete overthrow of all my poor friend's earthly hopes, were too much for him. He appeared too —as I was informed by the proprietor of the house in which I found him, when his summons at length had brought me to his bedside—to have received some sudden and unaccountable shock, which even the death of his grandson was inadequate to explain. There was, indeed, a wildness in his fast-glazing eye, which mingled strangely with the glance of satisfaction thrown upon me as he pressed my hand; he endeavoured to raise himself, and would have spoken, but fell back in the effort, and closed his eyes for ever. I buried him there, by the side of the object of his more than parental affection—in a foreign land.

It is from papers that I discovered in his travelling case that I submit the following extracts, without, however, presuming to advance an opinion on the strange circumstances which they detail, or even as to the connection which some may fancy they discover between different parts of them.

The first was evidently written at my own house, and bears date August the 15th, 18—, about three weeks after my own departure for Preston.

It begins thus:—

"Tuesday, August 15.—Poor girl!—I forget who it is that says,

'The real ills of life are light in comparison with fancied evils'; and certainly the scene I have just witnessed goes some way towards establishing the truth of the hypothesis. Among the afflictions which flesh is heir to, a diseased imagination is far from being the lightest, even when considered separately, and without taking into the account those bodily pains and sufferings which —so close is the connection between mind and matter—are but too frequently attendant upon any disorder of the fancy. Seldom has my interest been more powerfully excited than by poor Mary Graham. Her age, her appearance, her pale, melancholy features, the very contour of her countenance, all conspire to remind me, but too forcibly, of one who, waking or sleeping, is never long absent from my thoughts;—but enough of this.

"A fine morning had succeeded one of the most tempestuous nights I ever remember, and I was just sitting down to a substantial breakfast, which the care of my friend Ingoldsby's housekeeper, kind-hearted Mrs. Wilson, had prepared for me, when I was interrupted by a summons to the sick-bed of a young parishioner whom I had frequently seen in my walks, and had remarked for the regularity of her attendance at Divine worship. Mary Graham is the elder of two daughters, residing with their mother, the widow of an attorney, who, dying suddenly in the prime of life, left his family but slenderly provided for. A strict though not parsimonious economy has, however, enabled them to live with an appearance of respectability and comfort; and from the personal attractions which both the girls possess, their mother is evidently not without hopes of seeing one, at least, of them advantageously settled in life. As far as poor Mary is concerned, I fear she is doomed to inevitable disappointment, as I am much mistaken if consumption has not laid its wasting finger upon her; while this last occurrence, of what I cannot but believe to be a formidable epileptic attack, threatens to shake out, with even added velocity, the little sand that may yet remain within the hour-glass of time. Her very delusion, too, is of such a nature as, by adding to bodily illness the agitation of superstitious terror, can scarcely fail to accelerate the catastrophe, which I think I see fast approaching.

"Before I was introduced into the sick-room, her sister, who had been watching my arrival from the window, took me into their little parlour, and, after the usual civilities, began to prepare me for the visit I was about to pay. Her countenance was marked at once with trouble and alarm, and in a low tone of voice, which some internal emotion, rather than the fear of disturbing the invalid in a distant room, had subdued almost to a whisper, informed me that my presence was become necessary, not more as a clergyman than a magistrate; that the disorder with which her sister had, during the night, been so suddenly and unaccountably seized, was one of no common kind, but attended with circumstances which, coupled with the declarations of the sufferer, took it out of all ordinary calculations, and, to use her own expression, that, 'malice was at the bottom of it.'

"Naturally supposing that these insinuations were intended to intimate the partaking of some deleterious substance on the part of the invalid, I inquired what reason she had for imagining, in the first place, that anything of a poisonous nature had been administered at all; and, secondly, what possible incitement any human being could have for the perpetration of so foul a deed towards so innocent and unoffending an individual? Her answer considerably relieved the apprehension I had begun to entertain lest the poor girl should, from some unknown cause, have herself been attempting to rush uncalled into the presence of her Creator; at the same time, it surprised me not a little by its apparent want of rationality and common-sense. She had no reason to believe, she said, that her sister had taken poison, or that any attempt upon her life had been made, or was, perhaps, contemplated, but that 'still malice was at work—the malice of villains or fiends, or of both combined; that no causes purely natural would suffice to account for the state in which her sister had been now twice placed, or for the dreadful sufferings she had undergone while in that state'; and that she was determined the whole affair should undergo a thorough investigation. Seeing that the poor girl was now herself labouring under a great degree of excitement, I did not think it necessary to enter at that moment into a discussion upon the absurdity of her opinion, but applied myself to the tran-

quillising of her mind by assurances of a proper inquiry, and then drew her attention to the symptoms of the indisposition, and the way in which it had first made its appearance.

"The violence of the storm last night had, I found, induced the whole family to sit up far beyond their usual hour, till, wearied out at length, and, as their mother observed, 'tired of burning fire and candle to no purpose,' they repaired to their several chambers.

"The sisters occupied the same room; Elizabeth was already at her humble toilet, and had commenced the arrangement of her hair for the night, when her attention was at once drawn from her employment by a half-smothered shriek and exclamation from her sister, who, in her delicate state of health, had found walking up two flights of stairs, perhaps a little more quickly than usual, an exertion, to recover from which she had seated herself in a large armchair.

"Turning hastily at the sound, she perceived Mary deadly pale, grasping, as it were convulsively, each arm of the chair which supported her, and bending forward in the attitude of listening; her lips were trembling and bloodless, cold drops of perspiration stood upon her forehead, and in an instant after, exclaiming in a piercing tone, 'Hark! they are calling me again! it is—*it is the same voice*;—Oh no, no!—O my God! save me, Betsy—hold me—save me!' she fell forward upon the floor. Elizabeth flew to her assistance, raised her, and by her cries brought both her mother, who had not yet got into bed, and their only servant-girl, to her aid. The latter was despatched at once for medical help; but, from the appearance of the sufferer, it was much to be feared that she would soon be beyond the reach of art. Her agonised parent and sister succeeded in bearing her between them and placing her on a bed; a faint and intermittent pulsion was for a while perceptible; but in a few moments a general shudder shook the whole body; the pulse ceased, the eyes became fixed and glassy, the jaw dropped, a cold clamminess usurped the place of the genial warmth of life. Before Mr. I—— arrived everything announced that dissolution had taken place, and that the freed spirit had quitted its mortal tenement.

"The appearance of the surgeon confirmed their worst apprehensions; a vein was opened, but the blood refused to flow, and Mr. I—— pronounced that the vital spark was indeed extinguished.

"The poor mother, whose attachment to her children was perhaps the most powerful, as they were the sole relatives or connections she had in the world, was overwhelmed with a grief amounting almost to frenzy; it was with difficulty that she was removed to her own room by the united strength of her daughter and medical adviser. Nearly an hour had elapsed during the endeavour at calming her transports; they had succeeded, however, to a certain extent, and Mr. I—— had taken his leave, when Elizabeth, re-entering the bedchamber in which her sister lay, in order to pay the last sad duties to her corpse, was horror-struck at seeing a crimson stream of blood running down the side of the counterpane to the floor. Her exclamation brought the girl again to her side, when it was perceived, to their astonishment, that the sanguine stream proceeded from the arm of the body, which was now manifesting signs of returning life. The half-frantic mother flew to the room, and it was with difficulty that they could prevent her, in her agitation, from so acting as to extinguish for ever the hope which had begun to rise in their bosoms. A long-drawn sigh, amounting almost to a groan, followed by several convulsive gaspings, was the prelude in the restoration of the animal functions in poor Mary: a shriek, almost preternaturally loud, considering her state of exhaustion, succeeded; but she did recover, and, with the help of restoratives, was well enough towards morning to express a strong desire that I should be sent for—a desire the more readily complied with, inasmuch as the strange expressions and declarations she had made since her restoration to consciousness, had filled her sister with the most horrible suspicions. The nature of these suspicions was such as would at any other time, perhaps, have raised a smile upon my lips; but the distress, and even agony of the poor girl, as she half hinted and half expressed them, were such as entirely to preclude every sensation at all approaching to mirth. Without endeavouring, therefore, to combat ideas, evidently too strongly impressed

upon her mind at the moment to admit of present refutation, I merely used a few encouraging words, and requested her to precede me to the sick-chamber.

"The invalid was lying on the outside of the bed, partly dressed, and wearing a white dimity wrapping-gown, the colour of which corresponded but too well with the deadly paleness of her complexion. Her cheek was wan and shrunken, giving an extraordinary prominence to her eye, which gleamed with a lustrous brilliancy not unfrequently characteristic of the aberration of intellect. I took her hand; it was chill and clammy, the pulse feeble and intermittent, and the general debility of her frame was such that I would fain have persuaded her to defer any conversation which, in her present state, she might not be equal to support. Her positive assurance that, until she had disburdened herself of what she called her 'dreadful secret', she could know no rest either of mind or body, at length induced me to comply with her wish, opposition to which, in her then frame of mind, might perhaps be attended with even worse effects than its indulgence. I bowed acquiescence, and in a low and faltering voice, with frequent interruptions, occasioned by her weakness, she gave me the following singular account of the sensations which, she averred, had been experienced by her during her trance:

" 'This, sir,' she began, 'is not the first time that the cruelty of others has, for what purpose I am unable to conjecture, put me to a degree of torture which I can compare to no suffering, either of body or mind, which I have ever before experienced. On a former occasion I was willing to believe it the mere effect of a hideous dream, or what is vulgarly termed the nightmare; but this repetition, and the circumstances under which I was last *summoned*, at a time, too, when I had not even composed myself to rest, fatally convince me of the reality of what I have seen and suffered.

" 'This is no time for concealment of any kind. It is now more than a twelve-month since I was in the habit of occasionally encountering in my walks a young man of prepossessing appearance and gentlemanly deportment. He was always alone, and generally reading; but I could not be long in doubt that these rencounters, which became every week more frequent, were not

the effect of accident, or that his attention, when we did meet, was less directed to his book than to my sister and myself. He even seemed to wish to address us, and I have no doubt would have taken some other opportunity of doing so, had not one been afforded him by a strange dog attacking us one Sunday morning on our way to church, which he beat off, and made use of this little service to promote an acquaintance. His name, he said, was Francis Somers, and added that he was on a visit to a relation of the same name, resident a few miles from X——. He gave us to understand that he was himself studying surgery with the view to a medical appointment in one of the colonies. You are not to suppose, sir, that he had entered thus into his concerns at the first interview; it was not till our acquaintance had ripened, and he had visited our house more than once with my mother's sanction, that these particulars were elicited. He never disguised, from the first, that an attachment to myself was his object originally in introducing himself to our notice. As his prospects were comparatively flattering, my mother did not raise any impediment to his attentions, and I own I received them with pleasure.

" 'Days and weeks elapsed; and although the distance at which his relation resided prevented the possibility of an uninterrupted intercourse, yet neither was it so great as to preclude his frequent visits. The interval of a day, or at most of two, was all that intervened, and these temporary absences certainly did not decrease the pleasure of the meetings with which they terminated. At length a pensive expression began to exhibit itself upon his countenance, and I could not but remark that at every visit he became more abstracted and reserved. The eye of affection is not slow to detect any symptom of uneasiness in a quarter dear to it. I spoke to him, questioned him on the subject; his answer was evasive, and I said no more. My mother, too, however, had marked the same appearance of melancholy, and pressed him more strongly. He at length admitted that his spirits were depressed, and that their depression was caused by the necessity of an early, though but a temporary, separation. His uncle, and only friend, he said, had long insisted on his spending some months on the Continent, with the view of completing his professional education, and that

the time was now fast approaching when it would be necessary for him to commence his journey. A look made the inquiry which my tongue refused to utter. "Yes, dearest Mary," was his reply, "I have communicated our attachment to him, partially at least; and though I dare not say that the intimation was received as I could have wished, yet I have, perhaps, on the whole, no fair reason to be dissatisfied with his reply.

" ' "The completion of my studies, and my settlement in the world, must, my uncle told me, be the first consideration; when these material points were achieved, he should not interfere with any arrangement that might be found essential to my happiness: at the same time he has positively refused to sanction any engagement at present, which may, he says, have a tendency to divert my attention from those pursuits, on the due prosecution of which my future situation in life must depend. A compromise between love and duty was eventually wrung from me, though reluctantly. I have pledged myself to proceed immediately to my destination abroad, with a full understanding that on my return, a twelvemonth hence, no obstacle shall be thrown in the way of what are, I trust, our mutual wishes."

" 'I will not attempt to describe the feelings with which I received this communication, nor will it be necessary to say anything of what passed at the few interviews which took place before Francis quitted X——. The evening immediately previous to that of his departure he passed in this house, and, before we separated, renewed his protestations of an unchangeable affection, requiring a similar assurance from me in return. I did not hesitate to make it. "Be satisfied, my dear Francis," said I, "that no diminution in the regard I have avowed can ever take place, and though absent in body, my heart and soul will still be with you." —"Swear this," he cried, with a suddenness and energy which surprised, and rather startled me: "promise that you will be with me *in spirit*, at least, when I am far away." I gave him my hand, but that was not sufficient. "One of these dark shining ringlets, my dear Mary," said he, "as a pledge that you will not forget your vow!" I suffered him to take the scissors from my work-box and to sever a lock of my hair, which he placed in his bosom.—

The next day he was pursuing his journey, and the waves were already bearing him from England.

"'I had letters from him repeatedly during the first three months of his absence; they spoke of his health, his prospects, and of his love, but by degrees the intervals between each arrival became longer, and I fancied I perceived some falling off from that warmth of expression which had at first characterised his communications.

"'One night I had retired to rest rather later than usual, having sat by the bedside, comparing his last brief note with some of his earlier letters, and was endeavouring to convince myself that my apprehensions of his fickleness were unfounded, when an undefinable sensation of restlessness and anxiety seized upon me. I cannot compare it to anything I had ever experienced before; my pulse fluttered, my heart beat with a quickness and violence which alarmed me, and a strange tremor shook my whole frame. I retired hastily to bed, in hopes of getting rid of so unpleasant a sensation, but in vain; a vague apprehension of I know not what occupied my mind, and vainly did I endeavour to shake it off. I can compare my feelings to nothing but those which we sometimes experience when about to undertake a long and unpleasant journey, leaving those we love behind us. More than once did I raise myself in my bed and listen, fancying that I heard myself called, and on each of those occasions the fluttering of my heart increased. Twice I was on the point of calling to my sister, who then slept in an adjoining room, but she had gone to bed indisposed, and an unwillingness to disturb either her or my mother checked me; the large clock in the room below at this moment began to strike the hour of twelve. I distinctly heard its vibrations, but ere its sounds had ceased, a burning heat, as if a hot iron had been applied to my temple, was succeeded by a dizziness—a swoon—a total loss of consciousness as to where or in what situation I was.

"'A pain, violent, sharp, and piercing, as though my whole frame were lacerated by some keen-edged weapon, roused me from this stupor—but where was I? Everything was strange around me—a shadowy dimness rendered every object indistinct

and uncertain; methought, however, that I was seated in a large, antique, high-backed chair, several of which were near, their tall black carved frames and seats interwoven with a lattice-work of cane. The apartment in which I sat was one of moderate dimensions, and, from its sloping roof, seemed to be the upper story of the edifice, a fact confirmed by the moon shining without, in full effulgence, on a huge round tower, which its light rendered plainly visible through the open casement, and the summit of which appeared but little superior in elevation to the room I occupied. Rather to the right, and in the distance, the spire of some cathedral or lofty church was visible, while sundry gable-ends, and tops of houses, told me I was in the midst of a populous but unknown city.

"'The apartment itself had something strange in its appearance, and, in the character of its furniture and appurtenances, bore little or no resemblance to any I had ever seen before. The fireplace was large and wide, with a pair of what are sometimes called andirons, betokening that wood was the principal, if not the only fuel consumed within its recess; a fierce fire was now blazing in it, the light from which rendered visible the remotest parts of the chamber. Over a lofty old-fashioned mantelpiece, carved heavily in imitation of fruit and flowers, hung the half-length portrait of a gentleman in a dark-coloured foreign habit, with a peaked beard and moustaches, one hand resting upon a table, the other supporting a sort of *bâton*, or short military staff, the summit of which was surmounted by a silver falcon. Several antique chairs, similar in appearance to those already mentioned, surrounded a massive oaken table, the length of which much exceeded its width. At the lower end of this piece of furniture stood the chair I occupied; on the upper, was placed a small chafing-dish filled with burning coals, and darting forth occasionally long flashes of various-coloured fire, the brilliance of which made itself visible, even above the strong illumination emitted from the chimney. Two huge, black japanned cabinets, with clawed feet, reflecting from their polished surfaces the effulgence of the flame, were placed one on each side the casement-window to which I have alluded, and with a few shelves loaded with

books, many of which were also strewed in disorder on the floor, completed the list of the furniture in the apartment. Some strange-looking instruments, of unknown form and purpose, lay on the table near the chafing-dish, on the other side of which a miniature portrait of myself hung, reflected by a small oval mirror in a dark-coloured frame, while a large open volume, traced with strange characters of the colour of blood, lay in front; a goblet, containing a few drops of liquid of the same ensanguined hue, was by its side.

" 'But of the objects which I have endeavoured to describe, none arrested my attention so forcibly as two others. These were the figures of two young men, in the prime of life, only separated from me by the table. They were dressed alike, each in a long flowing gown, made of some sad-coloured stuff, and confined at the waist by a crimson girdle; one of them, the shorter of the two, was occupied in feeding the embers of the chafing-dish with a resinous powder, which produced and maintained a brilliant but flickering blaze, to the action of which his companion was exposing a long lock of dark chestnut hair, that shrank and shrivelled as it approached the flame. But, O God!—that hair! and the form of him who held it! that face! those features!—not for one instant could I entertain a doubt—it was He! Francis!—the lock he grasped was mine, the very pledge of affection I had given him, and still, as it partially encountered the fire, a burning heat seemed to scorch the temple from which it had been taken, conveying a torturing sensation that affected my very brain.

" 'How shall I proceed?—but no, it is impossible—not even to you, sir, can I—dare I—recount the proceedings of that unhallowed night of horror and of shame. Were my life extended to a term commensurate with that of the Patriarchs of old, never could its detestable, its damning pollutions be effaced from my remembrance; and, oh! above all, never could I forget the diabolical glee which sparkled in the eyes of my fiendish tormentors, as they witnessed the worse than useless struggles of their miserable victim. Oh! why was it not permitted me to take refuge in unconsciousness—nay, in death itself, from the abominations of which I was compelled to be, not only a witness, but a

partaker? But it is enough, sir; I will not further shock your nature by dwelling longer on a scene, the full horrors of which, words, if I even dared employ any, would be inadequate to express; suffice it to say, that after being subjected to it, how long I knew not, but certainly for more than an hour, a noise from below seemed to alarm my persecutors; a pause ensued—the lights were extinguished, and, as the sound of a footstep ascending a staircase became more distinct, my forehead felt again the excruciating sensation of heat, while the embers, kindling into a momentary flame, betrayed another portion of the ringlet consuming in the blaze. Fresh agonies succeeded, not less severe, and of a similar description to those which had seized upon me at first: oblivion again followed, and on being at length restored to consciousness, I found myself as you see me now, faint and exhausted, weakened in every limb, and every fibre quivering with agitation. My groans soon brought my sister to my aid; it was long before I could summon resolution to confide, even to her, the dreadful secret, and when I had done so, her strongest efforts were not wanting to persuade me that I had been labouring under a severe attack of nightmare. I ceased to argue, but I was not convinced; the whole scene was then too present, too awfully real, to permit me to doubt the character of the transaction; and if, when a few days had elapsed, the hopelessness of imparting to others the conviction I entertained myself, produced in me an apparent acquiescence, with their opinion, I have never been the less satisfied that no cause reducible to the known laws of nature occasioned my sufferings on that hellish evening. Whether that firm belief might have eventually yielded to time, whether I might at length have been brought to consider all that had passed, and the circumstances which I could never cease to remember, as a mere phantasm, the offspring of a heated imagination, acting upon an enfeebled body, I know not—last night, however, would in any case have dispelled the flattering illusion—last night—last night was the whole horrible scene acted over again. The place—the actors—the whole infernal apparatus were the same; the same insults, the same torments, the same brutalities—all were renewed, save that the period of my agony was not so prolonged.

I became sensible to an incision in my arm, though the hand that made it was not visible; at the same moment my persecutors paused; they were manifestly disconcerted, and the companion of him, whose name shall never more pass my lips, muttered something to his abettor in evident agitation; the formula of an oath of horrible import was dictated to me in terms fearfully distinct. I refused it unhesitatingly; again and again was it proposed, with menaces I tremble to think on—but I refused; the same sound was heard—interruption was evidently apprehended —the same ceremony was hastily repeated and I again found myself released, lying on my own bed, with my mother and my sister weeping over me. O God! O God! when and how is this to end? —When will my spirit be left in peace?—Where, or with whom, shall I find refuge?'

"It is impossible to convey any adequate idea of the emotions with which this unhappy girl's narrative affected me. It must not be supposed that her story was delivered in the same continuous and uninterrupted strain in which I have transcribed its substance. On the contrary, it was not without frequent intervals, of longer or shorter duration, that her account was brought to a conclusion; indeed, many passages of her strange dream were not without the greatest difficulty and reluctance communicated at all. My task was no easy one; never, in the course of a long life spent in the active duties of my Christian calling—never had I been summoned to such a conference before.

"To the half-avowed, and palliated confession of committed guilt I had often listened, and pointed out the only road to secure its forgiveness. I had succeeded in cheering the spirit of despondency, and sometimes even in calming the ravings of despair; but here I had a different enemy to combat, an ineradicable prejudice to encounter, evidently backed by no common share of superstition and confirmed by the mental weakness attendant upon severe bodily pain. To argue the sufferer out of an opinion so rooted was a hopeless attempt. I did, however, essay it; I spoke to her of the strong and mysterious connection maintained between our waking images and those which haunt us in our dreams, and more especially during that morbid oppression

commonly called nightmare. I was even enabled to adduce myself as a strong and living instance of the excess to which fancy sometimes carries her freaks on those occasions; while, by an odd coincidence, the impression made upon my own mind, which I adduced as an example, bore no slight resemblance to her own. I stated to her, that on my recovery from the fit of epilepsy, which had attacked me about two years since, just before my grandson Frederick left Oxford, it was with the greatest difficulty I could persuade myself that I had not visited him, during the interval, in his rooms at Brazenose, and even conversed with himself and his friend W——, seated in his armchair, and gazing through the window full upon the statue of Cain, as it stands in the centre of the quadrangle. I told her of the pain I underwent both at the commencement and termination of my attack; of the extreme lassitude that succeeded; but my efforts were all in vain: she listened to me, indeed, with an interest almost breathless, especially when I informed her of my having actually experienced the very burning sensation in the brain alluded to, no doubt a strong attendant symptom of this peculiar affection, and a proof of the identity of the complaint: but I could plainly perceive that I failed entirely in shaking the rooted opinion which possessed her, that her spirit had, by some nefarious and unhallowed means, been actually subtracted for a time from its earthly tenement."

The next extract which I shall give from my old friend's memoranda is dated August 24th, more than a week subsequent to his first visit at Mrs. Graham's. He appears, from his papers, to have visited the poor young woman more than once during the interval, and to have afforded her those spiritual consolations which no one was more capable of communicating. His patient, for so in a religious sense she may well be termed, had been sinking under the agitation she had experienced; and the constant dread she was under of similar sufferings, operated so strongly on a frame already enervated, that life at length seemed to hang only by a thread. His papers go on to say—

"I have just seen poor Mary Graham,—I fear for the last time. Nature is evidently quite worn out; she is aware that she is dying,

and looks forward to the termination of her existence here, not only with resignation but with joy. It is clear that her dream, or what she persists in calling her 'subtraction', has much to do with this. For the last three days her behaviour has been altered, she has avoided conversing on the subject of her delusion, and seems to wish that I should consider her as a convert to my view of her case. This may, perhaps, be partly owing to the flippancies of her medical attendant upon the subject, for Mr. I—— has, somehow or other, got an inkling that she has been much agitated by a dream, and thinks to laugh off the impression—in my opinion injudiciously; but though a skilful, and a kind-hearted, he is a young man, and of a disposition, perhaps, rather too mercurial for the chamber of a nervous invalid. Her manner has since been much more reserved to both of us: in my case, probably because she suspects me of betraying her secret."

"August 26th—Mary Graham is yet alive, but sinking fast; her cordiality towards me has returned since her sister confessed yesterday, that she had herself told Mr. I—— that his patient's mind 'had been affected by a terrible vision.' I am evidently restored to her confidence. She asked me this morning, with much earnestness, 'What I believed to be the state of departed spirits during the interval between dissolution and the final day of account? And whether I thought they would be safe, in another world, from the influence of wicked persons employing an agency more than human?' Poor child! One cannot mistake the prevailing bias of her mind. Poor child!"

"August 27th—It is nearly over; she is sinking rapidly, but quietly and without pain. I have just administered to her the sacred elements, of which her mother partook. Elizabeth declined doing the same: she cannot, she says, yet bring herself to forgive the villain who has destroyed her sister. It is singular that she, a young woman of good plain sense in ordinary matters, should so easily adopt, and so pertinaciously retain, a superstition so puerile and ridiculous. This must be matter of a future conversation between us; at present, with the form of the dying girl before her

eyes, it were vain to argue with her. The mother, I find, has written to young Somers, stating the dangerous situation of his affianced wife; indignant as she justly is, at his long silence, it is fortunate that she has no knowledge of the suspicions entertained by her daughter. I have seen her letter; it is addressed to Mr. Francis Somers, in the Hogewoert, at Leyden—a fellow-student, then, of Frederick's. I must remember to inquire if he is acquainted with this young man."

Mary Graham, it appears, died the same night. Before her departure she repeated to my friend the singular story she had before told him, without any material variation from the detail she had formerly given. To the last she persisted in believing that her unworthy lover had practised upon her by forbidden arts. She once more described the apartment with great minuteness, and even the person of Francis' alleged companion, who was, she said, about the middle height, hard-featured, with a rather remarkable scar upon his left cheek, extending in a transverse direction from below the eye to the nose. Several pages of my reverend friend's manuscript are filled with reflections upon this extraordinary confession, which, joined with its melancholy termination, seems to have produced no common effect upon him. He alludes to more than one subsequent discussion with the surviving sister, and piques himself on having made some progress in convincing her of the folly of her theory respecting the origin and nature of the illness itself.

His memoranda on this, and other subjects, are continued till about the middle of September, when a break ensues, occasioned, no doubt, by the unwelcome news of his grandson's dangerous state, which induces him to set out forthwith for Holland. His arrival at Leyden was, as I have already said, too late. Frederick S—— had expired after thirty hours' intense suffering, from a wound received in a duel with a brother student. The cause of quarrel was variously related; but, according to his landlord's version, it had originated in some silly dispute about a dream of his antagonist's, who had been the challenger. Such, at least, was the account given to him, as he said, by Frederick's friend and fellow-lodger, W——, who had acted as second on the occasion,

thus acquitting himself of an obligation of the same kind due to the deceased, whose services he had put in requisition about a year before on a similar occasion, when he had himself been severely wounded in the face.

From the same authority I learned that my poor friend was much affected on finding that his arrival had been deferred too long. Every attention was shown him by the proprietor of the house, a respectable tradesman, and a chamber was prepared for his accommodation; the books and few effects of his deceased grandson were delivered over to him, duly inventoried, and, late as it was in the evening when he reached Leyden, he insisted on being conducted immediately to the apartments which Frederick had occupied, there to indulge the first ebullitions of his sorrows, before he retired to his own. Madam Müller accordingly led the way to an upper room, which being situated at the top of the house, had been, from its privacy and distance from the street, selected by Frederick as his study. The Doctor entered, and taking the lamp from his conductress, motioned to be left alone. His implied wish was of course complied with; and nearly two hours had elapsed before his kind-hearted hostess reascended, in the hope of prevailing upon him to return with her, and partake of that refreshment which he had in the first instance peremptorily declined. Her application for admission was unnoticed:—she repeated it more than once, without success; then becoming somewhat alarmed at the continued silence, opened the door and perceived her new inmate stretched on the floor in a fainting fit. Restoratives were instantly administered, and prompt medical aid succeeded at length in restoring him to consciousness. But his mind had received a shock, from which, during the few weeks he survived, it never entirely recovered. His thoughts wandered perpetually: and though from the very slight acquaintance which his hosts had with the English language, the greater part of what fell from him remained unknown, yet enough was understood to induce them to believe that something more than the mere death of his grandson had contributed thus to paralyse his faculties.

When his situation was first discovered, a small miniature was found tightly grasped in his right hand. It had been the property

of Frederick, and had more than once been seen by the Müllers in his possession. To this the patient made continued reference, and would not suffer it one moment from his sight: it was in his hand when he expired. At my request it was produced to me. The portrait was that of a young woman, in an English morning dress, whose pleasing and regular features, with their mild and somewhat pensive expression, were not, I thought, altogether unknown to me. Her age was apparently about twenty. A profusion of dark chestnut hair was arranged in the Madonna style, above a brow of unsullied whiteness, a single ringlet depending on the left side. A glossy lock of the same colour, and evidently belonging to the original, appeared beneath a small crystal, inlaid in the back of the picture, which was plainly set in gold, and bore in a cipher the letters M. G. with the date 18—. From the inspection of this portrait, I could at the time recollect nothing, nor from that of the Doctor himself, which, also, I found the next morning in Frederick's desk, accompanied by two separate portions of hair. One of them was a lock, short and deeply tinged with grey, and had been taken, I have little doubt, from the head of my old friend himself; the other corresponded in colour and appearance with that at the back of the miniature. It was not till a few days had elapsed, and I had seen the worthy Doctor's remains quietly consigned to the narrow house, that while arranging his papers previous to my intended return upon the morrow, I encountered the narrative I have already transcribed. The name of the unfortunate young woman connected with it forcibly arrested my attention. I recollected it immediately as one belonging to a parishioner of my own, and at once recognised the original of the female portrait as its owner.

I rose not from the perusal of his very singular statement till I had gone through the whole of it. It was late—and the rays of the single lamp by which I was reading did but very faintly illumine the remoter parts of the room in which I sat. The brilliancy of an unclouded November moon, then some twelve nights old, and shining full into the apartment, did much towards remedying the defect. My thoughts filled with the melancholy details I had read, I rose and walked to the window. The beautiful planet rose high

in the firmament, and gave to the snowy roofs of the houses, and pendent icicles, all the sparkling radiance of clustering gems. The stillness of the scene harmonised well with the state of my feelings. I threw open the casement and looked abroad. Far below me, the waters of the principal canal shone like a broad mirror in the moonlight. To the left rose the Burght, a huge round tower of remarkable appearance, pierced with embrasures at its summit; while a little to the right and in the distance, the spire and pinnacles of the Cathedral of Leyden rose in all their majesty, presenting a *coup d'œil* of surpassing though simple beauty. To a spectator of calm, unoccupied mind, the scene would have been delightful. On me it acted with an electric effect. I turned hastily to survey the apartment in which I had been sitting. It was the one designated as the study of the late Frederick S——. The sides of the room were covered with dark wainscot; the spacious fireplace opposite to me, with its polished andirons, was surmounted by a large old-fashioned mantelpiece, heavily carved in the Dutch style with fruits and flowers; above it frowned a portrait, in a Vandyke dress, with a peaked beard and moustaches; one hand of the figure rested on a table, while the other bore a marshal's staff, surmounted with a silver falcon; and—either my imagination, already heated by the scene, deceived me—or a smile as of malicious triumph curled the lip and glared in the cold leaden eye that seemed fixed upon my own. The heavy, antique, cane-backed chairs—the large oaken table—the book-shelves, the scattered volumes—all, all were there; while, to complete the picture, to my right and left, as half-breathless I leaned my back against the casement, rose, on each side, a tall, dark, ebony cabinet, in whose polished sides the single lamp upon the table shone reflected as in a mirror.

What am I to think?—Can it be that the story I have been reading was written by my poor friend here, and under the influence of delirium?—Impossible! Besides, they all assure me, that from the fatal night of his arrival he never left his bed—never put pen to paper. His very directions to have me summoned from England were verbally given, during one of those few and brief

intervals in which reason seemed partially to resume her sway. Can it then be possible that——? W——? where is he who alone may be able to throw light on this horrible mystery? No one knows. He absconded, it seems, immediately after the duel. No trace of him exists, nor, after repeated and anxious inquiries, can I find that any student has even been known in the University of Leyden by the name of Francis Somers.

John Keir Cross

MOTHERING SUNDAY

"There is something," said Mrs. Carpenter with finality, "—there is something quite dreadful about that boy."

Her small, screwed, selfish eyes probed over the farmyard to where the children were playing in the first soft fall of the snow.

Apart from them a little, watching the game with a curious detached avidity, was the boy she had referred to: very pale, very thin, an angular white rag of a child at that distance, with a head that seemed almost bald so nearly white itself was the growth of scruffed hair on it. His black eyes, like buttons, were intent on the activities of the Gaywood children as they rolled and scuffled; his hands, dangling down by his sides, were sticklike and frigid.

"He gives me the creeps, the positive creeps," Mrs. Carpenter went on. "I'm peculiarly sensitive to people, Mr. Bell—quite peculiarly. I am aware of the auras we all carry about with us. You, for instance, are very comfortable and sanguine, I'd suggest: a person to whom one might cheerfully confess one's sins . . . but that boy, that boy now: I'd say of that boy——"

She hesitated with a small grimace, sipping her sherry. Andrew Bell watched her with a smile, curling himself in the warmth of the great farm kitchen.

"You'd say of him what, Mrs. Carpenter?"

"That he'll come to a bad end—something quite remarkably beastly, which even the Sunday papers will hardly dare to print. One likes to be charitable—as I think you'll agree, Miss Patillo?

—but such deep instincts are not to be laughingly tossed aside, oh no. I remember, many years ago, meeting a man at Bournemouth, in a delightful hotel I found there and which I must recollect to recommend to you, Miss Patillo—I remember meeting a man who positively made me contract, but *contract*, the instant he came into the room." (The vision of Mrs. Carpenter contracting occupied Andrew quite unpleasantly for a moment.) "He was extremely handsome—the younger and more gullible guests were quite 'mad about him', as the foolish fashionable phrase then had it; but I knew at once that his heart was arid—and the heart is all, Miss Patillo, as you will learn. I was aware of a black halo about his head."

"Like a gramophone record," thought Andrew. "What unimaginable music might it have played?"

"Two days later," said Mrs. Carpenter, leaning forward portentously and lowering her voice, "—two days later, Mr. Bell, that man was arrested for a singularly brutal murder. It was one of those trunk cases, in Notting Hill or Paddington—as they always are, of course: I can hardly ever bear to set out on a journey from Paddington—certainly, if ever I must, I avoid the left-luggage office."

"And has Master Moore, the boy there," asked Andrew solemnly, "—has he a black halo?"

Mrs. Carpenter leaned more closely still, spoke more portentously still.

"He has none, Mr. Bell—just none; and that is what is wrong. That boy has no halo, no aura. Shall I tell you that I firmly believe that if one could bear to look at those dreadful hands of his one would find no life-line on them? When was he born, do you know?—what month?"

"I do, as a matter of fact," said Andrew quietly. "In September, eleven years ago." And Mrs. Carpenter barked triumphantly.

"September! I might have known. An appalling month, Miss Patillo. That man in Bournemouth was a September birth—I asked especially when I learned the truth about him. . . . What about the boy's mother, Mr. Bell?—did you know her, by any chance?"

"Very well," said Andrew, setting his own sherry glass down. "Very well indeed. She was——" But he hesitated for a long serious moment.

"She was what?"

"Nothing. It is very difficult to say. She loved the boy very much, very much. But she is dead now."

"And the father?" Mrs. Carpenter spoke more quietly herself, impressed by something in Andrew's tone.

"I . . . did not know the father," he said, after another brief pause. And then a curious silence fell on the little group by the window, and all three, in their different ways, looked out again towards the children. The boy still stood apart from the others, quite motionless. He was a waxy small figure in the puffs and swirls of the falling snow, some flakes of it clinging to his round head, making it seem whiter than ever. The others, shouting, their voices drifting in flat echoes over the fields, were rolling a gigantic snowball, its track a winding green serpent. One of the Gaywood girls, with a laugh, suddenly scooped up a handful of the snow and threw it at their silent companion. But still he did not move—only smiled in a forlorn way as the snow struck his cheek, adhering to it strangely.

"The lovely snow," murmured Patsy Patillo. "How nice to have it for our Christmas visit. So good for the children. And it makes Paul's farm look like a Christmas card,"—with a flurried little smile of self-consciousness.

"Is the father dead too?" asked Mrs. Carpenter, ignoring the girl's remark. And this time Andrew's pause was so long that she looked at him sharply and made as if to repeat the question.

"I think so," he said at last. "I . . . think so."

"Why does Paul Gaywood have him to stay here? Where does he live?—the boy, I mean. I'm sure he can't be good for the others." The inexorable voice was now almost petulant.

"Paul has old loyalties, Mrs. Carpenter," said Andrew patiently. "He was very fond of Viola—Viola Moore, the boy's mother. He was—as we all were in the old days—he was sorry for her. He feels that the boy is lonely. He's at school somewhere in Switzer-

land. Viola had a little money and was able to put it in trust for the boy. Paul has him for the holidays—at least," and again he paused strangely, "at least for the Christmas holidays."

Now, as they watched, the children abandoned the snowball and ran towards the other end of the field where some neighbouring youngsters had appeared and were building a snowman. Stiffly, as if, almost, he were unaccustomed to walking, the gaunt small boy who was the subject of the speculation limped after them. The falling snow intensified—the gusts of it hid the little figure from sight as he plodded on towards the far-off shouting voices.

Mrs. Carpenter shivered melodramatically.

"Well," she said, with finality again, "there's *something* very strange about it all, and that I will insist. Some day I may know the truth—and whatever it is it will be unpleasant."

She stirred and expanded, with a pronouncement that she proposed to go to lie down before Paul returned from superintending the milking and could give some attention to his guests. And a moment later she had swept from the room, which strangely seemed to sigh, almost, and relax; and Andrew, settling himself in his seat again, smiled very oddly, Patsy thought.

"She won't," he murmured. "She never will, Patsy—know the truth, I mean."

"Is it unpleasant?" asked the girl.

"I don't know. In fact, I'm not even sure that I know the truth myself . . . I wonder why Paul ever invited that abominable woman down? If I'd known I might have refused his invitation —except," and he stretched out his hand to touch hers, "—except that I knew you'd be here, Patsy, and that would have made me face anything."

"I suspect his old loyalties again," said Patsy with a smile, returning the pressure of his hand. "Mrs. Carpenter was an aunt of his wife's, I think. At least we must bear with her, darling—we shall steal away as often as we can. But tell me," and her tone changed, "—you were so serious, Andrew, so very serious. Is the story of that boy so strange?—I've heard of Viola Moore before somewhere——"

"The story," said Andrew, his thin face contracting in a frown, "the story, Patsy, is hardly a story at all. It's a kind of dream, I think—or even a parable. It's absurd—all quite absurd: it's only something half-formed and a speculation in the night . . . I know nothing, you know—just nothing. Except, perhaps, that prayers are answered sometimes—sometimes. I'm not sure that I wouldn't go even further and say that prayers are answered . . . always. Pour me more sherry, darling."

She did, then took his hand again. Outside, the first dusk was settling, the thickening snow falling through it in increasing gusts. They sat on in the gloom, the rising flicker of the great fire sending their shadows high against the old walls and crooked beams of the ancient place. And Andrew's voice was very quiet through the silence. Patsy listened, half in a dream herself. And Mrs. Carpenter, far away, mountainous beneath her eiderdown, snored on and on . . .

That year (said Andrew) there was also snow at Christmas. I'd gone down for the vacation to Korder's place in Berkshire. I was barely out of adolescence, I suppose—there was something immensely exciting about being the guest of so famous a man, with so many other nearly-famous people there also.

The house was huge—a magnificent place; but even it seemed crowded there were so many of us. Korder used to love to surround himself with young people. I should think that we were all on the best side of twenty-five—except for Korder himself, of course, and . . . Viola.

You said you thought you had heard of Viola Moore. She's forgotten now, but in those times she was quite celebrated in a strange, insubstantial way. She painted—curious, tenuous water-colours that had about them something of the forlorn air she always somehow wore herself. It's the one word, the only word —forlorn . . . as you even must have seen it in the boy out there.

Viola was—what? Thirty-seven—thirty-eight . . . perhaps even over forty. She wore clothes that were tragically out-of-date—loose, straight-waisted; somehow out of the late 'twenties, one

might guess, or the early 'thirties, from pictures one had seen—old snapshots of lost aunts. There was an indescribable essence of those faded days all round and through her—in tangible things like the clothes and the way she did her hair, but more subtly still as a kind of . . . aura, almost, but in a different way from Mrs. Carpenter's.

She was oddly out of place among us all—and yet, you know . . . and yet, although one would never have expected it, from her whole appearance and flavour—and yet she threw herself into all our activities with an almost bitter intensity—yes, almost bitter. She was queerly . . . *hungry*, I'd nearly say—hungry to be one of us, to be part of us, to . . . to how shall I put it?—to salvage something.

In a group like that, all young, all still self-consciously a little bohemian, in the old word, since we were most of us just embarking on our various artistic careers, there was naturally a great deal of amorous pairing off—encouraged, of course, by Korder: it was, I think, in his old age, why he loved to have so many of us round him. He used to sit back in his musty corner with a great glass of brandy, watching us through a queer edged smile: you would suddenly, in the midst of a swift grapple with someone or other, find him regarding you from the shadows of a stairway or a hidden window-embrasure. I suppose, looking back now, that it's all very dated itself and rather unpleasant even; but it was quite delirious and wonderful at the time, you know—we were emancipated and venturesome—we wore Mrs. Carpenter's black haloes, if some of us, as I see now, had to sit up o' nights painting over their pristine white.

But the snow, the snow. We arrived at the house in snow, driving and plunging through great drifts of it, some of us hours late and with immense adventures to recount. And it still fell for almost a week after we had assembled—we were cut off from the village absolutely. There was much foraging in old store-cupboards for food, and someone found some yeast and we made our own bread—a great deal of that kind of thing. But Korder had a gigantic and subtle cellar, so we didn't need to eat so very much —not in the overall mood.

And through it all went Viola, always avid, with wilder suggestions for games and subjects for conversation than anyone else —almost drugged, you might think, almost feverish from the pervading young vicarious boisterousness of it all. And Korder always sitting back and watching—watching her particularly, I thought: always watching her, with that quiet damnable smile of his . . .

He was the devil, that old man—and I don't mean the ancient mountebank with a tail and a smell of sulphur, but the real Devil, the evil that is abroad. Yet in another sense perhaps I do mean the goat with the cloven hooves—as an expression of it all, as the Goat only ever was, of course, even back in the Middle Ages. The Church has its rituals—so has the Church that is no Church.

We none of us knew his age. Behind that awful freshness of his long classical face there was another face, which we only occasionally glimpsed—and comprehended according to our capacities. But we are back to Mrs. Carpenter and her auras again: it was his aura that was almost the full curse of him—an essence he somehow exuded that almost *was* a smell. One hears of the odour of sanctity, whatever that might mean; but his was the odour of unsanctity—of unholiness—of the decay in that bleak corner of the Cosmos, wherever it is, to which God sweeps away His rubbish.

You know how he made his money—at least one way; from those impossible sentimental novels he wrote under some absurd name and which brought him a fortune from the hidden callow lechery in them. He wrote only two books as himself, both printed privately and circulated only among friends. I read one and was offered the other; but I couldn't stomach it—I was beginning to grow up.

It was whispered, among other things, that he did indeed study necromancy, was a conjurer in the old sense. There was one room, certainly, in that house—like Bluebeard's—that we were never permitted to enter. And sometimes, you know, as we rambled past it, there was a queer high whining out of it, a kind

of breathless incantation of some wicked sort—and a true smell of brimstone after all beneath the black door. Mummery, of course; but it was hideously impressive when you knew him—it was easy in those times to see it all as some kind of gesture, something abandoned and lost and magnificent. We were susceptible—on the brink of the larger romance; which is not love, you know, my dearest Patsy, but hate. Growing up is losing hate and finding love—it is only the older men whose thoughts turn lightly in the spring, not the younger. And Korder had never grown up, for all his age.

But the mummery . . . So pointless, you know—a kind of parlour magic after all, that might easily be contrived with hidden wires and a simple chemical or two. But always with an edge of silly small cruelty to it that was also pointless—childish; yet gave pain.

For instance: In the huge drawing-room where we used to foregather there was a large crooked porcelain vase on an ebony pedestal. An antique of some kind, one supposed—at least old, quite incalculably old; but with its age adding somehow no grace to it, but increasing its unpleasantness. Its *shape* was unpleasant in some way indefinable—like Mrs. Carpenter's shape: what simple Chesterton called "the wrong shape". Across it were crude intaglio designs of an unequivocal obscenity, and round the belly of the thing an inscription of some sort in an unknown language.

Somehow the conversation had centred on it that evening. Esther Colebrook had asked what the inscription meant—I remember her leaning forward to the fire a little, that dark lovely delicate face of hers and the fall of her hair. And Korder smiled.

"It is forbidden to ask, dear Esther," he said, in his low, slightly mocking voice. "It is in the language which cannot be taught—one knows its meaning when the time comes, without translation."

"And when does the time come?" asked Esther.

"When one is ready. Therefore, be ready to be ready."

He smiled again, sipping his brandy. And now came the mummery, you see. He said slyly:

"There is a curious legend about that vase. It is probably why it has survived so long in this house of mine, when it might shatter to pieces in any other. It is said that it will stand so, quite intact, until the end of time itself, no matter what blows may be directed against it. But if once—if *once*—it is so much as caressed by a virgin, Esther, then it will break in a thousand fragments."

We laughed: and Esther rose solemnly at once and laid her finger on the ugly rim of the thing.

"You see?" said Korder.

And we laughed again. One or two of the others went over in the spirit of it all—one girl, I remember, as an extension of the whole absurd joke, took up a heavy iron poker and struck the vase as hard as she could, and it only rocked a little on its pedestal.

Then Viola, with an incredible childish coyness on that pale face of hers, minced across the room from where she had been sitting all alone, as always, in a dark corner. I don't think I shall ever forget that little mincing way she walked, like a seaside girl on an eternal esplanade, or the gleam of her dyed hair in the fireshine, the spindly legs thrust out from that sacklike frock of hers that was far too short.

She put out her hand with the immense home-made jewellery on it—and even then, you know, I saw her poor finger-nails bitten down to the quick.

The vase seemed to crumple and collapse, almost before her fingers reached it. The jagged pieces of it rocked and slithered across the floor about her feet.

There was a gale of laughter—and she was trying to laugh too, you know. She cried out, again with that edge of awful dated coyness, and blushing so painfully, and laughing and blushing and stamping her foot pettishly:

"It's a liar—oh, such a whopping liar, Mr. Korder! It's a fibber—oh, such a fibber!"

. . . You know, dearest Patsy, I couldn't laugh, suddenly. There was something in me which couldn't laugh after all. The green field had come off like a lid, as Auden says somewhere. I suppose, because I couldn't laugh, that I was the one who escaped

from it all—from all that callow bleak world of ours—before any of the others. Where are they now, I wonder? I've lost touch except with one or two. Guy Mitcham the sculptor, of course—trying to be a pale shadow of old dead Korder himself these days. And Geoffrey Glaspell, who is a monument of respectability at Motspur Park or somewhere like that—but there are strange tales. And Esther, who died last year, you know—do you remember?—those appalling circumstances of it all? . . but it was never her fault, never for a moment. One tries to forget—or remember: one remains younger than one thinks . . . or grows older than one thinks.

It was that same Guy Mitcham, the sculptor, who built the snowman, I remember. At least, we all helped, but it was Mitcham who added the expert finishing touches. The snow had gone crisp and hard in the bitter frosts, it was like a crust over the great lawns and gardens, weighting the trees down, hanging pendulously at all the eaves. There was a terrible waiting stillness in the air, before the thaw we knew must come soon. It was as if the whole great process of the world had come to a little deathly pause that icy Sunday, the very quick of things had been mortally chilled for a moment. . . . How strange it is, my dear, that I should find myself talking like this in this friendly room with you!—as if I were writing an elaborate pastiche of a style out of those past days themselves. This is not what I am—you know that. I am that comfortable person Mrs. Carpenter described, to whom you might cheerfully confess your sins—except that you have none, sweet heart, and I would not like to have hers confessed to me. But you see, as I remember it all, I find myself changing very strangely, under the spell. Let me finish and rid myself—there's little enough left; and I shall be simple Andrew again—we shall go out into that good snow, among the children. You will recognise me for the man you know.

. . . Our snowman was huge and absurd on the lawn there, before the big blind house. It had begun as a romp—even we, you know, shut up there for so long, had begun to feel the need for exercise. Some of the girls had wrapped themselves up and

started a snow-fight, and there was a sudden kind of fleeting young healthiness in each one of us—we streamed out to join them. We bombarded each other as we saw Paul's children doing outside there a moment ago—the whole spell was broken—something died in that house for a moment. But it crept back again. I can remember Korder standing quietly watching us through the french windows with a glass of his eternal brandy in his hand. He was wrapped about the shoulders in a black shawl, his face very white among the shadows—and for once he was not smiling. But we went on, in the sudden release we all felt.

I remember that Esther had started to roll a gigantic snowball —I remember that Viola, even Viola, had joined with her, and they were both laughing as it crunched over the lawn and grew so vast that they could no longer move it—tilted it over on its side so that it rocked for a moment, then settled, as hard and smooth as a marble boulder.

Glaspell shouted: "A snowman—we'll make a snowman!"—and in a moment, still in the mood of it all, we had set to rolling another ball, smaller, to heave on top of the first, and were scooping up the snow with our hands and making the thing shapely in the old traditional way. It was to conform, you know, as snowmen always have conformed, as the one the children are building across the field out there will conform: the classical squat pyramid, with pebbles for buttons, and the round face on top with nuts of coal for eyes, and an old pipe in the mouth, and a hat found from somewhere, and a broom beneath the bulge of the arm . . . and it was almost done, it grew very quickly with so many of us at work on it, adding touches here and there and moulding the primitive legs and the fat paunch. But suddenly Mitcham, in his quick deft professional way, gave it a face, a real face . . . and everything changed, and I remember Korder smiling at us again and raising his glass a little in a ghostly toast as he looked out at us through the window.

We still laughed, you know, but now it was a different kind of joke. We saw the sudden possibilities, with the snow so sculpturally hard. We helped Guy Mitcham as he shouted orders, like students in his *atelier*. His face was flushed as he went to work,

there was a real momentary artist's excitement in him. I remember the grey cold evening as the snowman grew before us there, the Snow Man, no longer the snowman. I remember its completion to every last naked masculine detail, and the face a travesty of some old Greek statue almost, yet with a hint in it—a hint, I suppose as a kind of jest from Mitcham at the very end—of . . . Korder's face.

Someone—it was Esther—had garlanded some laurel leaves, and we set them over the shoulders and round the brow. It stood immensely there, in the first moonlight now; and we were suddenly silent and tired. But Viola, before we went in—and I shall never forget—Viola suddenly laughed again and skipped forward with her long furs dangling; and she went up on an impossible tiptoe and pecked forward with her sharp cold nose. She kissed it on the hollow mouth.

"Watch out!" cried Glaspell. "He'll melt beneath your passion, Viola—he'll crumple like the vase!"

And she said, giggling, in that voice . . . God forgive me, Patsy!—she said: "He's such a pretty boy—yum-yum! He's such a pretty big cold boy, and needing comfort in the snow. He's such a pretty boy—yum-yum!"

She skipped back to join us. She took my arm as we went in to where Korder had the drinks waiting for us.

We were the last to enter and so I closed the door behind us and made to lock it.

"No, no," cried Viola playfully, tapping me on the arm. "No, no, Mr. Bell—don't lock the door. He may want to come in in the night."

Andrew, in his story-telling, paused, he suddenly paused. Outside they heard the boisterous banging of doors as Paul Gaywood came in from the milking parlour. They heard him shout something to one of the men, then his steps in the hallway outside the kitchen. Andrew abruptly rose.

"That's all, Patsy—that's all. I know nothing. I told you it was as insubstantial as a dream. Except that as I lay awake that night, in that house, I heard—oh, I thought I heard . . . God knows!

They were the most insubstantial of all: those large soft shufflings along the corridor, icy in the darkness. They stopped outside her room, beyond mine. And there was one small soft scream, of pain, I think, or dreadful pleasure. But I dreamed that too.

"I said—long ago, when I began, my dear—I said, do you remember? that all prayers are always answered. They are. But God forgive me, it is why I never pray!"

They went across the snow in the yard and over the meadow. Paul, discovering them in the dusky kitchen, had bustled them into clothes and rubber boots to find the children and bring them in to supper. "You need air," he had cried. "You're so pale, the pair of you, sitting there! Damned city lives you lead!"

He strode out ahead, his red farmer's face uplifted happily as he breathed in the crisp evening. Andrew and Patsy followed arm in arm, both very quiet, she shivering a little. Behind, awakened from her doze, enormous in her furs and galoshes, Mrs. Carpenter plunged and floundered like a galleon in a white sea.

"It was someone in that house, of course," Andrew was saying in a whisper, so that Patsy had to strain a little more closely to hear him. "It was someone nearer death than life. It must have been. It was Korder—I dreamed that it *must* have been Korder somehow. Yet was it?—for as I lay there, there was one thing that I did hear that I knew was no dream: from that locked room of his downstairs the high-pitched dreadful whine of one of his beastly mummeries, some kind of unholy incantation . . ."

Paul beckoned them forward. There were distant voices beyond the rim of the small hollow they now were mounting. The snow gusted round them as they trudged. Mrs. Carpenter, behind, called out puffily:

"One forgets, of course, how inexpert one is in the face of such natural phenomena as snow. One has become too civilised, perhaps."

She slipped and nearly fell, assembled herself with a shrill self-conscious laugh, and thrust on through the drifts again.

"I only saw Viola once again—years later," said Andrew. "I went to call on her in a studio I heard she'd rented in Camden Town. Her boy was three, four perhaps. She had nearly died in the bearing of him that old September. She was still very ill. She knew, quite plainly, that she hadn't much longer—I could tell: she knew. She sat shivering in shawls, talking to me about a thousand things but the one thing. Her eyes were always on that boy, who sat very quietly beside the empty fireplace. From first to last he said nothing, only sat there so calmly, unmoving in all the cold.

"I didn't stay long—I couldn't. I knew as I left that I would never see Viola again. I knew also that I would never, in all my life, see anything like the dreadful, hungry, overwhelming love in that square pale face in its frame of dyed bobbed hair as she looked and looked and only looked at him: her boy.

"And I cursed old dead Korder's memory, with his mummery, his black, white magic. And yet I didn't. And yet I did."

They were over the rim of the hollow. Paul had stopped, very strangely. Before them, in the gusting snow, the children had all fallen silent. They stood back in a wide ring from the snowman they had made, looking towards it even fearfully a little.

The boy with white hair stood close to it, peering up into the blank round face, his small black eyes, like nuts of coal, all bright with tears. Even as they gazed he spread his spindly arms and clasped them tightly round the squat effigy, and buried his thin face almost ferociously in the icy breast, his lonely shoulders shaking.

Mrs. Carpenter loomed forward, gasping.

"Look at him—just look at him, Mr. Bell," she puffed. "I told you—he gives me the creeps, that boy. What normal child would behave so? One may not care for him particularly, but someone had better get him away from that thing quickly—he'll catch his death of cold."

The small unloved and loveless thing still clung there tightly to the snowman.

"He'll catch," whispered Andrew to the trembling Patsy beside him, an immense and helpless sadness in his tone, "he'll catch—he's caught—his life of cold."

Dennis Wheatley

THE SNAKE

I didn't know Carstairs at all well, mind you, but he was our nearest neighbour and a stranger to the place. He'd asked me several times to drop in for a chat, and that weekend I'd been saddled with a fellow called Jackson.

He was an engineer who had come over from South America to report on a mine my firm were interested in. We hadn't got much in common and the talk was getting a bit thin, so on the Sunday evening I thought I'd vary the entertainment by looking up Carstairs and take Jackson with me.

Carstairs was pleased enough to see us; he lived all on his own but for the servants. What he wanted with a big place like that I couldn't imagine, but that was his affair. He made us welcome and we settled down in comfortable armchairs to chat.

It was one of those still summer evenings with the scent of the flowers drifting in through the open windows, and the peace of it all makes you think for the moment that the city, on Monday morning, is nothing but a rotten bad dream.

I think I did know in a vague way that Carstairs had made his money mining, but when, or where, I hadn't an idea. Anyhow, he and young Jackson were soon in it up to the neck, talking technicalities. That never has been my end of the business; I was content to lend them half an ear while I drank in the hush of the scented twilight; a little feller was piping away to his mate for all he was worth in the trees at the bottom of the garden.

It was the bat started it; you know how they flit in on a summer's night through the open windows, absolutely silently, before you are aware of them. How they're here one moment—and there the next, in and out of the shadows while you flap about with a newspaper like a helpless fool. They're unclean things, of course, but harmless enough, yet never in my life have I seen a big man so scared as Carstairs.

"Get it out!" he yelled. "Get it out," and he buried his bald head in the sofa cushions.

I think I laughed; anyhow I told him it was nothing to make a fuss about, and switched out the light.

The bat zigzagged from side to side once or twice, and then flitted out into the open as silently as it had come.

Carstairs's big red face had gone quite white when he peeped out from beneath his cushions. "Has it gone?" he asked in a frightened whisper.

"Of course it has," I assured him. "Don't be silly—it might have been the Devil himself from the fuss you made!"

"Perhaps it was," he said seriously. As he sat up I could see the whites of his rather prominent eyes surrounding the blue pupils —I should have laughed if the man hadn't been in such an obvious funk.

"Shut the windows," he said sharply, as he moved over to the whisky and mixed himself a pretty stiff drink. It seemed a sin on a night like that, but it was his house, so Jackson drew them to.

Carstairs apologised in a half-hearted sort of way for making such a scene, then we settled down again.

In the circumstances it wasn't unnatural that the talk should turn to witchcraft and things like that.

Young Jackson said he'd heard some pretty queer stories in the forests of Brazil, but that didn't impress me, because he looked a good half-dago himself, for all his English name, and dagoes always believe in that sort of thing.

Carstairs was a different matter; he was as British as could be, and when he asked me seriously if I believed in Black Magic—I didn't laugh, but told him just as seriously that I did not.

"You're wrong, then," he declared firmly, "and I'll tell you this, I shouldn't be sitting here if it wasn't for Black Magic."

"You can't be serious," I protested.

"I am," he said. "For thirteen years I roamed the Union of South Africa on my uppers, a 'poor white', if you know what that means. If you don't—well, it's hell on earth. One rotten job after another with barely enough pay to keep body and soul together, and between jobs not even that, so that at times you'd even lower yourself to chum up to a black for the sake of a drink or a bit of a meal. Never a chance to get up in the world, and despised by natives and whites alike—well, I suppose I'd be at it still but that I came up against the Black Art, and that brought me big money. Once I had money I went into business. That's twenty-two years ago—I'm a rich man now, and I've come home to take my rest."

Carstairs evidently meant every word he said, and I must confess I was impressed. There was nothing neurotic about him, he was sixteen stone of solid, prosaic Anglo-Saxon; in fact, he looked just the sort of chap you'd like to have with you in a tight corner. That's why I'd been so surprised when he got in such a blue funk about the bat.

"I'm afraid I'm rather an unbeliever," I admitted, "but perhaps that's because I've never come up against the real thing—won't you tell us some more about it?"

He looked at me steadily for a moment with his round, blue eyes. "All right," he said, "if you like; help yourself to another peg, and your friend too."

We refilled our glasses and he went on: "When I as good as said just now, 'that bat may be the Devil in person,' I didn't mean quite that. Maybe there are people who can raise the Devil—I don't know, anyhow I've never seen it done; but there is a power for evil drifting about the world—suffused in the atmosphere, as you might say, and certain types of animals seem to be sensitive to it—they pick it up out of the ether just like a wireless receiving set.

"Take cats—they're uncanny beasts; look at the way they can see in the dark; and they can do more than that; they can see things that we can't in broad day. You must have seen them,

before now, walk carefully round an object in a room that simply wasn't there.

"These animals are harmless enough in themselves, of course, but where the trouble starts is when they become used as a focus by a malignant human will. However, that's all by the way. As I was telling you, I'd hiked it up and down the Union for thirteen years, though it wasn't the Union in those days. From Durban to Damaraland, and from the Orange River to Matabel, fruit farmer, miner, salesman, wagoner, clerk—I took every job that offered, but for all the good I'd done myself I might as well have spent my time on the Breakwater instead.

"I haven't even made up my mind to-day which is the tougher master—the Bible-punching Dutchman, with his little piping voice, or the whisky-sodden South African Scot.

"At last I drifted into Swaziland; that's on the borders of Portuguese East, near Lourenco Marques and Delagoa Bay. As lovely a country as you could wish to see; it's all been turned into native reserve now, but in those days there were a handful of white settlers scattered here and there.

"Anyhow, it was there in a saloon at Mbabane that I met old Benny Isaacsohn, and he offered me a job. I was down and out, so I took it, though he was one of the toughest-looking nuts that I'd ever come across. He was a bigger man than I am, with greasy black curls and a great big hook of a nose. His face was as red as a turkey cock, and his wicked black eyes were as shifty as sin. He said his store-keeper had died on him sudden, and the way he said it made me wonder just what had happened to that man.

"But it was Benny or picking up scraps from a native kraal—so I went along with him there and then.

"He took me miles up country to his famous store—two tins of sardines and a dead rat were about all he had in it, and of course I soon tumbled to it that trading honest wasn't Benny's real business. I don't doubt he'd sized me up and reckoned I wouldn't be particular. I was careful not to be too curious, because I had a sort of idea that that was what my predecessor had died of.

"After a bit he seemed to get settled in his mind about me, and

didn't take much trouble to conceal his little games. He was doing a bit of gun-running for the natives from over the Portuguese border and a handsome traffic in illicit booze. Of course all our customers were blacks; there wasn't another white in a day's march except for Rebecca—Benny's old woman.

"I kept his books for him; they were all fake, of course. Brown sugar meant two dummy bullets out of five, and white, three. I remember; the dummies were cardboard painted to look like lead —cartridges come cheaper that way! Anyhow, Benny knew his ledger code all right.

"He didn't treat me badly on the whole; we had a shindy one hot night soon after I got there, and he knocked me flat with one blow from his big red fist. After that I used to go and walk it off if I felt my temper getting the best of me—and I did at times when I saw the way he used to treat those niggers. I'm not exactly squeamish myself, but the things he used to do would make you sick.

"When I got into the game, I found that gun-running and liquor weren't the end of it. Benny was a money-lender as well—that's where he over-reached himself and came up against the Black Art.

"Of the beginnings of Benny's dealings with Umtonga, the witch doctor, I know nothing. The old heathen would come to us now and again all decked out in his cowrie shells and strings of leopards' teeth, and Benny always received him in state. They'd sit drinking glass for glass of neat spirit for hours on end until Umtonga was carried away dead drunk by his men. The old villain used to sell off all the surplus virgins of his tribe to Benny, and Benny used to market them in Portuguese East, together with the wives of the poor devils who were in his clutches and couldn't pay the interest on their debts.

"The trouble started about nine months after I'd settled there; old Umtonga was a spender in his way, and there began to be a shortage of virgins in the tribe, so he started to borrow on his own account and then he couldn't pay. The interviews weren't so funny then—he began to go away sober and shaking his big black stick.

"That didn't worry Benny. He'd been threatened by people before, and he told Umtonga that if he couldn't raise enough virgins to meet his bill he'd better sell off a few of his wives himself.

"I was never present at the meetings, but I gathered a bit from what old Benny said in his more expansive moments, and I'd picked up enough Swazi to gather the gist of Umtonga's views when he aired them at parting on the stoep.

"Then one day Umtonga came with three women—it seemed that they were the equivalent of the original debt, but Benny had a special system with regard to his loans. Repayment of capital was nothing like enough—and the longer the debt was outstanding the greater the rate of interest became. By that time he wanted about thirty women, and good ones at that, to clear Umtonga off his books.

"The old witch doctor was calm and quiet; contrary to custom, he came in the evening and he did not stay more than twenty minutes. The walls were thin, so I heard most of what went on—he offered Benny the three women—or death before the morning.

"If Benny had been wise he would have taken the women, but he wasn't. He told Umtonga to go to the Devil—and Umtonga went.

"His people were waiting for him outside, about a dozen of them, and he proceeded to make a magic. They handed him a live black cock and a live white cock, and Umtonga sat down before the stoep and he killed them in a curious way.

"He examined their livers carefully, and then he began to rock backwards and forwards on his haunches, and in his old cracked voice he sang a weird, monotonous chant. The others lay down flat on the ground and wriggled round him one after the other on their bellies. They kept that up for about half an hour, and then the old wizard began to dance. I can see his belt of monkey tails swirling about him now, as he leapt and spun. You wouldn't have thought that lean old savage had the strength in him to dance like that.

"Then all of a sudden he seemed to have a fit—he went absolutely rigid and fell down flat. He dropped on his face, and when

his people turned him over we could see he was frothing at the mouth. They picked him up and carried him away.

"You know how the night comes down almost at once in the tropics. Umtonga started his incantation in broad daylight, and it didn't take so very long, but by the time he'd finished it was as dark as pitch, with nothing but the Southern Cross and the Milky Way to light the hidden world.

"In those places most people still act by Nature's clock. We had the evening meal, old Rebecca, Benny, and I; he seemed a bit preoccupied, but that was no more than I would have been in the circumstances. Afterwards he went into his office room to see what he'd made on the day, as he always did, and I went off to bed.

"It was the old woman roused me about two o'clock—it seems she'd dropped off to sleep, and awoke to find that Benny had not come up to bed.

"We went along through the shanty, and there he was with his eyes wide and staring, gripping the arms of his office chair and all hunched up as though cowering away from something.

"He had never been a pretty sight to look at, but now there was something fiendish in the horror on his blackened face, and of course he'd been dead some hours.

"Rebecca flung her skirts over her head, and began to wail fit to bring the house down. After I'd got her out of the room, I went back to investigate—what could have killed Benny Isaacsohn? I was like you in those days—I didn't believe for a second that that toothless old fool Umtonga had the power to kill from a distance.

"I made a thorough examination of the room, but there was no trace of anybody having broken in, or even having been there. I had a good look at Benny—it seemed to me he'd died of apoplexy or some sort of fit, but what had brought it on? He'd seen something, and it must have been something pretty ghastly.

"I didn't know then that a week or two later I was to see the same thing myself.

"Well, we buried Benny the next day—there was the usual kind of primitive wake, with the women howling and the men

getting free drinks—half Africa seemed to have turned up; you know how mysteriously news travels in the black man's country.

"Umtonga put in an appearance; he expressed neither regret nor pleasure, but stood looking on. I didn't know what to make of it. The only evidence against him was the mumbo-jumbo of the night before, and no sane European could count that as proof of murder. I was inclined to think that the whole thing was an amazing coincidence.

When the burying was over he came up to me: 'Why you no kill house-boys attend Big Boss before throne of Great Spirit?' he wanted to know.

"I explained that one killing in the house was quite enough at a time. Then he demanded his stick, said he had left it behind in Benny's office the night before.

"I was pretty short with him, as you can imagine, but I knew the old ruffian's stick as well as I knew my own hairbrush; so I went in to get it.

"There it was lying on the floor—a four-foot snake stick. I dare say you've seen the sort of thing I mean; they make them shorter for Europeans. They are carved out of heavy wood, the snake's head is the handle, the tail the ferrule. Between, there are from five to a dozen bands; little markings are carved all down it to represent the scales. Umtonga's was a fine one—quite thin, but as heavy as lead. It was black, and carved out of ebony, I imagine. Not an ounce of give in it, but it would have made a splendid weapon. I picked it up and gave it to him without a word.

"For about ten days I saw no more of him. Old Rebecca stopped her wailing, and got down to business. Benny must have told her about most of his deals that mattered, for I found that she knew pretty much how things stood. It was agreed that I should carry on as a sort of manager for her, and after a bit we came to the question of Umtonga. I suggested that the interest was pretty hot, and that the man might be really dangerous. Wouldn't it be better to settle with him for what we could get? But she wouldn't have it; you would have thought I was trying to draw her eye-teeth when I suggested forgoing the interest! She fairly glared at me.

" 'What is it to do with you?' she screamed. 'I need money, I have the future of my—er—myself to think of. Send a boy with a message that you want to see him, and when he comes—make him pay.'

"Well, there was nothing to do but to agree; the old shrew was worse than Benny in some ways. I sent a boy the following morning, and the day after Umtonga turned up.

"I saw him in Benny's office while his retinue waited outside; I was sitting in Benny's chair—the chair he'd died in—and I came to the point at once.

"He sat there for a few minutes just looking at me; his wizened old face was like a dried-up fruit that had gone bad. His black boot-button eyes shone with a strange, malignant fire, then he said very slowly, 'You—very brave young Baas.'

" 'No,' I said, 'just business-like, that's all.'

" 'You know what happen to old Baas—he die—you want to go Great Spirit yet?'

"There was something evil and powerful in his steady stare; it was horribly disconcerting, but I wouldn't give in to it, and I told him I didn't want anything except his cash that was due, or its equivalent.

" 'You forget business with Umtonga?' he suggested. 'You do much good business, other mens. You no forget, Umtonga make bad magic—you die.'

"Well, it wasn't my business—it was the old woman's. I couldn't have let him out if I'd wanted to—so there was only one reply, the same as he'd got from Benny.

"I showed him Benny's gun, and told him that if there were any monkey tricks I'd shoot on sight. His only answer was one of the most disdainful smiles I've ever seen on a human face. With that he left me and joined his bodyguard outside.

"They then went through the same abracadabra with another black cock and another white cock—wriggled about on their bellies, and the old man danced till he had another fit and was carried away.

"Night had fallen in the meantime, and I was none too easy in my mind. I thought of Benny's purple face and staring eyes.

"I had supper with the old hag, and then I went to Benny's room. I like my tot, but I'd been careful not to take it; I meant to remain stone cold sober and wide-awake that night.

"I had the idea that one of Umtonga's people had done something to Benny, poisoned his drink perhaps.

"I went over his room minutely, and after I'd done, there wasn't a place you could have hidden a marmoset. Then I shut the windows carefully, and tipped up a chair against each so that no one could get in without knocking it down. If I did drop off, I was bound to wake at that. I turned out the light so that they should have no target for a spear or an arrow, and then I sat down to wait.

"I never want another night like that as long as I live; you know how you can imagine things in the darkness—well, what I didn't imagine in those hours isn't worth the telling.

"The little noises of the veldt came to me as the creeping of the enemy—half a dozen times I nearly lost my nerve and put a bullet into the blacker masses of the shadows that seemed to take on curious forms, but I was pretty tough in those days and I stuck it out.

"About eleven o'clock the moon came up; you would have thought that made it better, but it didn't. It added a new sort of terror—that was all. You know how eerie moonlight can be; it is unnatural somehow, and I believe there's a lot in what they say about there being evil in the moon. Bright bars of it stood out in rows on the floor, where it streamed in silent and baleful through the slats in the jalousies. I found myself counting them over and over again. It seemed as if I were becoming mesmerised by that cold, uncanny light. I pulled myself up with a jerk.

"Then I noticed that something was different about the desk in front of me. I couldn't think what it could be—but there was something missing that had been there a moment before.

"All at once I realized what it was, and the palms of my hands became clammy with sweat. Umtonga had left his stick behind again—I had picked it up off the floor when I searched the office and leant it against the front of the desk; the top of it had

been there before my eyes for the last three hours in the semi-darkness—standing up stiff and straight—and now it had disappeared.

"It couldn't have fallen, I should have heard it—my eyes must have been starting out of my head. A ghastly thought had come to me—just supposing that stick was not a stick?

"And then I saw it—the thing was lying straight and still in the moonlight, with its eight to ten wavy bands, just as I'd seen it a dozen times before; I must have dreamed I propped it against the desk—it must have been on the floor all the time, and yet, I knew deep down in me that I was fooling myself and that it had moved of its own accord.

"My eyes never left it—I watched, holding my breath to see if it moved—but I was straining so that I couldn't trust my eyesight. The bright bars of moonlight on the floor began to waver ever so slightly, and I knew that my sight was playing me tricks; I shut my eyes for a moment—it was the only thing to do—and when I opened them again the snake had raised its head.

"My vest was sticking to me, and my face was dripping wet. I knew now what had killed old Benny—I knew, too, why his face had gone black. Umtonga's stick was no stick at all, but the deadliest snake in all Africa—a thing that can move like lightning, can overtake a galloping horse, and kill its rider, so deadly that you're stiff within four minutes of its bite—I was up against a black mamba.

"I had my revolver in my hand, but it seemed a stupid, useless thing—there wasn't a chance in a hundred that I could hit it. A shot-gun's the only thing that's any good; with that I might have blown its head off, but the guns weren't kept in Benny's room, and like a fool I'd locked myself in.

"The brute moved again as I watched it; it drew up its tail with a long slithering movement. There could be no doubt now; Umtonga was a super-snake-charmer, and he'd left this foul thing behind to do his evil work.

"I sat there petrified, just as poor Benny must have done, wondering what in Heaven's name I could do to save myself, but my brain simply wouldn't work.

"It was an accident that saved me. As it rose to strike, I slipped in my attempt to get to my feet and kicked over Benny's wicker wastepaper basket; the brute went for that instead of me. The force with which they strike is tremendous—it's like the blow from a hammer or the kick of a mule. Its head went clean through the side of the basket and there it got stuck; it couldn't get its head out again.

"As luck would have it, I had been clearing out some of Benny's drawers that day, and I'd thrown away a whole lot of samples of quartz; the basket was about a third full of them and they weigh pretty heavy; a few had fallen out when it fell over, but the rest were enough to keep the mamba down.

"It thrashed about like a gigantic whiplash, but it couldn't free its head, and I didn't waste a second; I started heaving ledgers on its tail. That was the end of the business as far as the mamba was concerned—I'd got it pinned down in half the time it took you to drive out that bat. Then I took up my gun again. 'Now, my beauty,' I thought, 'I've got you where I want you, and I'll just quietly blow your head off—I'm going to have a damn fine pair of shoes out of your skin.'

"I knelt down to the job and levelled my revolver; the snake struck twice, viciously, in my direction, but it couldn't get within a foot of me and it no more than jerked the basket either time.

"I looked down the barrel of the pistol within eighteen inches of its head, and then a very strange thing happened—and this is where the Black Magic comes in.

"The moonlit room seemed to grow dark about me, so that the baleful light faded before my eyes—the snake's head disappeared from view—the walls seemed to be expanding and the queer, acrid odour of the native filled my nostrils.

"I knew that I was standing in Umtonga's hut, and where the snake had been a moment before I saw Umtonga sleeping—or in a trance, if you prefer it. He was lying with his head on the belly of one of his women, as is the custom of the country, and I stretched out a hand towards him in greeting. It seemed that, although there was nothing there, I had touched something—and then I realized with an appalling fear that my left hand was

holding the wastepaper basket in which was the head of the snake.

"There was a prickling sensation on my scalp, and I felt my hair lifting—stiff with the electricity that was streaming from my body. With a tremendous effort of will-power I jerked back my hand. Umtonga shuddered in his trance—there was a thud, and I knew that the snake had struck in the place where my hand had been a moment before.

"I was half-crazy with fear, my teeth began to chatter, and it came to me suddenly that there was an icy wind blowing steadily upon me. I shivered with the deadly cold—although in reality it was a still, hot night. The wind was coming from the nostrils of the sleeping Umtonga full upon me; the bitter coldness of it was numbing me where I stood. I knew that in another moment I should fall forward on the snake.

"I concentrated every ounce of will-power in my hand that held the gun—I could not see the snake, but my eyes seemed to be focused upon Umtonga's forehead. If only my frozen finger could pull the trigger—I made a supreme effort, and then there happened a very curious thing.

"Umtonga began to talk to me in his sleep—not in words, you understand, but as spirit talks to spirit. He turned and groaned and twisted where he lay. A terrible sweat broke out on his forehead and round his skinny neck. I could see him as clearly as I can see you—he was pleading with me not to kill him, and in that deep, silent night, where space and time had ceased to exist, I knew that Umtonga and the snake were one.

"If I killed the snake, I killed Umtonga. In some strange fashion he had suborned the powers of evil, so that when at the end of the incantation he fell into a fit, his malignant spirit passed into the body of his dread familiar.

"I suppose I ought to have killed that snake and Umtonga too, but I didn't. Just as it is said that a drowning man sees his whole life pass before him at the moment of death—so I saw my own. Scene after scene out of my thirteen years of disappointment and failure flashed before me—but I saw more than that.

"I saw a clean, tidy office in Jo'burg, and I was sitting there in decent clothes. I saw this very house as you see it from the drive—although I'd never seen it in my life before—and I saw other things as well.

"At that moment I had Umtonga in my power, and he was saying as clearly as could be—'All these things will I give unto you—if only you will spare my life.'

"Then the features of Umtonga faded. The darkness lightened and I saw again the moonlight streaming through the slats of old Benny's office—and the mamba's head!

"I put my revolver in my pocket, unlocked the door, and locking it again behind me, went up to bed.

"I slept as though I'd been on a ten-day forced march, I was so exhausted; I woke late, but everything that had happened in the night was clear in my memory—I knew I hadn't dreamed it. I loaded a shot-gun and went straight to Benny's office.

"There was the serpent still beside the desk—its head thrust through the wicker basket and the heavy ledgers pinning down its body. It seemed to have straightened out, though, into its usual form, and when I knocked it lightly with the barrel of the gun it remained absolutely rigid. I could hardly believe it to be anything more than a harmless piece of highly polished wood, and yet I knew that it had a hideous, hidden life, and after that I left it very carefully alone.

"Umtonga turned up a little later, as I felt sure he would; he seemed very bent and old. He didn't say very much, but he spoke again about his debt, and asked if I would not forgo some part of it—he would pay the whole if he must, but it would ruin him if he did. To sell his wives would be to lose authority with his tribe.

"I explained that it wasn't my affair, but Rebecca's; she owned everything now that Benny was dead.

"He seemed surprised at that; natives don't hold with women owning property. He said he'd thought that the business was mine and that all I had to do was to feed Rebecca till she died.

"Then he wanted to know if I would have helped him had that been the case. I told him that extortion wasn't my idea of

business, and with that he seemed satisfied; he picked up his terrible familiar and stumped away without another word.

"The following week I had to go into Mbabane for stores. I was away a couple of nights and when I got back Rebecca was dead and buried; I heard the story from the house-boys. Umtonga had been to see her on the evening that I left. He'd made his magic again before the stoep, and they'd found her dead and black in the morning. I asked if by any chance he'd left his stick behind him, although I knew the answer before I got it—'Yes, he'd come back for it the following day.'

"I started in to clear up Benny's affairs, and board by board to pull the shanty down. Benny didn't believe in banks and I knew there was a hoard hidden somewhere. It took me three weeks, but I found it. With that, and a reasonable realization of what was outstanding, I cleared up a cool ten thousand. I've turned that into a hundred thousand since, and so you see that it was through the Black Art that I come to be sitting here."

As Carstairs came to the end of the story, something made me turn and look at Jackson; he was glaring at the older man, and his dark eyes shone with a fierce light in his sallow face.

"Your name's not Carstairs," he cried suddenly in a harsh voice. "It's Thompson—and mine is Isaacsohn. *I* am the child that you robbed and abandoned."

Before I could grasp the full significance of the thing he was on his feet—I saw the knife flash as it went home in Carstairs' chest, and the young Jew shrieked, "You fiend—you paid that devil to kill my mother."

R. Ellis Roberts

THE HILL

It was one of those hard, precise evenings when, before sunset, everything seems to become flat, the fields that lay just in front of me were cut out of cardboard, the long road down to Broad Oak appeared to stretch, not to the country, but to a back-cloth; and the trees that over-arched the lane to Symonsbury were untouched by any breeze that might give them the illusion of reality. For, when the country takes the decorative note, it is reality which is the illusion: one almost imperceptibly flattens oneself along the hedgerows in order to avoid breaking the perfect truth of the theatre which Nature contrives so much more skilfully than man.

I was tired and walked a little listlessly. I had business to do in Bridport; but I knew I should be there long before seven, and I enjoyed sauntering down the road, while the decadent sun of early April made green tinsel out of the budding larches, while soft little puddles of brown glowed from the ruts and hoofmarks in the sandy soil. I was feeling well in a genially tired way, and quite ready for the walk home again; feeling, however, singularly un-sharp. I mean that my senses, after the exertions of the week, were rather sleep-haunted—I had caught Nature's lesson, and felt all this activity of limb and thought to be the substance of nothing but a rather beautiful dream. My mind was as casual as my walk, and was occupied, so far as I remember, with nothing more arresting than some vaguely pleasant remembrance of a youthful affection.

I dwell on all this because I want to insist that I was not in an observant mood, not at all in the state to make this adventure I had likely. Those to whom I have told the story have all insisted that my "imagination" or "fancy" has made more of the facts than they warrant; that I was deceived by shadows, or misled by reflections; that my eyes were tired and played me tricks, that my memory is false and ill-suited to exact accuracy. So I would insist that such imagination as I have was almost quiescent, that my mind was singularly unalert, and that nothing can explain the extreme vividness of my recollection of that night of April 3rd, except the truth of what I saw. Its very incongruity, not only with my mental condition, but with the actual character of the evening, with the verdant artificiality of that Dorset springtime, when the countryside is rather less actual than the contour on an ordnance map, is a witness to the reality of that experience.

I had indeed forgotten the Hill. I generally used to look out for the first sight of it, when the road begins to run under the shoulder of the wooded height, and to skirt the Hill of Sacrifice. I don't know who gave it that name: whether, indeed, it is more than a modern device of some local journalist; but it suits the Hill. Everyone who passes along the main road from Chideock to Bridport must see it; but its most characteristic aspect is only caught from the road between North Chideock and Symonsbury. It is a curious, conical hill, covered with green grass and generally delivered over to innumerable sheep. It reminds one instantly of those high places on which the ancient Hebrews honoured other gods than Jehovah, the places where Solomon built temples for the family godlings of his heathen queens. Everyone felt this about the Hill, so it does not show any preoccupation of mine that I, too, always connected it with sacrifice, and the stone, square altars of the old faiths. I had never been up the Hill. I never met anyone who had. It was out of the way, and would be, though an easy, an unnecessary little climb for one whom Fleet Street had left without the wind of his youth. The sheep which grazed there belonged to a farm in the valley, and found their own way up and down.

Well, as I said, on that night I had forgotten the Hill; and when I caught my first glimpse of it, I had a shock. I thought at first the shock was due to the vision of a familiar but forgotten object. I think when one, so to speak, re-sees a perfectly familiar object, it has a more active and energising effect on the nerves than contact with something entirely new. Certainly the Hill made me jump. I stood and stared at it. As I stared I realised that the shock I had received was not entirely due to the Hill's re-assertion of its presence to my forgetful mind.

The Hill was different.

I glanced hastily back along the road, and over to my left where the fields stretched idly away; they were the same as they had been a minute ago, comfortable, artificial, flat, with no more atmosphere than a landscape in a modern painting. Then I swerved back to the Hill. It was ominous, alive, clamant with some mystery that I had not guessed. I should explain that though it was the Hill of Sacrifice, no one had associated it with anything mysterious or unusual. It was obviously the servant of some settled, rather courtly, religion, where the priests of the second-century Roman, journeying from Dorchester, had made polite augury at dawn. This evening, all that was changed. The Hill threatened. It quarrelled vehemently with the rest of the landscape. It stood like something or somebody naked and hairy in the middle of a crowd of modish and courtly figures; it was like some primitive, pre-Gothic idol in a French classical temple; or as if you sundered a picture of Watteau's with one of those brown, watchful Tahitians of Gauguin's.

I stood and stared at the Hill. And as I stared I became aware of two things. First, there were no sheep on the Hill. Their absence aided the strange, nude look of the thing. And I began to think that perhaps, after all, the change in the Hill was my fancy. Then, as I looked, the Hill lurched: that, of course, is an exaggeration; but it was the effect made on me by the movement of something that was almost up on the round crown at the top. With that movement the power of the Hill became active: suddenly and as by antagonism, I, too, leapt into mental alertness. The Hill and I were there, enemies, but akin in this, that we were

the players in the set scene; still the green fields spread away to the backcloth; still the road ran as a stage-road runs to the wings; still the sun, though now faintlier, flickered on green and brown, and turned them to paper and canvas—but now there were two lives on the stage, and the play was begun.

Before starting for the Hill—it is noteworthy that no other course but that of immediate access to my antagonist ever seemed possible—I looked at it once more, for I knew when I had scrambled through the hedge and across the first field, I should lose sight, for a while, of the top: I looked at the spot where the Hill had shuddered, and I saw that it was a figure, apparently human, and heavily burdened, which was now on the top and against the blue-black clouds which the sun was even now burning into angry gold. I was now much too far away—I have always suffered from short-sightedness—to make out clearly whether it was man or woman, or what it was that the figure carried; nor indeed did I greatly care, but I got through the hedge and started as quickly as I could for the summit of the Hill.

In the second field it was darker; and I felt that the atmosphere was a trifle oppressive; and there was a heavy, hot smell in the air, like musk. Of course, by now my imagination was at work; but I was not consciously inventing any explanation of what I saw or felt. I was simply bringing to bear on facts that were obtrusive all I had of perception and sensitiveness. I had not even then definitely decided whether what was abroad was evil or not. I knew it was an enemy—but it was inimical, at present, only in the sense of demanding effort and conflict. I could not proclaim that it was evil. As I climbed towards the lower slopes of the Hill, still hidden from view by a thick hedge, I was not conscious of any definite aim. I knew where I had to go; but I had no idea of what I should find, or what I should do. Just before I reached the final hedge something happened which removed all doubt as to the nature of that which I had to fight. Abruptly, and beginning on one long piercing note, a strange music clove the surrounding silence. After the first shrill rending of the evening's solitary quiet, the music went on with a wicked and luxuriant abandon that recalled to me all that I knew of the vague power

of harmony for evil. It was not vulgarly lascivious or alluring; it had in it that higher note of defiance, that keener note of pride and power and of certain, though dishonourable, rule which distinguishes the realm of the devil from that of the world and the flesh. It had in it that perverse ascetic note, that strain of rapture and endeavour and adventure which the sons of Satan achieve no less than the sons of Christ. It gave out no single note of compromise or concession: it was music of the airless heights, of the wilderness, of the great wastes of sand, or the interminable vastness of evil waters where the greater devils meditate and morosely scheme.

When I heard it, all doubt dropped from me. There dropped, too, everything of the present. I knew the music: I knew, somehow, the player; and I knew his instrument. And as I went on up the Hill I knew what task lay before me, and with Whom I was to wrestle. I felt no fear and no confidence. No fear as to the terror or extent of the conflict, and no confidence as to the result. The whole incident, though still to come, seemed a part of my life, not something that I could do, or could not do, so much as something without which I would not be I.

When I was through the hedge the sun was set, but it was still quite light, and I hoped it would not be dark for almost another hour. I looked up to the top of the Hill, and there was the figure I had seen, kneeling and piling stones on one another. He—for it was a young lad—was half turned towards me; but he was stooping over his work, and evidently had no idea of my approach. The music, which was getting louder every moment, seemed to come from the top of the Hill; but I could see no signs of the player: nor, indeed, had I expected to.

I looked carefully to my stick, and wished it had been of some stouter wood than cherry; and then started rapidly up the Hill. As I went on the music altered in character: from defiance it passed to menace, and from menace to a curious thin anger that somehow seemed intended for other ears than mine. It was. The lad looked up, puzzled, and I saw him distinctly say something towards the sound of the music. Then he saw me, recognised me, I think, and started down the Hill. The music stopped.

I went on, and after a few minutes the lad and I met. We were both a little out of breath, and stood for a moment at gaze. He was a singularly beautiful boy, with one of those faces in which it is so hard to discover the lines which will afterwards coarsen and harden. He was about seventeen, and I remember that I had seen him working on some job between Allington and Eype. At the moment his beauty was almost unearthly: it had no intellectual qualities, and little of character, but just that even bloom which marks young animals. There was in his eyes, however, a look far from animal—a look of exultation, of absorption, and combined with it a hardness that showed me my task would not be easy. What he said was in curious contrast with his appearance, and in even odder discordance with what was in our hearts, and in the heart of the Hill, and in the heart of that old musician who this night, at least, was claiming the worship of his ancient altar.

"You be trespassing, Mr. O'Brien."

"I suppose I am," I answered. "It's so jolly to be in a country where trespassing doesn't do any harm. It's why I like Dorset, and these great grazing fields."

He looked at me as the country folk do when they don't quite catch what you say, and yet don't want to confess to it.

"No one be allowed up here. I must ask you to go down again, sir."

His tone was very polite; but his eyes were set, and I saw his fingers twitching, and noticed the tremor of his shirt above his scurrying heart.

"Nonsense," I said. "I'm going to the top. Good night to you," and I started to get past him, rather hurriedly, and with little dignity, I am afraid.

With a sharp cry he stepped in front of me. Before he could say anything more, I spoke again, as sharply as I could—for I would have given anything just then to avoid the fight, and for the lad to go home—"What on earth are you doing, boy? You know perfectly well Mr. Goodere doesn't mind where I go on his land. Besides, you have no business here: you are not in his employ, and I don't know that he would allow you here. Get out of my way."

For the moment my tone of ordinary annoyance staggered him. He became—for a minute—an ordinary good-looking lad who, through clumsiness, had offended "one of the gentry", and made a fool of himself. I kept hold on myself and waited to see him go away, apologetic and abashed. If this was the fight, I had feared unnecessarily. He began to turn on his heel, muttering some excuse, and I went on upwards, when suddenly the music began again, insistent, defiant, challenging. In a second he rushed round; and with hot, hurried words, clung to my arm, impeding my way—"I was not to go—he was meeting his girl—he wouldn't let me—he would break me if I did—he would——" lies, and appeals, and foul threats followed each other as swift as sin; his face once more took on that strange look of unearthly beauty, of curious exultation, as he asked me not to go up the Hill.

And the music played faster and faster.

After a struggle that lasted, I suppose, but for a few minutes, I broke away from him and ran towards the summit. All pretence was now thrown aside. The lad knew that I was aware of his purpose: knew that I knew Who his companion would be, and what that awful music meant, as it broke the evening quiet of the spring fields with a challenge older and more hideous than any voice of cities or of civilisation.

I got to the top of the Hill, with the lad close on my heels: and when I was at the top I realised suddenly that it was night. Not, I think, that the ordinary world was yet dark, but a mist, acrid and pungent, hung over the top of the Hill, and seemed to settle on the rude altar which the boy had built.

I could not see him, but I heard his breathing close on my right. I thought I would try one last chance to avoid the conflict—for now fear had entered my very marrow. "Come down," I said, trying to make my voice as self-possessed as possible and as ordinary, "Come down and I'll go too."

There was no answer but his quick breathing; and then on a note of the music he began to sing. When he sang there was little trace of Dorset in his speech, and his voice was a beautiful treble, that of a boy whose voice is going to break later than usual. What he sang I cannot put down here. It soared up in unimaginable

wickedness, clear and pure as crystal, full of thoughts and words that we believe to have forsaken our world. The music adapted itself to his song and grew subtly and insolently wicked. The psalm of Satan rose up, invitatory, clarion, ascending to heights of sin that I did not know had ever been expressed in human words. The air grew hotter, and the mist glowed with a strange blurred light. The keen, acrid smell grew more intense, and the music shrieked more and more riotously, as though preluding some monstrous apocalypse.

Then, with no warning, there was silence.

I could hear nothing, not even my own breathing; and I could see nothing but the blurred glow that was, I judged, just over the altar. Then I heard a sound. It was a voice, but of an accent not human, and the words it spoke were not English. I remember how, even then, it struck me as odd that one should hear a voice in a Dorset field speaking in tones that belonged neither to the place nor to the age I lived in. It sounded very low, very sure, and very old; old not with any quavering, but with that sacerdotal certainty of age-long experience which people who are very old, or of a great tradition, so frequently possess. Yet any certainty I had caught in human voices seemed but a shadow beside the deep, awful solemnity of this utterance. The voice was magical, ecstatic, assured with an eternal assurance. I strained my ears to listen during the few seconds while the voice continued, but I could distinguish nothing except what I thought possibly was the syllable "Pai", and I wondered if the sentence was in Greek.

My senses by now were singularly acute: I had passed through fear into that strong, wine-glowing condition when one watches everything securely, oneself being external even to the dangers that are threatening one's body or soul. In this state, and in the boldness engendered by it, I took one step towards the glow that still shone over the altar. Long before I could approach, however, I was smitten—or rather not so much smitten as involved in a thick, palpable, and hideous atmosphere. Never have I been so submerged by anything external. The sensation was partly like that caused by a quicksand, which will wrestle with one's leg or

arm as though the sand were endowed with life, and when one pulls out the endangered limb, it is as if one sprung out of some being's lively jaws. So with an automatic movement of repulsion, I leapt back and was released. Then the light glowed more brightly and I saw my companion. He was standing stark naked, with his arms outstretched like an Orante's on a Catacomb fresco. His lips were still moving, and his gaze fixed intently on the glow above the rude stones he had piled up. Every moment the glow increased; I was only just over three yards from the altar, but the glow gave no heat, neither was there any smoke. Then as the light grew, in the centre of it there appeared a figure, and yet not so much a figure as a face, nor so much a face as a presence. It had the same beauty, that intolerable and sinful beauty which the boy had; or rather it seemed to *be* that beauty. It was, however, never still, but passed with incredible rapidity from the expression of one sensation to that of another; it had that most singular quality which can occasionally be seen on earthly faces, a complete lack of unity—there was no central and availing character in which the details might inhere, and it was this lack which gave the Presence its extraordinary sense of wrongness, of wickedness, of sin. It is a vulgar comparison, but the mode of its loveliness, the mode of its very expression, reminded me of nothing so much as a cinematograph, that dreadful invention in which the mimicry of Life treads breathlessly and continuously on the heels of Life itself, and yet never attains it. The same absolute lack of peace, of joy, of truth, shone at me from the glow on the Hill of Symonsbury.

As I was looking, feeling numbed and rather sick from my effort to penetrate that infernal barrier which surrounded the altar, the boy stooped down and picked up something which had escaped my notice. When he stood up again I saw it was a spaniel which from the droop of its head was either drugged or dead—I guessed the former. Round its neck was a cord, and at the end of the cord a knife, whose blade glanced in the strange glow, gleaming uneasily in the shadow of the night. Carrying the spaniel the boy stepped forward. I waited anxiously. He, when he was within the circle of the light, not only appeared to feel no discomfort, but

looked lighter, more at ease, supremely healthy. If it had not been for the look on his face, and the careless way he carried the dog, one would have judged him walking towards some celestial, instead of an infernal, revelation. As he approached the altar the Presence over it retreated, or rather ascended, and hovered, ominous, giving a sort of benison to what was going to be done.

For the strangest thing about that strange evening was not, perhaps, the events so much as my unhesitating acceptance of them. As I said, I was in no expectant mood when I first saw that movement on the Hill; yet I never doubted that what I saw on the Hill was an altar, never even questioned myself as to what the boy's purpose was, nor Whom it was he was going to worship; nor did he, in spite of the assumed ordinariness of our conversation, ever doubt that I was come to prevent his rites, if and how I could. Why this was, I leave to others; I have only to record the facts.

As he stepped up to the altar, I felt once more that I must take some action, I knew not what. It seemed useless to approach any nearer to the circle of the sacrifice, and it was evident I could do nothing with the boy except by force; and he had on his side powers greater than I had on mine. . . . But, had he? Ashamed, I remembered my faith. Since this ghastly business had begun I had uttered no conscious prayer, taken no steps to set in motion that vast spiritual machinery which is on the side of beauty and holiness. I made quick, in my foolish flurry, to remedy my mistake. Hurriedly I scampered through an "Our Father" and "Hail Mary", and, making the Sign of the Cross, walked towards the altar. Once more I was sucked in—though this time with greater force—and it needed considerable effort, as well as natural revulsion, to pull myself out of the circle; and then I fell back on the clean, dark grass trembling with futile excitement.

As I stumbled out, the Presence laughed, and the boy echoed it. Anything more horrible in its perfection, more cruel in its note of absolute and casual conquest I never expect to hear. I felt not only beaten and baffled, but silly and childish; I felt as though some huge force had been not so much victorious, as possessive,

over me. The boy knew, it seemed, that I could offer no resistance, let alone any active interference. Maddened by the laughter, I dashed once more towards the altar, and again was first absorbed and then, by the strong reaction of my body, flung out of the ring, weak and helpless. As I was thus beaten for a third time, the music began again.

This time it had lost its note of gay sinfulness, and was more ceremonial and evocative; but it still kept its undertone of essential vice; the grey of its formal progress was still marked by passages of scarlet and phrases of deep black. With the beginning of the music the boy stooped, laid the dog on the altar, untied the knife, and swiftly cut some string that bound its legs together. As he did so, either because the effect of the drug had passed off or because he touched the poor animal with the knife, the dog gave a little moan. I cannot hope to convey the effect on me of the dog's cry. Quite suddenly I felt that what I had to do was to save the dog. That possibly I should also have to struggle with the boy, and to fight that Presence which still hung over the altar and glowed in the darkness of the night; but that everything else was incidental to saving the dog.

The boy had now begun a new hymn, and this time he, too, used a language which was not English. Once again I stepped forward, and as I moved the dog shrieked loudly, horribly. I rushed forward, and in a moment was involved in the atmosphere of terror and power. This time, however, instead of fighting against it, I tried to ignore it, and simply kept in mind the fact that I must save the dog. I caught the boy's arm just as the knife was about to come down behind the animal's shoulder, and with a quick jerk twisted his wrist, so that the knife flew out of his hand. With a snarl of fury he turned on me—still ignoring him, I caught at the dog and rushed towards the darkness. Then something caught me: the glow buzzed like a million bees, the face of the Thing became altogether blurred with the rapidity of its changes, and loomed once more imminent and horrible. Hands that were not hands plucked at the spaniel, feet that were not feet tried to trip mine; whatever I caught changed and swelled and shrunk and changed until I found myself again and again

digging my fingers into my own palms, or clutching in foiled futility at the thick, obscene air. The smell was now rank and poisonous, and though there was no heat I felt the sweat running down my brow. The boy had fallen, apparently in a fit, but still clung tightly to my ankles; and as I pushed and heaved and struggled through the light I dragged his body with me. At first, as I say, the Thing which was there had seemed to attack me; but after a moment this stopped, and, instead of any active attack, I had to contend with what felt like a crushing, inchoate and slime-covered mass. I was near the end of my resources, and there was still more than a yard and a half of that atrocious glow to get through. As I fought on, the dog in my arms moved, gave a little bark and snapped furiously at the air. Strangely enough, the effort of the animal gave me extra strength. I burst out of the clutch that was holding me, and, the dog still barking excitedly, fell exhausted but outside the light. As I fell, my head struck something cold and sharp, and I fainted away.

I woke in the morning to find a small spaniel anxiously licking my hand.

I sat up, and saw some farm-hands approaching with a hurdle. I feebly waved my hand, and noticed that it was covered with blood. My head ached intolerably, and I put up my hand to it and found my hair was caked with dried blood. Then on the ground I saw a knife, with blood on the blade. The men came up. "Are you better, Mr. O'Brien?" "Yes, I'm all right," and I tried to struggle to my feet, but my head swam and I had to sit down again, rather ignominiously, on the ground.

"I shan't need that hurdle, I don't think—but thanks very much. How on earth did I——" then I recollected what my last conscious experience had been, and I could still smell that acrid stench.

"How did'ee get here? Why, we don't know. Farmer Goodere's spaniel bitch brought us up here. She were in a terr'ble to do. Don't 'ee remember aught?"

I did: but nothing I could tell these men. I muttered something about having fallen against a stone; and they looked puzzled.

I got up again, and found I could stand.

Yes; there was the altar, or rather its ruins, for the stones had fallen. I began to walk along with the men, when I noticed some pebbles arranged rather curiously round the altar. I looked more closely at them—and spelled out in Greek letters the words *ΠΑΝ, ΠΡΙΑΠΟΣ, ΑΠΟΛΛΩ*; and then I knew under what titles the boy had come to sacrifice to Evil, and with Whom I had fought that night. I stooped and caressed the dog, who was frisking at my side in extravagant pleasure.

" 'Ee must have a pup of hers, Mr. O'Brien—she won't be long now," said one of the men.

That afternoon there was a caller—or rather two—at my cottage. My little maid came and told me that Mrs. Toogood would like to see me, and a woman entered whom I knew well by sight. She was evidently in great distress. When she was a little calmer she told me how her boy—who had just begun work as a railway porter—had been rather odd lately, humming to himself, and looking, as she expressed it, "all overish". This morning she had gone to wake him, and found him looking dead white; no effort of hers could rouse him from a slumber that seemed deeper than natural. She made up her mind to send some excuse to the station, and ran round for the doctor. When he came the boy was awake. "He seemed, Mr. O'Brien, to be a child again. He just put his arms round me and kissed me—which he hasn't done for three weeks—but he can't speak."

"Can't speak," I echoed.

"Not a word," she sobbed. "The doctor says he's had a shock." Here she broke down again and wept.

I sat wondering. "I suppose, Mrs. Toogood, you don't know whether he was out last night?"

"Out? No, sir. I still go up and see him after he's in bed—and he was in at half after nine. He was very curious, though, and didn't say a word to me, though I knew he was awake."

"Ah! but earlier in the evening—about sunset?"

"No, sir. He was home to supper, though he didn't eat a bit and wouldn't speak a word. But it's this morning, sir. Though

he's so kind and nice and happy, he had such odd ideas. He got a slate and wrote on it, 'I belong to Mr. O'Brien——' "

"What," I said—"I belong——!"

"Yes, sir; that's what I'm telling you. And the doctor said we mustn't excite him, though he doesn't get annoyed like he used; and so I've brought him up here. I thought you might help me, sir."

"Where is he?"

"Outside, sir." She rose eagerly. "May I have him in?"

"Yes," I answered.

In a minute she was back with her son. There was no doubt about it. It was the same boy. He was not less beautiful than I had thought; but this morning there was nothing sinister or evil about his beauty. He saw me and then, with a grace very rare in an English boy, knelt and kissed my hand. I hastily drew it away, and asked him:

"What do you want?"

With a smile that was quite jolly and boylike, he darted into a corner, where there was a pair of old boots of mine, and went through the motions of polishing them. Then looked, first at me, then at his mother, with an air of plaintive request.

Well, after some discussion that lasted longer than it needed, the boy became my servant. He was perfectly sane, though more childlike than most country boys. He has never recovered his voice, but is so quick that one hardly realises his dumbness. I can give no explanation of how he was on the Hill of Sacrifice at the same time that he was at home eating his supper; but would suggest that there is more than modern incredulity will admit in those old stories of the Sabbath when demons assumed the places of men and women who were temporarily absent from their homes, entangled in the lures of the Devil.

Farmer Goodere had to give me, not a puppy, but Jessie herself: for she ran to my cottage that evening, and has lived with me ever since.

M. R. James

CASTING THE RUNES

April 15th, 190–.

DEAR SIR,—I am requested by the Council of the —— Association to return to you the draft of a paper on *The Truth of Alchemy*, which you have been good enough to offer to read at our forthcoming meeting, and to inform you that the Council do not see their way to including it in the programme.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

—— *Secretary*.

April 18th.

DEAR SIR,—I am sorry to say that my engagements do not permit of my affording you an interview on the subject of your proposed paper. Nor do our laws allow of your discussing the matter with a Committee of our Council, as you suggest. Please allow me to assure you that the fullest consideration was given to the draft which you submitted, and that it was not declined without having been referred to the judgment of a most competent authority. No personal question (it can hardly be necessary for me to add) can have had the slightest influence on the decision of the Council.

Believe me (*ut supra*).

April 20th.

The Secretary of the —— Association begs respectfully to inform Mr. Karswell that it is impossible for him to communicate the name of any person or persons to whom the draft of Mr.

Karswell's paper may have been submitted; and further desires to intimate that he cannot undertake to reply to any further letters on this subject.

"And who *is* Mr. Karswell?" inquired the Secretary's wife. She had called at his office, and (perhaps unwarrantably) had picked up the last of these three letters, which the typist had just brought in.

"Why, my dear, just at present Mr. Karswell is a very angry man. But I don't know much about him otherwise, except that he is a person of wealth, his address is Lufford Abbey, Warwickshire, and he's an alchemist, apparently, and wants to tell us all about it; and that's about all—except that I don't want to meet him for the next week or two. Now, if you're ready to leave this place, I am."

"What have you been doing to make him angry?" asked Mrs. Secretary.

"The usual thing, my dear, the usual thing: he sent in a draft of a paper he wanted to read at the next meeting, and we referred it to Edward Dunning—almost the only man in England who knows about these things—and he said it was perfectly hopeless, so we declined it. So Karswell has been pelting me with letters ever since. The last thing he wanted was the name of the man we referred his nonsense to; you saw my answer to that. But don't you say anything about it, for goodness' sake."

"I should think not, indeed. Did I ever do such a thing? I do hope, though, he won't get to know that it was poor Mr. Dunning."

"Poor Mr. Dunning? I don't know why you call him that; he's a very happy man, is Dunning. Lots of hobbies and a comfortable home, and all his time to himself."

"I only meant I should be sorry for him if this man got hold of his name, and came and bothered him."

"Oh, ah! yes. I dare say he would be poor Mr. Dunning then."

The Secretary and his wife were lunching out, and the friends to whose house they were bound were Warwickshire people. So

Mrs. Secretary had already settled it in her own mind that she would question them judiciously about Mr. Karswell. But she was saved the trouble of leading up to the subject, for the hostess said to the host, before many minutes had passed, "I saw the Abbot of Lufford this morning." The host whistled. "*Did* you? What in the world brings him up to town?" "Goodness knows; he was coming out of the British Museum gate as I drove past." It was not unnatural that Mrs. Secretary should inquire whether this was a real Abbot who was being spoken of. "Oh no, my dear: only a neighbour of ours in the country who bought Lufford Abbey a few years ago. His real name is Karswell." "Is he a friend of yours?" asked Mr. Secretary, with a private wink to his wife. The question let loose a torrent of declamation. There was really nothing to be said for Mr. Karswell. Nobody knew what he did with himself: his servants were a horrible set of people; he had invented a new religion for himself, and practised no one could tell what appalling rites; he was very easily offended, and never forgave anybody: he had a dreadful face (so the lady insisted, her husband somewhat demurring); he never did a kind action, and whatever influence he did exert was mischievous. "Do the poor man justice, dear," the husband interrupted. "You forget the treat he gave the school children." "Forget it, indeed! But I'm glad you mentioned it, because it gives an idea of the man. Now, Florence, listen to this. The first winter he was at Lufford this delightful neighbour of ours wrote to the clergyman of his parish (he's not ours, but we know him very well) and offered to show the school children some magic lantern slides. He said he had some new kinds, which he thought would interest them. Well, the clergyman was rather surprised, because Mr. Karswell had shown himself inclined to be unpleasant to the children—complaining of their trespassing, or something of the sort; but of course he accepted, and the evening was fixed, and our friend went himself to see that everything went right. He said he never had been so thankful for anything as that his own children were all prevented from being there: they were at a children's party at our house, as a matter of fact. Because this Mr. Karswell had evidently set out with the intention of frighten-

ing these poor village children out of their wits, and I do believe, if he had been allowed to go on, he would actually have done so. He began with some comparatively mild things. Red Riding Hood was one, and even then, Mr. Farrer said, the wolf was so dreadful that several of the smaller children had to be taken out: and he said Mr. Karswell began the story by producing a noise like a wolf howling in the distance, which was the most gruesome thing he had ever heard. All the slides he showed, Mr. Farrer said, were most clever; they were absolutely realistic, and where he had got them or how he worked them he could not imagine. Well, the show went on, and the stories kept on becoming a little more terrifying each time, and the children were mesmerized into complete silence. At last he produced a series which represented a little boy passing through his own park—Lufford, I mean—in the evening. Every child in the room could recognize the place from the pictures. And this poor boy was followed, and at last pursued and overtaken, and either torn in pieces or somehow made away with, by a horrible hopping creature in white, which you saw first dodging about among the trees, and gradually it appeared more and more plainly. Mr. Farrer said it gave him one of the worst nightmares he ever remembered, and what it must have meant to the children doesn't bear thinking of. Of course this was too much, and he spoke very sharply indeed to Mr. Karswell, and said it couldn't go on. All *he* said was: 'Oh, you think it's time to bring our little show to an end and send them home to their beds? *Very* well!' And then, if you please, he switched on another slide, which showed a great mass of snakes, centipedes, and disgusting creatures with wings, and somehow or other he made it seem as if they were climbing out of the picture and getting in amongst the audience; and this was accompanied by a sort of dry rustling noise which sent the children nearly mad, and of course they stampeded. A good many of them were rather hurt in getting out of the room, and I don't suppose one of them closed an eye that night. There was the most dreadful trouble in the village afterwards. Of course the mothers threw a good part of the blame on poor Mr. Farrer, and, if they could have got past the gates, I believe the fathers would have

broken every window in the Abbey. Well, now, that's Mr. Karswell: that's the Abbot of Lufford, my dear, and you can imagine how we covet *his* society."

"Yes, I think he has all the possibilities of a distinguished criminal, has Karswell," said the host. "I should be sorry for anyone who got into his bad books."

"Is he the man, or am I mixing him up with someone else?" asked the Secretary (who for some minutes had been wearing the frown of the man who is trying to recollect something). "Is he the man who brought out a *History of Witchcraft* some time back—ten years or more?"

"That's the man; do you remember the reviews of it?"

"Certainly I do; and what's equally to the point, I knew the author of the most incisive of the lot. So did you: you must remember John Harrington; he was at John's in our time."

"Oh, very well indeed, though I don't think I saw or heard anything of him between the time I went down and the day I read the account of the inquest on him."

"Inquest?" said one of the ladies. "What has happened to him?"

"Why, what happened was that he fell out of a tree and broke his neck. But the puzzle was, what could have induced him to get up there. It was a mysterious business, I must say. Here was this man—not an athletic fellow, was he? and with no eccentric twist about him that was ever noticed—walking home along a country road late in the evening—no tramps about—well known and liked in the place—and he suddenly begins to run like mad, loses his hat and stick, and finally shins up a tree—quite a difficult tree—growing in the hedgerow: a dead branch gives way, and he comes down with it and breaks his neck, and there he's found next morning with the most dreadful face of fear on him that could be imagined. It was pretty evident, of course, that he had been chased by something, and people talked of savage dogs, and beasts escaped out of menageries; but there was nothing to be made of that. That was in '89, and I believe his brother Henry (whom I remember as well at Cambridge, but *you* probably don't) has been trying to get on the track of an explanation ever

since. He, of course, insists there was malice in it, but I don't know. It's difficult to see how it could have come in."

After a time the talk reverted to the *History of Witchcraft.* "Did you ever look into it?" asked the host.

"Yes, I did," said the Secretary. "I went so far as to read it."

"Was it as bad as it was made out to be?"

"Oh, in point of style and form, quite hopeless. It deserved all the pulverizing it got. But, besides that, it was an evil book. The man believed every word of what he was saying, and I'm very much mistaken if he hadn't tried the greater part of his receipts."

"Well, I only remember Harrington's review of it, and I must say if I'd been the author it would have quenched my literary ambition for good. I should never have held up my head again."

"It hasn't had that effect in the present case. But come, it's half-past three; I must be off."

On the way home the Secretary's wife said, "I do hope that horrible man won't find out that Mr. Dunning had anything to do with the rejection of his paper." "I don't think there's much chance of that," said the Secretary. "Dunning won't mention it himself, for these matters are confidential, and none of us will for the same reason. Karswell won't know his name, for Dunning hasn't published anything on the same subject yet. The only danger is that Karswell might find out, if he was to ask the British Museum people who was in the habit of consulting alchemical manuscripts: I can't very well tell them not to mention Dunning, can I? It would set them talking at once. Let's hope it won't occur to him."

However, Mr. Karswell was an astute man.

This much is in the way of prologue. On an evening rather later in the same week, Mr. Edward Dunning was returning from the British Museum, where he had been engaged in Research, to the comfortable house in a suburb where he lived alone, tended by two excellent women who had been long with him. There is nothing to be added by way of description of him to

what we have heard already. Let us follow him as he takes his sober course homewards.

A train took him to within a mile or two of his house, and an electric tram a stage farther. The line ended at a point some three hundred yards from his front door. He had had enough of reading when he got into the car, and indeed the light was not such as to allow him to do more than study the advertisements on the panes of glass that faced him as he sat. As was not unnatural, the advertisements in this particular line of cars were objects of his frequent contemplation, and, with the possible exception of the brilliant and convincing dialogue between Mr. Lamplough and an eminent K.C. on the subject of Pyretic Saline, none of them afforded much scope to his imagination. I am wrong: there was one at the corner of the car farthest from him which did not seem familiar. It was in blue letters on a yellow ground, and all that he could read of it was a name—John Harrington—and something like a date. It could be of no interest to him to know more; but for all that, as the car emptied, he was just curious enough to move along the seat until he could read it well. He felt to a slight extent repaid for his trouble; the advertisement was *not* of the usual type. It ran thus: "In memory of John Harrington, F.S.A., of The Laurels, Ashbrooke. Died Sept. 18th, 1889. Three months were allowed."

The car stopped. Mr. Dunning, still contemplating the blue letters on the yellow ground, had to be stimulated to rise by a word from the conductor. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I was looking at that advertisement; it's a very odd one, isn't it?" The conductor read it slowly. "Well, my word," he said, "I never see that one before. Well, that is a cure, ain't it? Someone bin up to their jokes 'ere, I should think." He got out a duster and applied it, not without saliva, to the pane and then to the outside. "No," he said, returning, "that ain't no transfer; seems to me as if it was reg'lar *in* the glass, what I mean in the substance, as you may say. Don't you think so, sir?" Mr. Dunning examined it and rubbed it with his glove, and agreed. "Who looks after these advertisements, and gives leave for them to be put up? I wish

you would inquire. I will just take a note of the words." At this moment there came a call from the driver: "Look alive, George, time's up." "All right, all right; there's somethink else what's up at this end. You come and look at this 'ere glass." "What's gorn with the glass?" said the driver, approaching. "Well, and oo's 'Arrington? What's it all about?" "I was just asking who was responsible for putting the advertisements up in your cars, and saying it would be as well to make some inquiry about this one." "Well, sir, that's all done at the Company's orfice, that work is: it's our Mr. Timms, I believe, looks into that. When we put up to-night I'll leave a word, and per'aps I'll be able to tell you to-morrer if you 'appen to be coming this way."

This was all that passed that evening. Mr. Dunning did just go to the trouble of looking up Ashbrooke, and found that it was in Warwickshire.

Next day he went to town again. The car (it was the same car) was too full in the morning to allow of his getting a word with the conductor: he could only be sure that the curious advertisement had been made away with. The close of the day brought a further element of mystery into the transaction. He had missed the tram, or else preferred walking home, but at a rather late hour, while he was at work in his study, one of the maids came to say that two men from the tramways was very anxious to speak to him. This was a reminder of the advertisement, which he had, he says, nearly forgotten. He had the men in—they were the conductor and driver of the car—and when the matter of refreshment had been attended to, asked what Mr. Timms had had to say about the advertisement. "Well, sir, that's what we took the liberty to step round about," said the conductor. "Mr. Timms 'e give William 'ere the rough side of his tongue about that: 'cordin' to 'im there warn't no advertisement of that description sent in, nor ordered, nor paid for, nor put up, nor nothink, let alone not bein' there, and we was playing the fool takin' up his time. 'Well,' I says, 'if that's the case, all I ask of you, Mr. Timms,' I says, 'is to take and look at it for yourself,' I says. 'Of course if it ain't there,' I says, 'you may take and call me what

you like.' 'Right,' he says, 'I will': and we went straight off. Now, I leave it to you, sir, if that ad., as we term 'em, with 'Arrington on it warn't as plain as ever you see anythink—blue letters on yellow glass, and as I says at the time, and you borne me out, reg'lar *in the glass*, because, if you remember, you recollect of me swabbing it with my duster." "To be sure I do, quite clearly—well?" "You may say well, I don't think. Mr. Timms he gets in that car with a light—no, he telled William to 'old the light outside. 'Now,' he says, 'where's your precious ad. what we've 'eard so much about?' ''Ere it is,' I says, 'Mr. Timms,' and I laid my 'and on it." The conductor paused.

"Well," said Mr. Dunning, "it was gone, I suppose. Broken?"

"Broke!—not it. There warn't, if you'll believe me, no more trace of them letters—blue letters they was—on that piece o' glass, than—well, it's no good *me* talking. *I* never see such a thing. I leave it to William here if—but there, as I says, where's the benefit in me going on about it?"

"And what did Mr. Timms say?"

"Why 'e did what I give 'im leave to—called us pretty much anythink he liked, and I don't know as I blame him so much neither. But what we thought, William and me did, was as we seen you take down a bit of a note about that—well, that letterin'——"

"I certainly did that, and I have it now. Did you wish me to speak to Mr. Timms myself, and show it to him? Was that what you came in about?"

"There, didn't I say as much?" said William. "Deal with a gent if you can get on the track of one, that's my word. Now perhaps, George, you'll allow as I ain't took you very far wrong to-night."

"Very well, William, very well; no need for you to go on as if you'd 'ad to frog's-march me 'ere. I come quiet, didn't I? All the same for that, we 'adn't ought to take up your time this way, sir; but if it so 'appened you could find time to step round to the Company's orfice in the morning and tell Mr. Timms what you seen for yourself, we should lay under a very 'igh obligation to you for the trouble. You see it ain't bein' called—well, one thing

and another, as we mind, but if they got it into their 'ead at the orfice as we seen things as warn't there, why, one thing leads to another, and where should we be a twelvemunce 'ence—well, you can understand what I mean."

Amid further elucidations of the proposition, George, conducted by William, left the room.

The incredulity of Mr. Timms (who had a nodding acquaintance with Mr. Dunning) was greatly modified on the following day by what the latter could tell and show him; and any bad mark that might have been attached to the names of William and George was not suffered to remain on the Company's books; but explanation there was none.

Mr. Dunning's interest in the matter was kept alive by an incident of the following afternoon. He was walking from his club to the train, and he noticed some way ahead a man with a handful of leaflets such as are distributed to passers-by by agents of enterprising firms. This agent had not chosen a very crowded street for his operations: in fact, Mr. Dunning did not see him get rid of a single leaflet before he himself reached the spot. One was thrust into his hand as he passed: the hand that gave it touched his, and he experienced a sort of little shock as it did so. It seemed unnaturally rough and hot. He looked in passing at the giver, but the impression he got was so unclear that, however much he tried to reckon it up subsequently, nothing would come. He was walking quickly, and as he went on glanced at the paper. It was a blue one. The name of Harrington in large capitals caught his eye. He stopped, startled, and felt for his glasses. The next instant the leaflet was twitched out of his hand by a man who hurried past, and was irrecoverably gone. He ran back a few paces, but where was the passer-by? and where the distributor?

It was in a somewhat pensive frame of mind that Mr. Dunning passed on the following day into the Select Manuscript Room of the British Museum, and filled up tickets for Harley 3586, and some other volumes. After a few minutes they were brought to him, and he was settling the one he wanted first upon the desk, when he thought he heard his own name whispered

behind him. He turned round hastily, and in doing so, brushed his little portfolio of loose papers on to the floor. He saw no one he recognized except one of the staff in charge of the room, who nodded to him, and he proceeded to pick up his papers. He thought he had them all, and was turning to begin work, when a stout gentleman at the table behind him, who was just rising to leave, and had collected his own belongings, touched him on the shoulder, saying, "May I give you this? I think it should be yours," and handed him a missing quire. "It is mine, thank you," said Mr. Dunning. In another moment the man had left the room. Upon finishing his work for the afternoon, Mr. Dunning had some conversation with the assistant in charge, and took occasion to ask who the stout gentleman was. "Oh, he's a man named Karswell," said the assistant; "he was asking me a week ago who were the great authorities on alchemy, and of course I told him you were the only one in the country. I'll see if I can't catch him: he'd like to meet you, I'm sure."

"For heaven's sake don't dream of it!" said Mr. Dunning, "I'm particularly anxious to avoid him."

"Oh! very well," said the assistant, "he doesn't come here often: I dare say you won't meet him."

More than once on the way home that day Mr. Dunning confessed to himself that he did not look forward with his usual cheerfulness to a solitary evening. It seemed to him that something ill-defined and impalpable had stepped in between him and his fellow-men—had taken him in charge, as it were. He wanted to sit close up to his neighbours in the train and in the tram, but as luck would have it both train and car were markedly empty. The conductor George was thoughtful, and appeared to be absorbed in calculations as to the number of passengers. On arriving at his house he found Dr. Watson, his medical man, on his doorstep. "I've had to upset your household arrangements, I'm sorry to say, Dunning. Both your servants *hors de combat*. In fact, I've had to send them to the Nursing Home."

"Good heavens! what's the matter?"

"It's something like ptomaine poisoning, I should think:

you've not suffered yourself, I can see, or you wouldn't be walking about. I think they'll pull through all right."

"Dear, dear! Have you any idea what brought it on?"

"Well, they tell me they bought some shell-fish from a hawker at their dinner-time. It's odd. I've made inquiries, but I can't find that any hawker has been to other houses in the street. I couldn't send word to you; they won't be back for a bit yet. You come and dine with me to-night, anyhow, and we can make arrangements for going on. Eight o'clock. Don't be too anxious."

The solitary evening was thus obviated; at the expense of some distress and inconvenience, it is true. Mr. Dunning spent the time pleasantly enough with the doctor (a rather recent settler), and returned to his lonely home at about 11.30. The night he passed is not one on which he looks back with any satisfaction. He was in bed and the light was out. He was wondering if the charwoman would come early enough to get him hot water next morning, when he heard the unmistakable sound of his study door opening. No step followed it on the passage floor, but the sound must mean mischief, for he knew that he had shut the door that evening after putting his papers away in his desk. It was rather shame than courage that induced him to slip out into the passage and lean over the banister in his nightgown, listening. No light was visible; no further sound came: only a gust of warm, or even hot air played for an instant round his shins. He went back and decided to lock himself into his room. There was more unpleasantness, however. Either an economical suburban company had decided that their light would not be required in the small hours, and had stopped working, or else something was wrong with the meter; the effect was in any case that the electric light was off. The obvious course was to find a match, and also to consult his watch: he might as well know how many hours of discomfort awaited him. So he put his hand into the well-known nook under the pillow: only, it did not get so far. What he touched was, according to his account, a mouth, with teeth, and with hair about it, and, he declares, not the mouth of a human being. I do not think it is any use to guess what he said or did; but he was in a spare room with the door locked and

his ear to it before he was clearly conscious again. And there he spent the rest of a most miserable night, looking every moment for some fumbling at the door: but nothing came.

The venturing back to his own room in the morning was attended with many listenings and quiverings. The door stood open, fortunately, and the blinds were up (the servants had been out of the house before the hour of drawing them down); there was, to be short, no trace of an inhabitant. The watch, too, was in its usual place; nothing was disturbed, only the wardrobe door had swung open, in accordance with its confirmed habit. A ring at the back door now announced the charwoman, who had been ordered the night before, and nerved Mr. Dunning, after letting her in, to continue his search in other parts of the house. It was equally fruitless.

The day thus begun went on dismally enough. He dared not go to the Museum: in spite of what the assistant had said, Karswell might turn up there, and Dunning felt he could not cope with a probably hostile stranger. His own house was odious; he hated sponging on the doctor. He spent some little time in a call at the Nursing Home, where he was slightly cheered by a good report of his housekeeper and maid. Towards lunch-time he betook himself to his club, again experiencing a gleam of satisfaction at seeing the Secretary of the Association. At luncheon Dunning told his friend the more material of his woes, but could not bring himself to speak of those that weighed most heavily on his spirits. "My poor dear man," said the Secretary, "what an upset! Look here: we're alone at home, absolutely. You must put up with us. Yes! no excuse: send your things in this afternoon." Dunning was unable to stand out: he was, in truth, becoming acutely anxious, as the hours went on, as to what that night might have waiting for him. He was almost happy as he hurried home to pack up.

His friends, when they had time to take stock of him, were rather shocked at his lorn appearance, and did their best to keep him up to the mark. Not altogether without success: but, when the two men were smoking alone later, Dunning became dull again. Suddenly he said, "Gayton, I believe that alchemist man

knows it was I who got his paper rejected." Gayton whistled. "What makes you think that?" he said. Dunning told of his conversation with the Museum assistant, and Gayton could only agree that the guess seemed likely to be correct. "Not that I care much," Dunning went on, "only it might be a nuisance if we were to meet. He's a bad-tempered party, I imagine." Conversation dropped again; Gayton became more and more strongly impressed with the desolateness that came over Dunning's face and bearing, and finally—though with a considerable effort—he asked him point-blank whether something serious was not bothering him. Dunning gave an exclamation of relief. "I was perishing to get it off my mind," he said. "Do you know anything about a man named John Harrington?" Gayton was thoroughly startled, and at the moment could only ask why. Then the complete story of Dunning's experiences came out—what had happened in the tramcar, in his own house, and in the street, the troubling of spirit that had crept over him, and still held him; and he ended with the question he had begun with. Gayton was at a loss how to answer him. To tell the story of Harrington's end would perhaps be right; only, Dunning was in a nervous state, the story was a grim one, and he could not help asking himself whether there were not a connecting link between these two cases, in the person of Karswell. It was a difficult concession for a scientific man, but it could be eased by the phrase "hypnotic suggestion." In the end he decided that his answer to-night should be guarded; he would talk the situation over with his wife. So he said that he had known Harrington at Cambridge, and believed he had died suddenly in 1889, adding a few details about the man and his published work. He did talk over the matter with Mrs. Gayton, and, as he had anticipated, she leapt at once to the conclusion which had been hovering before him. It was she who reminded him of the surviving brother, Henry Harrington, and she also who suggested that he might be got hold of by means of their hosts of the day before. "He might be a hopeless crank," objected Gayton. "That could be ascertained from the Bennetts, who knew him," Mrs. Gayton retorted; and she undertook to see the Bennetts the very next day.

It is not necessary to tell in further detail the steps by which Henry Harrington and Dunning were brought together.

The next scene that does require to be narrated is a conversation that took place between the two. Dunning had told Harrington of the strange ways in which the dead man's name had been brought before him, and had said something, besides, of his own subsequent experiences. Then he had asked if Harrington was disposed, in return, to recall any of the circumstances connected with his brother's death. Harrington's surprise at what he heard can be imagined: but his reply was readily given.

"John," he said, "was in a very odd state, undeniably, from time to time, during some weeks before, though not immediately before, the catastrophe. There were several things; the principal notion he had was that he thought he was being followed. No doubt he was an impressionable man, but he never had had such fancies as this before. I cannot get it out of my mind that there was ill-will at work, and what you tell me about yourself reminds me very much of my brother. Can you think of any possible connecting link?"

"There is just one that has been taking shape vaguely in my mind. I've been told that your brother reviewed a book very severely not long before he died, and just lately I have happened to cross the path of the man who wrote that book in a way he would resent."

"Don't tell me the man was called Karswell."

"Why not? that is exactly his name."

Henry Harrington leant back. "That is final to my mind. Now I must explain further. From something he said, I feel sure that my brother John was beginning to believe—very much against his will—that Karswell was at the bottom of his trouble. I want to tell you what seems to me to have a bearing on the situation. My brother was a great musician, and used to run up to concerts in town. He came back, three months before he died, from one of these, and gave me his programme to look at—an analytical programme: he always kept them. 'I nearly missed this one,' he

said. 'I suppose I must have dropped it: anyhow, I was looking for it under my seat and in my pockets and so on, and my neighbour offered me his: said "might he give it to me, he had no further use for it", and he went away just afterwards. I don't know who he was—a stout, clean-shaven man. I should have been sorry to miss it; of course I could have bought another, but this cost me nothing.' At another time he told me that he had been very uncomfortable both on the way to his hotel and during the night. I piece things together now in thinking it over. Then, not very long after, he was going over these programmes, putting them in order to have them bound up, and in this particular one (which by the way I had hardly glanced at), he found quite near the beginning a strip of paper with some very odd writing on it in red and black—most carefully done—it looked to me more like Runic letters than anything else. 'Why,' he said, 'this must belong to my fat neighbour. It looks as if it might be worth returning to him; it may be a copy of something; evidently someone has taken trouble over it. How can I find his address?' We talked it over for a little and agreed that it wasn't worth advertising about, and that my brother had better look out for the man at the next concert, to which he was going very soon. The paper was lying on the book and we were both by the fire; it was a cold, windy summer evening. I suppose the door blew open, though I didn't notice it: at any rate a gust—a warm gust it was—came quite suddenly between us, took the paper and blew it straight into the fire: it was light, thin paper, and flared and went up the chimney in a single ash. 'Well,' I said, 'you can't give it back now.' He said nothing for a minute: then rather crossly, 'No, I can't; but why you should keep on saying so I don't know.' I remarked that I didn't say it more than once. 'Not more than four times, you mean,' was all he said. I remember all that very clearly, without any good reason; and now to come to the point. I don't know if you looked at that book of Karswell's which my unfortunate brother reviewed. It's not likely that you should: but I did, both before his death and after it. The first time we made game of it together. It was written in no style at all—split infinitives, and every sort of thing that makes an Oxford gorge rise. Then there

was nothing that the man didn't swallow: mixing up classical myths, and stories out of the *Golden Legend* with reports of savage customs of to-day—all very proper, no doubt, if you know how to use them, but he didn't: he seemed to put the *Golden Legend* and the *Golden Bough* exactly on a par, and to believe both: a pitiable exhibition, in short. Well, after the misfortune, I looked over the book again. It was no better than before, but the impression which it left this time on my mind was different. I suspected—as I told you—that Karswell had borne ill-will to my brother, even that he was in some way responsible for what had happened; and now his book seemed to me to be a very sinister performance indeed. One chapter in particular struck me, in which he spoke of 'casting the Runes' on people, either for the purpose of gaining their affection or of getting them out of the way—perhaps more especially the latter: he spoke of all this in a way that really seemed to me to imply actual knowledge. I've not time to go into details, but the upshot is that I am pretty sure from information received that the civil man at the concert was Karswell: I suspect—I more than suspect—that the paper was of importance: and I do believe that if my brother had been able to give it back, he might have been alive now. Therefore, it occurs to me to ask you whether you have anything to put beside what I have told you."

By way of answer, Dunning had the episode in the Manuscript Room at the British Museum to relate. "Then he did actually hand you some papers; have you examined them? No? because we must, if you'll allow it, look at them at once, and very carefully."

They went to the still empty house—empty, for the two servants were not yet able to return to work. Dunning's portfolio of papers was gathering dust on the writing-table. In it were the quires of small-sized scribbling paper which he used for his transcripts: and from one of these, as he took it up, there slipped and fluttered out into the room, with uncanny quickness, a strip of thin light paper. The window was open, but Harrington slammed it to, just in time to intercept the paper, which he caught. "I thought so," he said; "it might be the identical thing that was

given to my brother. You'll have to look out, Dunning; this may mean something quite serious for you."

A long consultation took place. The paper was narrowly examined. As Harrington had said, the characters on it were more like Runes than anything else, but not decipherable by either man, and both hesitated to copy them, for fear, as they confessed, of perpetuating whatever evil purpose they might conceal. So it has remained impossible (if I may anticipate a little) to ascertain what was conveyed in this curious message or commission. Both Dunning and Harrington are firmly convinced that it had the effect of bringing its possessors into very undesirable company. That it must be returned to the source whence it came they were agreed, and further, that the only safe and certain way was that of personal service; and here contrivance would be necessary, for Dunning was known by sight to Karswell. He must, for one thing, alter his appearance by shaving his beard. But then might not the blow fall first? Harrington thought they could time it. He knew the date of the concert at which the "black spot" had been put on his brother: it was June 18th. The death had followed on September 18th. Dunning reminded him that three months had been mentioned on the inscription on the car-window. "Perhaps," he added, with a cheerless laugh, "mine may be a bill at three months too. I believe I can fix it by my diary. Yes, April 23rd was the day at the Museum; that brings us to July 23rd. Now, you know, it becomes extremely important to me to know anything you will tell me about the progress of your brother's trouble, if it is possible for you to speak of it." "Of course. Well, the sense of being watched whenever he was alone was the most distressing thing to him. After a time I took to sleeping in his room, and he was the better for that: still, he talked a great deal in his sleep. What about? Is it wise to dwell on that, at least before things are straightened out? I think not, but I can tell you this: two things came for him by post during those weeks, both with a London postmark, and addressed in a commercial hand. One was a woodcut of Bewick's, roughly torn out of the page: one which shows a moonlit road and a man walking along it, followed by an awful demon creature. Under it were written the

lines out of the 'Ancient Mariner' (which I suppose the cut illustrates) about one who, having once looked round:

> *'walks on,*
> *And turns no more his head,*
> *Because he knows a frightful fiend*
> *Doth close behind him tread.'*

The other was a calendar, such as tradesmen often send. My brother paid no attention to this, but I looked at it after his death, and found that everything after Sept. 18 had been torn out. You may be surprised at his having gone out alone the evening he was killed, but the fact is that during the last ten days or so of his life he had been quite free from the sense of being followed or watched."

The end of the consultation was this. Harrington, who knew a neighbour of Karswell's, thought he saw a way of keeping a watch on his movements. It would be Dunning's part to be in readiness to try to cross Karswell's path at any moment, to keep the paper safe and in a place of ready access.

They parted. The next weeks were no doubt a severe strain upon Dunning's nerves: the intangible barrier which had seemed to rise about him on the day when he received the paper, gradually developed into a brooding blackness that cut him off from the means of escape to which one might have thought he might resort. No one was at hand who was likely to suggest them to him, and he seemed robbed of all initiative. He waited with inexpressible anxiety as May, June, and early July passed on, for a mandate from Harrington. But all this time Karswell remained immovable at Lufford.

At last, in less than a week before the date he had come to look upon as the end of his earthly activities, came a telegram: "Leaves Victoria by boat train Thursday night. Do not miss. I come to you to-night. Harrington."

He arrived accordingly, and they concocted plans. The train left Victoria at nine and its last stop before Dover was Croydon West. Harrington would mark down Karswell at Victoria, and look out for Dunning at Croydon, calling to him if need were

by a name agreed upon. Dunning, disguised as far as might be, was to have no label or initials on any hand luggage, and must at all costs have the paper with him.

Dunning's suspense as he waited on the Croydon platform I need not attempt to describe. His sense of danger during the last days had only been sharpened by the fact that the cloud about him had perceptibly been lighter; but relief was an ominous symptom, and, if Karswell eluded him now, hope was gone: and there were so many chances of that. The rumour of the journey might be itself a device. The twenty minutes in which he paced the platform and persecuted every porter with inquiries as to the boat train were as bitter as any he had spent. Still, the train came, and Harrington was at the window. It was important, of course, that there should be no recognition: so Dunning got in at the farther end of the corridor carriage, and only gradually made his way to the compartment where Harrington and Karswell were. He was pleased, on the whole, to see that the train was far from full.

Karswell was on the alert, but gave no sign of recognition. Dunning took the seat not immediately facing him, and attempted, vainly at first, then with increasing command of his faculties, to reckon the possibilities of making the desired transfer. Opposite to Karswell, and next to Dunning, was a heap of Karswell's coats on the seat. It would be of no use to slip the paper into these—he would not be safe, or would not feel so, unless in some way it could be proffered by him and accepted by the other. There was a handbag, open, and with papers in it. Could he manage to conceal this (so that perhaps Karswell might leave the carriage without it), and then find and give it to him? This was the plan that suggested itself. If he could only have counselled with Harrington! but that could not be. The minutes went on. More than once Karswell rose and went out into the corridor. The second time Dunning was on the point of attempting to make the bag fall off the seat, but he caught Harrington's eye, and read in it a warning. Karswell, from the corridor, was watching: probably to see if the two men recognized each other. He returned, but was evidently restless: and, when he rose the third

time, hope dawned, for something did slip off his seat and fall with hardly a sound to the floor. Karswell went out once more, and passed out of range of the corridor window. Dunning picked up what had fallen, and saw that the key was in his hands in the form of one of Cook's ticket-cases, with tickets in it. These cases have a pocket in the cover, and within very few seconds the paper of which we have heard was in the pocket of this one. To make the operation more secure, Harrington stood in the doorway of the compartment and fiddled with the blind. It was done, and done at the right time, for the train was now slowing down towards Dover.

In a moment more Karswell re-entered the compartment. As he did so, Dunning, managing, he knew not how, to suppress the tremble in his voice, handed him the ticket-case, saying, "May I give you this, sir? I believe it is yours." After a brief glance at the ticket inside, Karswell uttered the hoped-for response, "Yes, it is; much obliged to you, sir," and he placed it in his breast pocket.

Even in the few moments that remained—moments of tense anxiety, for they knew not to what a premature finding of the paper might lead—both men noticed that the carriage seemed to darken about them and to grow warmer; that Karswell was fidgety and oppressed; that he drew the heap of loose coats near to him and cast it back as if it repelled him; and that he then sat upright and glanced anxiously at both. They, with sickening anxiety, busied themselves in collecting their belongings; but they both thought that Karswell was on the point of speaking when the train stopped at Dover Town. It was natural that in the short space between town and pier they should both go into the corridor.

At the pier they got out, but so empty was the train that they were forced to linger on the platform until Karswell should have passed ahead of them with his porter on the way to the boat, and only then was it safe for them to exchange a pressure of the hand and a word of concentrated congratulation. The effect upon Dunning was to make him almost faint. Harrington made him lean up against the wall, while he himself went forward a few yards

within sight of the gangway to the boat, at which Karswell had now arrived. The man at the head of it examined his ticket, and, laden with coats, he passed down into the boat. Suddenly the official called after him, "You, sir, beg pardon, did the other gentleman show his ticket?" "What the devil do you mean by the other gentleman?" Karswell's snarling voice called back from the deck. The man bent over and looked at him. "The devil? Well, I don't know, I'm sure," Harrington heard him say to himself, and then aloud, "My mistake, sir; must have been your rugs! ask your pardon." And then, to a subordinate near him, " 'Ad he got a dog with him, or what? Funny thing: I could 'a' swore 'e wasn't alone. Well, whatever it was, they'll 'ave to see to it aboard. She's off now. Another week and we shall be gettin' the 'oliday customers." In five minutes more there was nothing but the lessening lights of the boat, the long line of the Dover lamps, the night breeze, and the moon.

Long and long the two sat in their room at the "Lord Warden". In spite of the removal of their greatest anxiety, they were oppressed with a doubt, not of the lightest. Had they been justified in sending a man to his death, as they believed they had? Ought they not to warn him, at least? "No," said Harrington; "if he is the murderer I think him, we have done no more than is just. Still, if you think it better—but how and where can you warn him?" "He was booked to Abbeville only," said Dunning. "I saw that. If I wired to the hotels there in Joanne's Guide, 'Examine your ticket-case, Dunning,' I should feel happier. This is the 21st: he will have a day. But I am afraid he has gone into the dark." So telegrams were left at the hotel office.

It is not clear whether these reached their destination, or whether, if they did, they were understood. All that is known is that, on the afternoon of the 23rd, an English traveller, examining the front of St. Wulfram's Church at Abbeville, then under extensive repair, was struck on the head and instantly killed by a stone falling from the scaffold erected round the north-western tower, there being, as was clearly proved, no workman on the scaffold at that moment: and the traveller's papers identified him as Mr. Karswell.

Only one detail shall be added. At Karswell's sale a set of Bewick, sold with all faults, was acquired by Harrington. The page with the woodcut of the traveller and the demon was, as he had expected, mutilated. Also, after a judicious interval, Harrington repeated to Dunning something of what he had heard his brother say in his sleep: but it was not long before Dunning stopped him.

John Wyndham

MORE SPINNED AGAINST . . .

One of the things about her husband that displeased Lydia Charters more as the years went by was the shape of him: another was his hobby. There were other displeasures, of course, but it was these in particular that rankled in her with a sense of failure.

True, he had been much the same shape when she had married him, but she had looked for improvement. She had envisaged the development, under her domestic influence, of a more handsome, suaver, better-filled type.

Yet, after nearly twelve years of her care and feeding there was scarcely any demonstrable improvement. The torso, the main man, looked a little more solid, and the scales endorsed that it was so, but, unfortunately, this seemed only to emphasize the knobbly, gangling, loosely hinged effect of the rest.

Once, in a mood of more than usual dissatisfaction, Lydia had taken a pair of his trousers and measured them carefully. Inert, and empty, they seemed all right—long in the leg, naturally, but not abnormally so, and the usual width that people wore—but, put to use, they immediately achieved the effect of being too narrow and full of knobs, just as his sleeves did.

After the failure of several ideas to soften this appearance, she had realized that she would have to put up with it. Reluctantly, she had told herself: "Well, I suppose it can't be helped. It must be just one of those things—like horsy women getting to look

more like horses, I mean," and thereby managed a dig at the hobby as well.

Hobbies are convenient in the child, but irritating in the adult; which is why women are careful never to have them, but simply to be interested in this or that. It is perfectly natural for a woman —and Lydia was a comely demonstration of the art of being one —to take an interest in semi-precious and, when she can afford them, precious stones: Edward's hobby, on the other hand, was not really natural to anyone.

Lydia had known about the hobby before they were married, of course. No one could know Edward for long without being aware of the way his eyes hopefully roved the corners of any room he chanced to be in, or how, when he was out of doors, his attention would be suddenly snatched away from any matter in hand by the sight of a pile of dead leaves, or a piece of loose bark.

It had been annoying at times, but she had not allowed it to weigh too much with her, since it would naturally wither from neglect later. For Lydia held the not uncommon opinion that though, of course, a married man should spend a certain amount of his time assuring an income, beyond that there ought to be only one interest in his life—from which it followed that the existence of any other must be slightly insulting to his wife, since everybody knows that a hobby is really just a form of sublimation.

The withering, however, had not taken place.

Disappointing as this was in itself, it would have been a lot more tolerable if Edward's hobby had been the collection of objects of standing—say old prints, or first editions, or oriental pottery. That kind of thing could not only be displayed for envy, it had value; and the collector himself had status. But one achieved no status but that of a crank for having even a very extensive collection of spiders.

Now, over butterflies or moths, Lydia felt without actually putting the matter to the test, one could perhaps have summoned up the appearance of some enthusiasm. There was a kind of nature's-living-jewels line that one could take if they were nicely mounted. But for spiders—a lot of nasty, creepy-crawly, leggy

horrors, all getting gradually more pallid in tubes of alcohol—she could find nothing to be said at all.

In the early days of their marriage Edward had tried to give her some of his own enthusiasm, and Lydia had listened as tactfully as possible to his explanations of the complicated lives, customs, and mating habits of spiders, most of which seemed either disgusting, or very short on morals, or frequently both, and to his expatiations on the beauties of colouration and marking which her eye lacked the affection to detect.

Luckily, however, it had gradually become apparent from some of her comments and questions that Edward was not awakening the sympathetic understanding he had hoped for, and when the attempt lapsed, Lydia had been able to retreat gratefully to her former viewpoint from which all spiders were undesirable, and the dead ones only slightly less horrible than the living.

Realizing that frontal opposition to spiders would be poor tactics, she had attempted a quiet and painless weaning. It had taken her two or three years to appreciate that this was not going to work; after that, the spiders had settled down to being one of those bits of the rough that the wise take with the smooth and leave unmentioned except on those occasions of extreme provocation when the whole catalogue of one's dissatisfactions is reviewed.

Lydia entered Edward's spider-room about once a week, partly to tidy and dust it, and partly to enjoy detesting its inhabitants in a pleasantly masochistic fashion. This she could do on at least two levels.

There was the kind of generalized satisfaction that anyone might feel in looking along the rows of test-tubes that, at any rate, here were a whole lot of displeasing creepies that would creep no more. And then there was the more personal sense of compensation in the reflection that though they had to some extent succeeded in diverting a married man's attention from its only proper target, they had had to die to do it.

There was an astonishing number of test-tubes ranged in the racks along the walls; so many that at one time she had hopefully

inquired whether there could be many more kinds of spiders. His first answer of five hundred and sixty in the British Isles had been quite encouraging, but then he had gone on to speak of twenty thousand or so different kinds in the world, not to mention the allied orders, whatever they might be, in a way that was depressing.

There were other things in the room besides the test-tubes: a shelf of reference books, a card-index, a table holding his carefully hooded microscope. There was also a long bench against one wall supporting a variety of bottles, packets of slides, boxes of new test-tubes, as well as a number of glass-topped boxes in which specimens were preserved for study alive before they went into the alcohol.

Lydia could never resist peeping into these condemned cells with a satisfaction which she would scarcely have cared to admit, or, indeed, even have felt, in the case of other creatures, but somehow with spiders it just served them right for being spiders.

As a rule there would be five or six of them in similar boxes, and it was with surprise one morning that she noticed a large bell-jar ranged neatly in the line. After she had done the rest of the dusting, curiosity took her over to the bench.

It should, of course, have been much easier to observe the occupant of the bell-jar than those of the boxes, but in fact it was not, because the inside, for fully two-thirds of its height, was obscured by web. A web so thickly woven as to hide the occupant entirely from the sides. It hung in folds, almost like a drapery, and on examining it more closely, Lydia was impressed by the ingenuity of the work; it looked surprisingly like a set of Nottingham-lace curtains—though reduced greatly in scale, of course, and perhaps not quite in the top flight of design.

Lydia went closer to look over the top edge of the web, and down upon the occupant. "Good gracious!" she said.

The spider, squatting in the centre of its web-screened circle, was quite the largest she had ever seen. She stared at it. She recalled that Edward had been in a state of some excitement the previous evening, but she had paid little attention except to tell him, as on several previous occasions, that she was much too busy

to go and look at a horrible spider: she also recalled that he had been somewhat hurt about her lack of interest.

Now, seeing the spider, she could understand that: she could even understand for once how it was possible to talk of a beautifully coloured spider, for there could be no doubt at all that this specimen deserved a place in the nature's-living-jewels class.

The ground colour was a pale green with a darker stippling, which faded away towards the underside. Down the centre of the back ran a pattern of blue arrowheads, bright in the centre and merging almost into the green at the points. At either side of the abdomen were bracket-shaped squiggles of scarlet. Touches of the same scarlet showed at the joints of the green legs, and there were small markings of it, too, on the upper part of what Edward resoundingly called the cephalothorax, but which Lydia thought of as the part where the head was fastened on.

Lydia leaned closer. Strangely, the spider had not frozen into immobility in the usual spiderish manner. Its attention seemed to be wholly taken up by something held out between its front pair of legs, something that flashed as it moved. Lydia thought that the object was an aquamarine, cut and polished.

As she moved her head to make sure, her shadow fell across the bell-jar. The spider stopped twiddling the stone, and froze. Presently a small, muffled voice said:

"Hullo! Who are you?" with a slight foreign accent.

Lydia looked round. The room was as empty as before.

"No. Here!" said the muffled voice.

She looked down again at the jar, and saw the spider pointing to itself with its number two leg on the right.

"My name," said the voice, sociably, "is Arachne. What's yours?"

"Er—Lydia," said Lydia, uncertainly.

"Oh dear! Why?" asked the voice.

Lydia felt a trifle nettled. "What do you mean, why?" she asked.

"Well, as I recall it, Lydia was sent to hell as a punishment for doing very nasty things to her lover. I suppose you aren't given to——?"

"Certainly not," Lydia said, cutting the voice short.

"Oh," said the voice, doubtfully. "Still, they can't have given you the name for nothing. And, mind you, I never really blamed Lydia. Lovers, in my experience, usually deserve——" Lydia lost the rest as she looked around the room again, uncertainly.

"I don't understand," she said. "I mean, is it really——?"

"Oh, it's me, all right," said the spider. And to make sure, it indicated itself again, this time with the third leg on the left.

"But—but spiders can't——"

"Of course not. Not real spiders, but I'm Arachne—I told you that."

A hazy memory stirred at the back of Lydia's mind.

"You mean *the* Arachne?" she inquired.

"Did you ever hear of another?" the voice asked, coldly.

"I mean, the one who annoyed Athene—though I can't remember just how?" said Lydia.

"Certainly. I was technically a spinster, and Athene was jealous and——"

"I should have thought it would be the other way—oh, I see, you mean you spun?"

"That's what I said. I was *the* best spinner and weaver, and when I won the all-Greece open competition and beat Athene she couldn't take it; she was so furiously jealous she turned me into a spider.

"It's very unfair to let gods and goddesses go in for competitions at all, I always say. They're spitefully bad losers, and then they go telling lies about you to justify the bad-tempered things they do in revenge. You've probably heard it differently?" the voice added, on a slightly challenging note.

"No, I think it was pretty much like that," Lydia told her, tactfully. "You must have been a spider a very long time now," she added.

"Yes, I suppose so, but you give up counting after a bit." The voice paused, then it went on: "I say, would you mind taking this glass thing off? It's stuffy in here; besides, I shouldn't have to shout."

Lydia hesitated.

"I never interfere with anything in this room. My husband gets so annoyed if I do."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid I shall run away. I'll give you my word on that, if you like."

But Lydia was still doubtful.

"You're in a pretty desperate position, you know," she said, with an involuntary glance at the alcohol bottle.

"Not really," said the voice in a tone that suggested a shrug. "I've often been caught before. Something always turns up—it has to. That's one of the few advantages of having a really permanent curse on you. It makes it impossible for anything really fatal to happen."

Lydia looked round. The window was shut, the door too, and the fireplace was blocked up.

"Well, perhaps for a few minutes, if you promise," she allowed.

She lifted the jar and put it down to one side. As she did so the curtains of web trailed out, and tore.

"Never mind about them. Phew! That's better," said the voice, still small, but now quite clear and distinct.

The spider did not move. It still held the aquamarine, catching the light and shining, between its front legs.

On a sudden thought, Lydia leaned down and looked at the stone more closely. She was relieved to see that it was not one of her own.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Arachne. "Not really my colour, though. I rather kill it, I think. One of the emeralds would have been more suitable—even though they were smaller."

"Where did you get it?" Lydia asked.

"Oh, a house just near here. Next door but one, I think it was."

"Mrs. Ferris's—yes, of course, that would be one of hers."

"Possibly," agreed Arachne. "Anyway, it was in a cabinet with a lot of others, so I took it, and I was just coming through the hedge out of the garden, looking for a comfortable hole to enjoy it in when I got caught. It was the stone shining that made him see me. A funny sort of man, rather like a spider himself, if he had more legs."

Lydia said, somewhat coldly:

"He was smarter than you were."

"H'm," said Arachne, noncommittally.

She laid the stone down, and started to move about, trailing several threads from her spinnerets. Lydia drew away a little. For a moment she watched Arachne, who appeared to be engaged in a kind of doodling, then her eyes returned to the aquamarine.

"I have a little collection of stones myself. Not as good as Mrs. Ferris's, of course, but one or two nice ones amongst them," she remarked. "Oh," said Arachne, absent-minded as she worked out her pattern.

"I—I should rather like a nice aquamarine," said Lydia. "Suppose the door happened to have been left open just a little . . ."

"There!" said Arachne, with satisfaction. "Isn't that the prettiest doily you ever saw?"

She paused to admire her work.

Lydia looked at it too. The pattern seemed to her to show a lack of subtlety, but she agreed tactfully. "It's delightful! Absolutely charming! I wish I could—I mean, I don't know how you do it."

"One has just a little talent, you know," said Arachne, with undeceiving modesty. "You were saying something?" she added.

Lydia repeated her remark.

"Not really worth my while," said Arachne. "I told you something *has* to happen, so why should I bother?"

She began to doodle again. Rapidly, though with a slightly abstracted air, she constructed another small lace mat suitable for the lower-income-bracket trade, and pondered over it for a moment. Presently she said:

"Of course, if it were to be made worth my while . . ."

"I couldn't afford very much——" began Lydia, with caution.

"Not money," said Arachne. "What on earth would I do with money? But I am a bit overdue for a holiday."

"Holiday?" Lydia repeated, blankly.

"There's a sort of alleviation clause," Arachne explained, "lots of good curses have them. It's often sometimes like being

uncursed by a prince's kiss—you know, something so improbable that it's a real outside chance, but gets the god a reputation for not being such a Shylock after all. Mine is that I'm allowed twenty-four hours' holiday in the year—but I've scarcely ever had it." She paused, doodling an inch or two of lace edging. "You see," she added, "the difficult thing is to find someone willing to change places for twenty-four hours."

"Er—yes, I can see it would be," said Lydia, detachedly.

Arachne put out one foreleg and spun the aquamarine round so that it glittered.

"Someone willing to change places," she repeated.

"Well—er—I—er—I don't think——" Lydia tried.

"It's not at all difficult to get in and out of Mrs. Ferris's house —not when you're my size," Arachne observed.

Lydia looked at the aquamarine. It wasn't possible to stop having a mental picture of the other stones that were lying bedded on black velvet in Mrs. Ferris's cabinet.

"Suppose one got caught?" she suggested.

"One need not bother about that—except as an inconvenience. I should have to take over in twenty-four hours again, in any case," Arachne told her.

"Well—I don't know——" said Lydia, unwillingly.

Arachne spoke in a ruminative manner:

"I remember thinking how easy it would be to carry them out one by one, and hide them in a convenient hole," she said.

Lydia was never able to recall in detail the succeeding stages of the conversation, only that, at some point where she was still intending to be tentative and hypothetical, Arachne must have thought she was more definite. Anyway, one moment she was still standing beside the bench, and the next, it seemed, she was on it, and the thing had happened.

She didn't really feel any different, either. Six eyes did not seem any more difficult to manage than two, though everything looked exceedingly large, and the opposite wall very far away. The eight legs seemed capable of managing themselves without getting tangled too.

"How do you——? Oh, I see," she said.

"Steady on," said a voice from above. "That's more than enough for a pair of curtains you've wasted there. Take it gently now. Always keep the word 'dainty' in mind. Yes, that's much better—a little finer still. That's it. You'll soon get the idea. Now all you have to do is walk over the edge and let yourself down on it."

"Er—yes," said Lydia, dubiously. The edge of the bench seemed a long way from the floor.

The figure towering above turned as if to go, and then turned back on a thought that occurred to her.

"Oh, there's just one thing," she said. "About men . . ."

"Men?" said Lydia.

"Well, male spiders. I mean, I don't want to come back and find that——"

"No, of course not," agreed Lydia. "I shall be pretty busy, I expect. And I don't—er—think I feel much interested in male spiders, as a matter of fact."

"Well, I don't know. There's this business of like calling to like."

"I think it sort of probably depends on how long you have been like," suggested Lydia.

"Good. Anyway, it's not very difficult. He'll only be about a fraction of your size, so you can easily brush him off. Or you can eat him, if you like."

"Eat him!" exclaimed Lydia. "Oh, yes, I remember my husband said something—— No, I think I'll just brush him off, as you said."

"Just as you like. There's one thing about spiders, they're much better arranged to the female advantage. You don't have to go on being cumbered up with a useless male just because. You simply find a new one when you want him. It simplifies things a lot, really."

"I suppose so," said Lydia. "Still, in only twenty-four hours——"

"Quite," said Arachne. "Well, I'll be off. I mustn't waste my holiday. You'll find you'll be quite all right once you get the hang of it. Good-bye till to-morrow." And she went out, leaving the door slightly ajar.

Lydia practised her spinning a little more until she could be sure of keeping a fairly even thread. Then she went to the edge of the bench. After a slight hesitation she let herself over. It turned out to be quite easy, really.

Indeed, the whole thing turned out to be far easier than she had expected. She found her way to Mrs. Ferris's drawing-room, where the door of the cabinet had been carelessly left unlatched, and selected a nice fire opal. There was no difficulty in discovering a small hole on the roadside of the front bank in which the booty could be deposited for collection later.

On the next trip she chose a small ruby; and the next time an excellently cut square zircon, and the operation settled down to an industrious routine, which was interrupted by nothing more than the advances of a couple of male spiders, who were easily bowled over with a flip of the front leg, and became discouraged.

By the later afternoon Lydia had accumulated quite a nice little hoard in the hole in the bank. She was in the act of adding a small topaz, and wondering whether she would make just one more trip, when a shadow fell across her. She froze quite still, looking up at a tall gangling form with knobbly joints, which really did look surprisingly spidery from that angle.

"Well, I'm damned," said Edward's voice, speaking to itself. "Another of them! Two in two days. Most extraordinary."

Then, before Lydia could make up her mind what to do, a sudden darkness descended over her, and presently she found herself being joggled along in a box.

A few minutes later she was under the bell-jar that she had lifted off Arachne, with Edward bending over her, looking partly annoyed at finding that his specimen had escaped, and partly elated that he had recaptured it.

After that, there didn't seem to be much to do but doodle a few lace curtains for privacy, in the way Arachne had. It was a consoling thought that the stones were safely hidden away, and that at any time after the next twelve or thirteen hours she would be able to collect them at her leisure . . .

No one came near the spider-room during the evening. Lydia could distinguish various domestic sounds taking place in more or less their usual succession, and culminating in two pairs of footfalls ascending the stairs. And but for physical handicaps, she might have frowned slightly at this point. The ethics of the situation were somewhat obscure. Was Arachne really entitled . . . ? Oh well, there was nothing one could do about it, anyway.

Presently the sound of movement ceased, and the house settled down for the night.

She had half-expected that Edward would look in to assure himself of her safety before he went to work in the morning. She remembered that he had done so in the case of other and far less spectacular spiders, and she was a trifle piqued that, when at last the door did open, it was simply to admit Arachne.

She noticed, also, that Arachne had not succeeded in doing her hair with just that touch that suited Lydia's face.

Arachne gave a little yawn, and came across to the bench.

"Hullo," she said, lifting the jar, "had an interesting time?"

"Not this part of it," Lydia said. "Yesterday was very satisfactory, though. I hope you enjoyed your holiday?"

"Yes," said Arachne. "Yes, I had a nice time—though it did somehow seem less of a change than I'd hoped." She looked at the watch on her wrist. "Well, time's nearly up. If I don't get back, I'll have that Athene on my tail. You ready?"

"Certainly," said Lydia, feeling more than ready.

"Well, here we are again," said Arachne's small voice. She stretched her legs in pairs, starting at the front, and working astern. She doodled a capital A in a debased Gothic script to assure herself that her spinning faculties were unimpaired. "You know," she said, "habit is a curious thing. I'm not sure now I'm not more comfortable like this, after all. Less inhibited, really."

She scuttered over to the side of the bench and let herself down, looking like a ball of brilliant feathers sinking to the floor. As she reached it, she unfolded her legs, and ran across to the open door. On the threshold she paused. "Well, good-bye, and thanks a lot," she said. "I'm sorry about your husband. I'm afraid I rather forgot myself for the moment."

Then she scooted away down the passage as if she were a ball of coloured wools blowing along in the draught.

"Good-bye," said Lydia, by no means sorry to see her go.

The intention of Arachne's parting remark was lost on her: in fact, she forgot it altogether until she discovered the collection of extraordinarily knobbly bones that someone had recently put in the dustbin.

Lord Lytton

THE HAUNTED AND THE HAUNTERS

A friend of mine, who is a man of letters and a philosopher, said to me one day, as if between jest and earnest—"Fancy! since we last met, I have discovered a haunted house in the midst of London."

"Really haunted?—and by what?—ghosts?"

"Well, I can't answer these questions—all I know is this—six weeks ago I and my wife were in search of a furnished apartment. Passing a quiet street, we saw on the window of one of the houses a bill, 'Apartments Furnished.' The situation suited us: we entered the house—liked the rooms—engaged them by the week—and left them the third day. No power on earth could have reconciled my wife to stay longer, and I don't wonder at it."

"What did you see?"

"Excuse me—I have no desire to be ridiculed as a superstitious dreamer—nor, on the other hand, could I ask you to accept on my affirmation what you would hold to be incredible without the evidence of your own senses. Let me only say this, it was not so much what we saw or heard (in which you might fairly suppose that we were the dupes of our own excited fancy, or the victims of imposture in others) that drove us away, as it was an undefinable terror which seized both of us whenever we passed by the door of a certain unfurnished room, in which we neither saw nor heard anything. And the strangest marvel of all was, that for once in my life I agreed with my wife—silly woman though she be—and allowed, after the third night, that it was impossible to

stay a fourth in that house. Accordingly, on the fourth morning, I summoned the woman who kept the house and attended on us, and told her that the rooms did not quite suit us, and we would not stay out our week. She said, dryly: 'I know why; you have stayed longer than any other lodger; few ever stayed a second night; none before you, a third. But I take it they have been very kind to you.'

" 'They—who?' I asked, affecting a smile.

" 'Why, they who haunt the house, whoever they are. I don't mind them; I remember them many years ago, when I lived in this house, not as a servant; but I know they will be the death of me some day. I don't care—I'm old, and must die soon, anyhow; and then I shall be with them, and in this house still.' The woman spoke with so dreary a calmness, that really it was a sort of awe that prevented my conversing with her further. I paid for my week, and too happy were I and my wife to get off so cheaply."

"You excite my curiosity," said I; "nothing I should like better than to sleep in a haunted house. Pray give me the address of the one which you left so ignominiously."

My friend gave me the address; and when we parted, I walked straight towards the house thus indicated.

It is situated on the north side of Oxford Street, in a dull but respectable thoroughfare. I found the house shut up—no bill at the window, and no response to my knock. As I was turning away, a beer-boy, collecting pewter pots at the neighbouring areas, said to me, "Do you want anyone in that house, sir?"

"Yes, I heard it was to let."

"Let!—why, the woman who kept it is dead—has been dead these three weeks, and no one can be found to stay there, though Mr. J—— offered ever so much. He offered Mother, who chars for him, £1 a week just to open and shut the windows, and she would not."

"Would not!—and why?"

"The house is haunted; and the old woman who kept it was found dead in her bed, with her eyes wide open. They say the devil strangled her."

"Pooh!—you speak of Mr. J——. Is he the owner of the house?"

"Yes."

"Where does he live?"

"In G—— Street, No.—."

"What is he?—in any business?"

"No, sir—nothing particular; a single gentleman."

I gave the pot-boy the gratuity earned by his liberal information, and proceeded to Mr. J——, in G—— Street, which was close by the street that boasted the haunted house. I was lucky enough to find Mr. J—— at home—an elderly man, with intelligent countenance and prepossessing manners.

I communicated my name and my business frankly. I said I heard the house was considered to be haunted—that I had a strong desire to examine a house with so equivocal a reputation—that I should be greatly obliged if he would allow me to hire it, though only for a night. I was willing to pay for that privilege whatever he might be inclined to ask. "Sir," said Mr. J——, with great courtesy, "the house is at your service, for as short or as long a time as you please. Rent is out of the question—the obligation will be on my side should you be able to discover the cause of the strange phenomena which at present deprive it of all value. I cannot let it, for I cannot even get a servant to keep it in order or answer the door. Unluckily the house is haunted, if I may use that expression, not only by night, but by day; though at night the disturbances are of a more unpleasant and sometimes of a more alarming character.

"The poor old woman who died in it three weeks ago was a pauper whom I took out of a workhouse, for in her childhood she had been known to some of my family, and had once been in such good circumstances that she had rented that house of my uncle. She was a woman of superior education and strong mind, and was the only person I could ever induce to remain in the house. Indeed, since her death, which was sudden, and the coroner's inquest, which gave it a notoriety in the neighbourhood, I have so despaired of finding any person to take charge of it, much more a tenant, that I would willingly let

it rent-free for a year to any one who would pay its rates and taxes."

"How long is it since the house acquired this sinister character?"

"That I can scarcely tell you, but very many years since. The old woman I spoke of said it was haunted when she rented it between thirty and forty years ago. The fact is that my life has been spent in the East Indies and in the civil service of the Company. I returned to England last year on inheriting the fortune of an uncle, amongst whose possessions was the house in question. I found it shut up and uninhabited. I was told that it was haunted, that no one would inhabit it. I smiled at what seemed to me so idle a story. I spent some money in repainting and roofing it—added to its old-fashioned furniture a few modern articles—advertised it, and obtained a lodger for a year. He was a colonel retired on half-pay. He came in with his family, a son and a daughter, and four or five servants: they all left the house the next day, and although they deposed that they had all seen something different, that something was equally terrible to all. I really could not in conscience sue, or even blame, the colonel for breach of agreement.

"Then I put in the old woman I have spoken of, and she was empowered to let the house in apartments. I never had one lodger who stayed more than three days. I do not tell you their stories—to no two lodgers have there been exactly the same phenomena repeated. It is better that you should judge for yourself, than enter the house with an imagination influenced by previous narratives; only be prepared to see and to hear something or other, and take whatever precautions you yourself please."

"Have you never had a curiosity yourself to pass a night in that house?"

"Yes. I passed not a night, but three hours in broad daylight alone in that house. My curiosity is not satisfied, but it is quenched. I have no desire to renew the experiment. You cannot complain, you see, sir, that I am not sufficiently candid; and unless your interest be exceedingly eager and your nerves unusually strong, I honestly add that I advise you *not* to pass a night in that house."

"My interest *is* exceedingly keen," said I, "and though only a coward will boast of his nerves in situations wholly unfamiliar to him, yet my nerves have been seasoned in such variety of danger that I have the right to rely on them—even in a haunted house."

Mr. J—— said very little more; he took the keys of the house out of his bureau, gave them to me—and thanking him cordially for his frankness, and his urbane concession to my wish, I carried off my prize.

Impatient for the experiment, as soon as I reached home I summoned my confidential servant—a young man of gay spirits, fearless temper, and as free from superstitious prejudice as any one I could think of.

"F——," said I, "you remember in Germany how disappointed we were at not finding a ghost in that old castle, which was said to be haunted by a headless apparition? Well, I have heard of a house in London which, I have reason to hope, is decidedly haunted. I mean to sleep there to-night. From what I hear, there is no doubt that something will allow itself to be seen or to be heard—something, perhaps, excessively horrible. Do you think, if I take you with me, I may rely on your presence of mind, whatever may happen?"

"Oh, sir! pray trust me," answered F——, grinning with delight.

"Very well—then here are the keys of the house—this is the address. Go now—select for me any bedroom you please; and since the house has not been inhabited for weeks, make up a good fire—air the bed well—see, of course, that there are candles as well as fuel. Take with you my revolver and my dagger—so much for my weapons—arm yourself equally well; and if we are not a match for a dozen ghosts, we shall be but a sorry couple of Englishmen."

I was engaged for the rest of the day on business so urgent that I had not leisure to think much on the nocturnal adventure to which I had plighted my honour. I dined alone, and very late, and while dining, read, as is my habit. The volume I selected was one of Macaulay's Essays. I thought to myself that I would take the book with me; there was so much of healthfulness in the style,

and practical life in the subjects, that it would serve as an antidote against the influences of superstitious fancy.

Accordingly, about half-past nine, I put the book into my pocket, and strolled leisurely towards the haunted house. I took with me a favourite dog—an exceedingly sharp, bold, and vigilant bull-terrier—a dog fond of prowling about strange ghostly corners and passages at night in search of rats—a dog of dogs for a ghost.

It was a summer night, but chilly, the sky somewhat gloomy and overcast. Still, there was a moon—faint and sickly, but still a moon and, if the clouds permitted, after midnight it would be brighter.

I reached the house, knocked, and my servant opened with a cheerful smile.

"All right, sir, and very comfortable."

"Oh!" said I rather disappointed; "have you not seen nor heard anything remarkable?"

"Well, sir, I must own I have heard something queer."

"What?—what?"

"The sound of feet pattering behind me; and once or twice small noises like whispers close at my ear—nothing more."

"You are not at all frightened?"

"I! not a bit of it, sir"; and the man's bold look reassured me on one point—viz. that, happen what might, he would not desert me.

We were in the hall, the street-door closed, and my attention was now drawn to my dog. He had at first run in eagerly enough, but had sneaked back to the door, and was scratching and whining to get out. After my patting him on the head, and encouraging him gently, the dog seemed to reconcile himself to the situation and followed me and F—— through the house, but keeping close at my heels instead of hurrying inquisitively in advance, which was his usual and normal habit in all strange places. We first visited the subterranean apartments, the kitchen and other offices, and especially the cellars, in which last there were two or three bottles of wine still left in a bin, covered with cobwebs, and evidently, by their appearance, undisturbed for many years. It was clear that the ghosts were not wine-bibbers.

For the rest we discovered nothing of interest. There was a gloomy little backyard, with very high walls. The stones of this yard were very damp—and what with the damp, and what with the dust and smoke-grime on the pavement, our feet left a slight impression where we passed. And now appeared the first strange phenomenon witnessed by myself in this strange abode. I saw, just before me, the print of a foot suddenly form itself, as it were. I stopped, caught hold of my servant, and pointed to it. In advance of that footprint as suddenly dropped another. We both saw it. I advanced quickly to the place; the footprint kept advancing before me, a small footprint—the foot of a child: the impression was too faint thoroughly to distinguish the shape, but it seemed to us both that it was the print of a naked foot. This phenomenon ceased when we arrived at the opposite wall, nor did it repeat itself on returning.

We remounted the stairs, and entered the rooms on the ground floor, a dining parlour, a small back-parlour, and a still smaller third room that had been probably appropriated to a footman—as still as death. We then visited the drawing-rooms, which seemed fresh and new. In the front room I seated myself in an armchair. F—— placed on the table the candlestick with which he had lighted us. I told him to shut the door. As he turned to do so, a chair opposite to me moved from the wall quickly and noiselessly, and dropped itself about a yard from my own chair, immediately fronting it.

"Why, this is better than the turning-tables," said I, with a half-laugh—and as I laughed, my dog put back his head and howled.

F——, coming back, had not observed the movement of the chair. He employed himself now in stilling the dog. I continued to gaze on the chair, and fancied I saw on it a pale blue misty outline of a human figure, but an outline so indistinct that I could only distrust my own vision. The dog now was quiet. "Put back that chair opposite to me," said I to F——; "put it back to the wall."

F—— obeyed. "Was that you, sir?" said he, turning abruptly. "I—what?"

"Why, something struck me. I felt it sharply on the shoulder —just here."

"No," said I. "But we have jugglers present, and though we may not discover their tricks, we shall catch *them* before they frighten *us*."

We did not stay long in the drawing-rooms—in fact, they felt so damp and so chilly that I was glad to get to the fire upstairs. We locked the doors of the drawing-rooms—a precaution which, I should observe, we had taken with all the rooms we had searched below. The bedroom my servant had selected for me was the best on the floor—a large one, with two windows fronting the street. The four-posted bed, which took up no inconsiderable space, was opposite to the fire, which burned clear and bright; a door in the wall to the left, between the bed and the window, communicated with the room which my servant appropriated to himself.

This last was a small room with a sofa-bed, and had no communication with the landing-place—no other door but that which conducted to the bedroom I was to occupy. On either side of my fireplace was a cupboard, without locks, flushed with the wall, and covered with the same dull-brown paper. We examined these cupboards—only hooks to suspend female dresses—nothing else; we sounded the walls—evidently solid—the outer walls of the building. Having finished the survey of these apartments, warmed myself a few moments, and lighted my cigar, I then, still accompanied by F——, went forth to complete my reconnoitre. In the landing-place there was another door; it was closed firmly. "Sir," said my servant in surprise, "I unlocked this door with all the others when I first came; it cannot have got locked from the inside, for it is a——"

Before he had finished his sentence the door, which neither of us then was touching, opened quietly of itself. We looked at each other a single instant. The same thought seized both—some human agency might be detected here. I rushed in first, my servant followed. A small blank dreary room without furniture—a few empty boxes and hampers in a corner—a small window—the shutters closed—not even a fireplace—no other door but that by

which we had entered—no carpet on the floor, and the floor seemed very old, uneven, worm-eaten, mended here and there, as was shown by the whiter patches on the wood; but no living being, and no visible place in which a living being could have hidden. As we stood gazing around, the door by which we had entered closed as quietly as it had before opened: we were imprisoned.

For the first time I felt a creep of undefinable horror. Not so my servant. "Why, they don't think to trap us, sir; I could break that trumpery door with a kick of my boot."

"Try first if it will open to your hand," said I, shaking off the vague apprehension that had seized me, "while I open the shutters and see what is without."

I unbarred the shutters—the window looked on the little back-yard I have before described; there was no ledge without—nothing but sheer descent. No man getting out of that window would have found any footing till he had fallen on the stones below.

F——, meanwhile, was vainly attempting to open the door. He now turned round to me, and asked my permission to use force. And I should here state, in justice to the servant, that, far from evincing any superstitious terrors, his nerve, composure, and even gaiety amidst circumstances so extraordinary compelled my admiration, and made me congratulate myself on having secured a companion in every way fitted to the occasion. I willingly gave him the permission he required. But though he was a remarkably strong man, his force was as idle as his milder efforts; the door did not even shake to his stoutest kick. Breathless and panting, he desisted. I then tried the door myself, equally in vain.

As I ceased from the effort, again that creep of horror came over me; but this time it was more cold and stubborn. I felt as if some strange and ghastly exhalation were rising up from the chinks of that rugged floor, and filling the atmosphere with a venomous influence hostile to human life. The door now very slowly and quietly opened as of its own accord. We precipitated ourselves into the landing-place. We both saw a large pale light—as large as the human figure, but shapeless and unsubstantial—move before us, and ascend the stairs that led from the landing

into the attics. I followed the light, and my servant followed me. It entered, to the right of the landing, a small garret, of which the door stood open. I entered in the same instant. The light then collapsed into a small globule, exceedingly brilliant and vivid; rested a moment on a bed in the corner, quivered, and vanished. We approached the bed and examined it—a half-tester, such as is commonly found in attics devoted to servants. On the drawers that stood near it we perceived an old faded silk kerchief, with the needle still left in a rent half repaired. The kerchief was covered with dust; probably it had belonged to the old woman who had last died in that house, and this might have been her sleeping-room.

I had sufficient curiosity to open the drawers; there were a few odds and ends of female dress, and two letters tied round with a narrow ribbon of faded yellow. I took the liberty to possess myself of the letters. We found nothing else in the room worth noticing—nor did the light reappear; but we distinctly heard, as we turned to go, a pattering footfall on the floor—just before us. We went through the other attics (in all, four), the footfall still preceding us. Nothing to be seen—nothing but the footfall heard. I had the letters in my hand; just as I was descending the stairs I distinctly felt my wrist seized, and a faint, soft effort made to draw the letters from my clasp. I only held them the more tightly, and the effort ceased.

We regained the bed-chamber appropriated to myself, and I then remarked that my dog had not followed us when we had left it. He was thrusting himself close to the fire, and trembling. I was impatient to examine the letters; and while I read them, my servant opened a little box in which he had deposited the weapons I had ordered him to bring, took them out, placed them on a table close at my bed-head, and then occupied himself in soothing the dog, who, however, seemed to heed him very little.

The letters were short—they were dated; the dates exactly thirty-five years ago. They were evidently from a lover to his mistress, or a husband to some young wife. Not only the terms of expression, but a distinct reference to a former voyage indicated the writer to have been a seafarer. The spelling and handwriting

were those of a man imperfectly educated, but still the language itself was forcible. In the expressions of endearment there was a kind of rough wild love; but here and there were dark unintelligible hints at some secret not of love—some secret that seemed of crime. "We ought to love each other," was one of the sentences I remember, "for how everyone else would execrate us if all was known." Again: "Don't let anyone be in the same room with you at night—you talk in your sleep." And again: "What's done can't be undone; and I tell you there's nothing against us unless the dead could come to life." Here there was underlined in a better handwriting (a female's), "They do!" At the end of the letter latest in date the same female hand had written these words: "Lost at sea the 4th of June, the same day as——"

I put down the letters, and began to muse over their contents.

Fearing, however, that the train of thought into which I fell might unsteady my nerves, I fully determined to keep my mind in a fit state to cope with whatever of marvellous the advancing night might bring forth. I roused myself—laid the letters on the table—stirred up the fire, which was still bright and cheering—and opened my volume of Macaulay. I read quietly enough till about half-past eleven. I then threw myself dressed upon the bed, and told my servant he might retire to his own room, but must keep himself awake. I bade him leave open the door between the two rooms. Thus alone, I kept two candles burning on the table by my bed-head. I placed my watch beside the weapons, and calmly resumed my Macaulay.

Opposite to me the fire burned clear; and on the hearth-rug, seemingly asleep, lay the dog. In about twenty minutes I felt an exceedingly cold air pass by my cheek, like a sudden draught. I fancied the door to my right, communicating with the landing-place, must have got open; but no—it was closed. I then turned my glance to my left, and saw the flame of the candles violently swayed as by a wind. At the same moment the watch beside the revolver softly slid from the table—softly, softly—no visible hand—it was gone. I sprang up, seizing the revolver with the one hand, the dagger with the other; I was not willing that my weapons should share the fate of the watch. Thus armed, I looked

round the floor—no sign of the watch. Three slow, loud, distinct knocks were now heard at the bed-head; my servant called out, "Is that you, sir?"

"No; be on your guard."

The dog now roused himself and sat on his haunches, his ears moving quickly backwards and forwards. He kept his eyes fixed on me with a look so strange that he concentrated all my attention on himself. Slowly he rose up, all his hair bristling, and stood perfectly rigid, and with the same wild stare. I had no time, however, to examine the dog. Presently my servant emerged from his room; and if ever I saw horror in the human face, it was then. I should not have recognised him had we met in the streets, so altered was every lineament. He passed by me quickly, saying in a whisper that seemed scarcely to come from his lips, "Run—run! it is after me!" He gained the door to the landing, pulled it open, and rushed forth. I followed him into the landing involuntarily, calling him to stop; but, without heeding me, he bounded down the stairs, clinging to the balusters, and taking several steps at a time. I heard, where I stood, the street-door open—heard it again clap to. I was left alone in the haunted house.

It was but for a moment that I remained undecided whether or not to follow my servant; pride and curiosity alike forbade so dastardly a flight. I re-entered my room, closing the door after me, and proceeded cautiously into the interior chamber. I encountered nothing to justify my servant's terror. I again carefully examined the walls, to see if there were any concealed door. I could find no trace of one—not even a seam in the dull-brown paper with which the room was hung. How, then, had the Thing, whatever it was, which had so scared him, obtained ingress except through my own chamber?

I returned to my room, shut and locked the door that opened upon the interior one, and stood on the hearth, expectant and prepared. I now perceived that the dog had slunk into an angle of the wall, and was pressing himself close against it, as if literally trying to force his way into it. I approached the animal and spoke to it; the poor brute was evidently beside itself with terror. It showed all its teeth, the slaver dropping from its jaws, and would

certainly have bitten me if I had touched it. It did not seem to recognise me. Whoever has seen at the Zoological Gardens a rabbit fascinated by a serpent, cowering in a corner, may form some idea of the anguish which the dog exhibited. Finding all efforts to soothe the animal in vain, and fearing that his bite might be as venomous in that state as if in the madness of hydrophobia, I left him alone, placed my weapons on the table beside the fire, seated myself, and recommenced my Macaulay.

Perhaps in order not to appear seeking credit for a courage, or rather a coolness, which the reader may conceive I exaggerate, I may be pardoned if I pause to indulge in one or two egotistical remarks.

As I hold presence of mind, or what is called courage, to be precisely proportioned to familiarity with the circumstances that lead to it, so I should say that I had been long sufficiently familiar with all experiments that appertain to the Marvellous. I had witnessed many very extraordinary phenomena in various parts of the world—phenomena that would be either totally disbelieved if I stated them, or ascribed to supernatural agencies. Now, my theory is that the Supernatural is the Impossible, and that what is called supernatural is only a something in the laws of nature of which we have been hitherto ignorant. Therefore, if a ghost rise before me, I have not the right to say, "So, then, the supernatural is possible," but rather, "So, then, the apparition of a ghost is, contrary to received opinion, within the laws of nature—i.e. not supernatural."

Now, in all that I had hitherto witnessed, and indeed in all the wonders which the amateurs of mystery in our age record as facts, a material living agency is always required. On the Continent you will find still magicians who assert that they can raise spirits. Assume for the moment that they assert truly, still the living material form of the magician is present; and he is the material agency by which from some constitutional peculiarities, certain strange phenomena are represented to your natural senses.

Accept again, as truthful, the tales of Spirit Manifestation in America—musical or other sounds—writings on paper, produced by no discernible hand—articles of furniture moved about with-

out apparent human agency—or the actual sight and touch of hands to which no bodies seem to belong—still there must be found the *medium* or living being, with constitutional peculiarities capable of obtaining these signs. In fine, in all such marvels, supposing even that there is no imposture, there must be a human being like ourselves, by whom, or through whom, the effects presented to human beings are produced. It is so with the now familiar phenomena of mesmerism or electro-biology; the mind of the person operated on is affected through a material living agent. Nor, supposing it true that a mesmerised patient can respond to the will or passes of a mesmeriser a hundred miles distant, is the response less occasioned by a material being; it may be through a material fluid—call it Electric, call it Odic, call it what you will—which has the power of traversing space and passing obstacles, that the material effect is communicated from one to the other.

Hence all that I had hitherto witnessed, or expected to witness, in this strange house, I believed to be occasioned through some agency or medium as mortal as myself; and this idea necessarily prevented the awe with which those who regard as supernatural things that are not within the ordinary operations of nature, might have been impressed by the adventures of that memorable night.

As, then, it was my conjecture that all that was presented, or would be presented, to my senses, must originate in some human being gifted by constitution with the power so to present them, and having some motive so to do, I felt an interest in my theory which, in its way, was rather philosophical than superstitious. And I can sincerely say that I was in as tranquil a temper for observation as any practical experimentalist could be in awaiting the effects of some rare though perhaps perilous chemical combination. Of course, the more I kept my mind detached from fancy, the more the temper fitted for observation would be obtained; and I therefore riveted eye and thought on the strong daylight sense in the page of my Macaulay.

I now became aware that something interposed between the page and the light—the page was over-shadowed; I looked up,

and I saw what I shall find it very difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe.

It was a Darkness shaping itself out of the air in very undefined outline. I cannot say it was of a human form, and yet it had more resemblance to a human form, or rather shadow, than anything else. As it stood, wholly apart and distinct from the air and the light around it, its dimensions seemed gigantic, the summit nearly touching the ceiling. While I gazed, a feeling of intense cold seized me. An iceberg before me could not more have chilled me; nor could the cold of an iceberg have been more purely physical. I feel convinced that it was not the cold caused by fear. As I continued to gaze, I thought—but this I cannot say with precision—that I distinguished two eyes looking down on me from the height. One moment I seemed to distinguish them clearly, the next they seemed gone; but still two rays of a pale-blue light frequently shot through the darkness, as from the height on which I half-believed, half-doubted, that I had encountered the eyes.

I strove to speak—my voice utterly failed me; I could only think to myself, "Is this fear? it is *not* fear!" I strove to rise—in vain; I felt as if weighed down by an irresistible force. Indeed, my impression was that of an immense and overwhelming Power opposed to my volition; that sense of utter inadequacy to cope with a force beyond men's, which one may feel *physically* in a storm at sea, in a conflagration, or when confronting some terrible wild beast, or rather, perhaps, the shark of the ocean, I felt *morally*. Opposed to my will was another will, as far superior to its strength as storm, fire, and shark are superior in material force to the force of men.

And now, as this impression grew on me, now came, at last, horror—horror to a degree that no words can convey. Still I retained pride, if not courage; and in my own mind I said, "This is horror, but it is not fear; unless I fear, I cannot be harmed; my reason rejects this thing; it is an illusion—I do not fear." With a violent effort I succeeded at last in stretching out my hand towards the weapon on the table; as I did so, on the arm and shoulder I received a strange shock, and my arm fell to my

side powerless. And now, to add to my horror, the light began slowly to wane from the candles—they were not, as it were, extinguished, but their flame seemed very gradually withdrawn; it was the same with the fire—the light was extracted from the fuel; in a few minutes the room was in utter darkness.

The dread that came over me, to be thus in the dark with that dark Thing, whose power was so intensely felt, brought a reaction of nerve. In fact, terror had reached that climax, that either my senses must have deserted me, or I must have burst through the spell. I did burst through it. I found voice, though the voice was a shriek. I remember that I broke forth with words like these: "I do not fear, my soul does not fear"; and at the same time I found the strength to rise. Still in that profound gloom I rushed to one of the windows—tore aside the curtain—flung open the shutters; my first thought was—LIGHT. And when I saw the moon high, clear, and calm, I felt a joy that almost compensated for the previous terror. There was the moon, there was also the light from the gas-lamps in the deserted slumberous street. I turned to look back into the room; the moon penetrated its shadow very palely and partially—but still there was light. The dark Thing, whatever it might be, was gone—except that I could yet see a dim shadow which seemed the shadow of that shade, against the opposite wall.

My eye now rested on the table, and from under the table (which was without cloth or cover—an old mahogany round table) there rose a hand, visible as far as the wrist. It was a hand, seemingly, as much of flesh and blood as my own, but the hand of an aged person—lean, wrinkled, small too—a woman's hand.

That hand very softly closed on the two letters that lay on the table: hand and letters both vanished. Then there came the same three loud measured knocks I had heard at the bed-head before this extraordinary drama had commenced.

As those sounds slowly ceased, I felt the whole room vibrate sensibly; and at the far end there rose, as from the floor, sparks or globules like bubbles of light, many-coloured—green, yellow, fire-red, azure. Up and down, to and fro, hither, thither, as tiny will-o'-the-wisps, the sparks moved, slow or swift, each at its own

caprice. A chair (as in the drawing-room below) was now advanced from the wall without apparent agency, and placed at the opposite side of the table. Suddenly, as forth from the chair, there grew a shape—a woman's shape. It was distinct as a shape of life—ghastly as a shape of death. The face was that of youth, with a strange mournful beauty; the throat and shoulders were bare, the rest of the form in a loose robe of cloudy white. It began sleeking its long yellow hair, which fell over its shoulders; its eyes were not turned towards me, but to the door; it seemed listening, watching, waiting. The shadow of the shade in the background grew darker; and again I thought I beheld the eyes gleaming out from the summit of the shadow—eyes fixed upon that shape.

As if from the door, though it did not open, there grew out another shape equally distinct, equally ghastly—a man's shape—a young man's. It was in the dress of the last century, or rather in a likeness of such dress; for both the male shape and the female, though defined, were evidently unsubstantial, impalpable—simulacra—phantasms; and there was something incongruous, grotesque, yet fearful, in the contrast between the elaborate finery, the courtly precision of that old-fashioned garb, with its ruffles and lace and buckles, and the corpse-like aspect and ghostlike stillness of the flitting wearer. Just as the male shape approached the female, the dark Shadow started from the wall, all three for a moment wrapped in darkness. When the pale light returned, the two phantoms were as if in the grasp of the Shadow that towered between them; and there was a bloodstain on the breast of the female; and the phantom-male was leaning on its phantom-sword, and blood seemed trickling fast from the ruffles, from the lace; and the darkness of the intermediate Shadow swallowed them up—they were gone. And again the bubbles of light shot, and sailed, and undulated, growing thicker and thicker and more wildly confused in their movements.

The closet-door to the right of the fireplace now opened, and from the aperture there came the form of a woman, aged. In her hand she held letters—the very letters over which I had seen *the* Hand close; and behind her I heard a footstep. She turned round as if to listen, then she opened the letters and seemed to read;

and over her shoulder I saw a livid face, the face as of a man long drowned—bloated, bleached—seaweed tangled in its dripping hair; and at her feet lay a form as of a corpse and beside the corpse there cowered a child, a miserable, squalid child, with famine in its cheeks and fear in its eyes. And as I looked in the old woman's face, the wrinkles and lines vanished, and it became a face of youth—hard-eyed, stony, but still youth; and the Shadow darted forth and darkened over these phantoms as it had darkened over the last.

Nothing now was left but the Shadow, and on that my eyes were intently fixed, till again eyes grew out of the Shadow—malignant, serpent eyes. And the bubbles of light again rose and fell, and in their disordered, irregular, turbulent maze, mingled with the wan moonlight. And now from these globules themselves as from the shell of an egg, monstrous things burst out; the air grew filled with them; larvæ so bloodless and so hideous that I can in no way describe them except to remind the reader of the swarming life which the solar microscope brings before his eyes in a drop of water—things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each other—forms like naught ever beheld by the naked eye. As the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order. In their very vagrancies there was no sport; they came round me and round, thicker and faster and swifter, swarming over my head, crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings.

Sometimes I felt myself touched, but not by them; invisible hands touched me. Once I felt the clutch as of cold soft fingers at my throat. I was still equally conscious that if I gave way to fear I should be in bodily peril; and I concentrated all my faculties in the single focus of resisting, stubborn will. And I turned my sight from the Shadow—above all, from those strange serpent eyes—eyes that had now become distinctly visible. For there, though in naught else around me, I was aware that there was a *will*, and a will of intense, creative, working evil, which might crush down my own.

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in

the air of some near conflagration. The larvæ grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks; and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark Shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned.

As the gloom receded, the Shadow was wholly gone. Slowly as it had been withdrawn, the flame grew again into the candles on the table, again into the fuel in the grate. The whole room came once more calmly, healthfully into sight.

The two doors were still closed, the door communicating with the servant's room still locked. In the corner of the wall, into which he had so convulsively niched himself, lay the dog. I called to him—no movement; I approached—the animal was dead; his eyes protruded; his tongue out of his mouth; the froth gathered round his jaws. I took him in my arms; I brought him to the fire; I felt acute grief for the loss of my poor favourite—acute self-reproach; I accused myself of his death; I imagined he had died of fright. But what was my surprise on finding that his neck was actually broken—actually twisted out of the vertebræ. Had this been done in the dark?—must it not have been by a hand human as mine?—must there not have been a human agency all the while in that room? Good cause to suspect it. I cannot tell. I cannot do more than state the fact fairly; the reader may draw his own inference.

Another surprising circumstance—my watch was restored to the table from which it had been so mysteriously withdrawn; but it had stopped at the very moment it was so withdrawn; nor, despite all the skill of the watchmaker, has it ever gone since—that is, it will go in a strange erratic way for a few hours, and then comes to a dead stop—it is worthless.

Nothing more chanced for the rest of the night. Nor, indeed, had I long to wait before the dawn broke. Not till it was broad daylight did I quit the haunted house. Before I did so, I revisited the little blind room in which my servant and myself had been for a time imprisoned. I had a strong impression—for which I could not account—that from that room had originated the mechanism of the phenomena—if I may use the term—which

had been experienced in my chamber. And though I entered it now in the clear day, with the sun peering through the filmy window, I still felt, as I stood on its floor, the creep of the horror which I had first there experienced the night before, and which had been so aggravated by what had passed in my own chamber. I could not, indeed, bear to stay more than half a minute within those walls. I descended the stairs, and again I heard the footfall before me; and when I opened the street door, I thought I could distinguish a very low laugh. I gained my own home, expecting to find my runaway servant there. But he had not presented himself; nor did I hear more of him for three days, when I received a letter from him, dated from Liverpool, to this effect:—

"Honoured Sir,—I humbly entreat your pardon, though I can scarcely hope that you will think I deserve it, unless—which Heaven forbid!—you saw what I did. I feel that it will be years before I can recover myself; and as to being fit for service, it is out of the question. I am therefore going to my brother-in-law at Melbourne. The ship sails to-morrow. Perhaps the long voyage may set me up. I do nothing but start and tremble, and fancy It is behind me. I humbly beg you, honoured sir, to order my clothes, and whatever wages are due to me, to be sent to my mother's, at Walworth—John knows her address."

The letter ended with additional apologies, somewhat incoherent, and explanatory details as to effects that had been under the writer's charge.

This flight may perhaps warrant a suspicion that the man wished to go to Australia, and had been somehow or other fraudulently mixed up with the events of the night. I say nothing in refutation of that conjecture; rather, I suggest it as one that would seem to many persons the most probable solution of improbable occurrences. My own theory remained unshaken. I returned in the evening to the house, to bring away in a hack-cab the things I had left there, with my poor dog's body. In this task I was not disturbed, nor did any incident worth note befall me, except that still, on ascending and descending the stairs I heard the same footfall in advance. On leaving the house, I went to Mr.

J——'s. He was at home. I returned him the keys, told him that my curiosity was sufficiently gratified, and was about to relate quickly what had passed, when he stopped me, and said, though with much politeness, that he had no longer any interest in a mystery which none had ever solved.

I determined at least to tell him of the two letters I had read, as well as of the extraordinary manner in which they had disappeared, and I then inquired if he thought they had been addressed to the woman who had died in the house, and if there were anything in her early history which could possibly confirm the dark suspicions to which the letters gave rise. Mr. J—— seemed startled, and, after musing a few moments, answered, "I know but little of the woman's earlier history, except, as I before told you, that her family were known to mine. But you revive some vague reminiscences to her prejudice. I will make inquiries, and inform you of their result. Still, even if we could admit the popular superstition that a person who had been either the perpetrator or the victim of dark crimes in life could revisit, as a restless spirit, the scene in which those crimes had been committed, I should observe that the house was infested by strange sights and sounds before the old woman died—you smile—what would you say?"

"I would say this, that I am convinced, if we could get to the bottom of these mysteries, we should find a living human agency."

"What! you believe it is all an imposture? For what object?"

"Not an imposture in the ordinary sense of the word. If suddenly I were to sink into a deep sleep, from which you could not awake me, but in that sleep could answer questions with an accuracy which I could not pretend to when awake—tell you what money you had in your pocket—nay, describe your very thoughts—it is not necessarily an imposture, any more than it is necessarily supernatural. I should be, unconsciously to myself, under a mesmeric influence, conveyed to me from a distance by a human being who had acquired power over me by previous *rapport*."

"Granting mesmerism, so far carried, to be a fact, you are right. And you would infer from this that a mesmeriser might

produce the extraordinary effects you and others have witnessed over inanimate objects—fill the air with sights and sounds?"

"Or impress our senses with the belief in them—we never having been *en rapport* with the person acting on us? No. What is commonly called mesmerism could not do this; but there may be a power akin to mesmerism, and superior to it—the power that in the old days was called Magic. That such a power may extend to all inanimate objects of matter, I do not say; but if so, it would not be against nature, only a rare power in nature which might be given to constitutions with certain peculiarities, and cultivated by practice to an extraordinary degree. That such a power might extend over the dead—that is, over certain thoughts and memories that the dead may still retain—and compel, not that which ought properly to be called the *soul*, and which is far beyond human reach, but rather a phantom of what has been most earth-stained on earth, to make itself apparent to our senses —is a very ancient though obsolete theory, upon which I will hazard no opinion. But I do not conceive the power would be supernatural.

"Let me illustrate what I mean from an experiment which Paracelsus describes as not difficult, and which the author of the *Curiosities of Literature* cites as credible: A flower perishes; you burn it. Whatever were the elements of that flower while it lived are gone, dispersed, you know not whither; you can never discover nor re-collect them. But you can, by chemistry, out of the burnt dust of that flower, raise a spectrum of the flower, just as it seemed in life. It may be the same with the human being. The soul has so much escaped you as the essence or elements of the flower. Still you may make a spectrum of it. And this phantom, though in the popular superstition it is held to be the soul of the departed, must not be confounded with the true soul; it is but the eidolon of the dead form.

"Hence, like the best-attested stories of ghosts or spirits, the thing that most strikes us is the absence of what we hold to be soul—that is, of superior emancipated intelligence. They come for little or no object—they seldom speak, if they do come; they utter no ideas above that of an ordinary person on earth. These

American spirit-seers have published volumes of communications in prose and verse, which they assert to be given in the names of the most illustrious dead—Shakespeare, Bacon—heaven knows whom. Those communications, taking the best, are certainly not a whit of higher order than would be communications from living persons of fair talent and education; they are wondrously inferior to what Bacon, Shakespeare and Plato said and wrote when on earth.

"Nor, what is more notable, do they ever contain an idea that was not on the earth before. Wonderful, therefore, as such phenomena may be (granting them to be truthful), I see much that philosophy may question, nothing that it is incumbent on philosophy to deny—viz. nothing supernatural. They are but ideas conveyed somehow or other (we have not yet discovered the means) from one mortal brain to another. Whether, in so doing, tables walk of their own accord, or fiend-like shapes appear in a magic circle, or bodiless hands rise and remove material objects, or a Thing of Darkness, such as presented itself to me, freeze our blood—still am I persuaded that these are but agencies conveyed, as by electric wires, to my own brain from the brain of another. In some constitutions there is a natural chemistry, and those may produce chemic wonders—in others a natural fluid, call it electricity, and these produce electric wonders. But they differ in this from Normal Science—they are alike objectless, purposeless, puerile, frivolous. They lead on to no grand results; and therefore the world does not heed, and true sages have not cultivated them. But sure I am, that of all I saw or heard, a man, human as myself, was the remote originator; and I believe unconsciously to himself as to the exact effects produced, for this reason: no two persons, you say, have ever told you that they experienced exactly the same thing. Well, observe, no two persons ever experience exactly the same dream. If this were an ordinary imposture, the machinery would be arranged for results that would but little vary; if it were a supernatural agency permitted by the Almighty, it would surely be for some definite end.

"These phenomena belong to neither class; my persuasion is, that they originate in some brain now far distant; that that brain

had no distinct volition in anything that occurred; that what does occur reflects but its devious, motley, ever-shifting, half-formed thoughts; in short, that it has been but the dreams of such a brain put into action and invested with a semi-substance. That this brain is of immense power, that it can set matter into movement, that it is malignant and destructive, I believe: some material force must have killed my dog; it might, for aught I know, have sufficed to kill myself, had I been as subjugated by terror as the dog—had my intellect or my spirit given me no countervailing resistance in my will."

"It killed your dog! that is fearful! indeed, it is strange that no animal can be induced to stay in that house; not even a cat. Rats and mice are never found in it."

"The instincts of the brute creation detect influences deadly to their existence. Man's reason has a sense less subtle, because it has a resisting power more supreme. But enough; do you comprehend my theory?"

"Yes, though imperfectly—and I accept any crotchet (pardon the word), however odd, rather than embrace at once the notion of ghosts and hobgoblins we imbibed in our nurseries. Still, to my unfortunate house the evil is the same. What on earth can I do with the house?"

"I will tell you what I would do. I am convinced from my own internal feelings that the small unfurnished room at right angles to the door of the bedroom which I occupied, forms a starting-point or receptacle for the influences which haunt the house; and I strongly advise you to have the walls opened, the floor removed —nay, the whole room pulled down. I observe that it is detached from the body of the house, built over the small back-yard, and could be removed without injury to the rest of the building."

"And you think, if I did that——"

"You would cut off the telegraph wires. Try it. I am so persuaded that I am right, that I will pay half the expense if you will allow me to direct the operations."

"Nay, I am well able to afford the cost; for the rest, allow me to write to you."

About ten days afterwards I received a letter from Mr. J——,

telling me that he had visited the house since I had seen him; that he had found the two letters I had described, replaced in the drawer from which I had taken them; that he had read them with misgivings like my own; that he had instituted a cautious enquiry about the woman to whom I rightly conjectured they had been written. It seemed that thirty-six years ago (a year before the date of the letters), she had married, against the wish of her relatives, an American of very suspicious character; in fact, he was generally believed to have been a pirate. She herself was the daughter of very respectable tradespeople, and had served in the capacity of a nursery governess before her marriage. She had a brother, a widower, who was considered wealthy, and who had one child of about six years old. A month after the marriage, the body of this brother was found in the Thames, near London Bridge; there seemed some marks of violence about his throat, but they were not deemed sufficient to warrant the inquest in any verdict other than that of "found drowned".

The American and his wife took charge of the little boy, the deceased brother having by his will left his sister the guardian of his only child—and in the event of the child's death, the sister inherited. The child died about six months afterwards—it was supposed to have been neglected and ill-treated. The neighbours deposed to have heard it shriek at night. The surgeon who had examined it after death, said that it was emaciated as if from want of nourishment, and the body was covered with livid bruises. It seemed that one winter night the child had sought to escape—crept out into the back-yard—tried to scale the wall—fallen back exhausted, and been found at morning on the stones in a dying state. But though there was some evidence of cruelty, there was none of murder; and the aunt and her husband had sought to palliate cruelty by alleging the exceeding stubbornness and perversity of the child, who was declared to be half-witted. Be that as it may, at the orphan's death the aunt inherited her brother's fortune.

Before the first wedded year was out, the American quitted England abruptly, and never returned to it. He obtained a cruising vessel, which was lost in the Atlantic two years afterwards.

The widow was left in affluence; but reverses of various kinds had befallen her: a bank broke—an investment failed—she went into a small business and became insolvent—then she entered into service, sinking lower and lower, from housekeeper down to maid-of-all-work—never long retaining a place, though nothing peculiar against her character was ever alleged. She was considered sober, honest, and peculiarly quiet in her ways; still nothing prospered with her. And so she had dropped into the workhouse, from which Mr. J—— had taken her, to be placed in charge of the very house which she had rented as mistress in the first year of her wedded life.

Mr. J—— added that he had passed an hour alone in the unfurnished room which I had urged him to destroy, and that his impressions of dread while there were so great, though he had neither heard nor seen anything, that he was eager to have the walls bared and the floors removed as I had suggested. He had engaged persons for the work, and would commence any day I would name.

The day was accordingly fixed. I repaired to the haunted house —we went into the blind dreary room, took up the skirting, and then the floors. Under the rafters, covered with rubbish, was found a trap-door, quite large enough to admit a man. It was closely nailed down, with clamps and rivets of iron. On removing these we descended into a room below, the existence of which had never been suspected. In this room there had been a window and a flue, but they had been bricked over, evidently for many years. By the help of candles we examined this place; it still retained some mouldering furniture—three chairs, an oak settee, a table—all of the fashion of about eighty years ago. There was a chest-of-drawers against the wall, in which we found, half-rotted away, old-fashioned articles of a man's dress, such as might have been worn eighty or a hundred years ago by a gentleman of some rank —costly steel buckles and buttons, like those yet worn in court dresses—a handsome court sword—in a waistcoat which had once been rich with gold lace, but which was now blackened and foul with damp, we found five guineas, a few silver coins, and an ivory ticket, probably for some place of entertainment long since

passed away. But our main discovery was in a kind of iron safe fixed to the wall, the lock of which it cost us much trouble to get picked.

In this safe were three shelves and two small drawers. Ranged on the shelves were several small bottles of crystal, hermetically stopped. They contained colourless volatile essences, of what nature I shall say no more than that they were not poisons—phosphor and ammonia entered into some of them. There were also some very curious glass tubes, and a small pointed rod of iron, with a large lump of rock-crystal, and another of amber—also a loadstone of great power.

In one of the drawers we found a miniature portrait set in gold, and retaining the freshness of its colours most remarkably, considering the length of time it had probably been there. The portrait was that of a man who might be somewhat advanced in middle life, perhaps forty-seven or forty-eight.

It was a most peculiar face—a most impressive face. If you could fancy some mighty serpent transformed into man, preserving in the human lineaments the old serpent type, you would have a better idea of that countenance than long descriptions can convey; the width and flatness of frontal—the tapering elegance of contour disguising the strength of the deadly jaw—the long, large, terrible eye, glittering and green as the emerald—and withal a certain ruthless calm, as if from the consciousness of an immense power. The strange thing was this—the instant I saw the miniature I recognised a startling likeness to one of the rarest portraits in the world—the portrait of a man of a rank only below that of royalty, who in his own day had made a considerable noise. History says little or nothing of him; but search the correspondence of his contemporaries, and you find reference to his wild daring, his bold profligacy, his restless spirit, his taste for the occult sciences. While still in the meridian of life he died and was buried, so say the chronicles, in a foreign land. He died in time to escape the grasp of the law, for he was accused of crimes which would have given him to the headsman.

After his death, the portraits of him, which had been numerous, for he had been a munificent encourager of art, were bought up

and destroyed—it was supposed by his heirs, who might have been glad could they have razed his very name from their splendid line. He had enjoyed a vast wealth; a large portion of this was believed to have been embezzled by a favourite astrologer or soothsayer—at all events, it had unaccountably vanished at the time of his death. One portrait alone of him was supposed to have escaped the general destruction; I had seen it in the house of a collector some months before. It had made on me a wonderful impression, as it does on all who behold it—a face never to be forgotten; and there was that face in the miniature that lay within my hand. True, that in the miniature the man was a few years older than in the portrait I had seen, or than the original was even at the time of his death. But a few years!—why, between the date in which flourished that direful noble, and the date in which the miniature was evidently painted, there was an interval of more than two centuries. While I was thus gazing, silent and wondering, Mr. J—— said:

"But is it possible? I have known this man."

"How—where?" I cried.

"In India. He was high in the confidence of the Rajah of ——, and wellnigh drew him into a revolt which would have lost the Rajah his dominions. The man was a Frenchman—his name de V——, clever, bold, lawless. We insisted on his dismissal and banishment: it must be the same man—no two faces like his—yet this miniature seems nearly a hundred years old."

Mechanically I turned round the miniature to examine the back of it, and on the back was engraved a pentacle; in the middle of the pentacle a ladder, and the third step of the ladder was formed by the date 1765. Examining still more minutely, I detected a spring; this, on being pressed, opened the back of the miniature as a lid. Withinside the lid was engraved "Mariana to thee—Be faithful in life and in death to ——". Here follows a name that I will not mention, but it was not unfamiliar to me. I had heard it spoken of by old men in my childhood as the name borne by a dazzling charlatan, who had made a great sensation in London for a year or so, and had fled the country on the charge of a double murder within his own house—that of his mistress and his

rival. I said nothing of this to Mr. J——, to whom reluctantly I resigned the miniature.

We had found no difficulty in opening the first drawer within the iron safe; we found great difficulty in opening the second: it was not locked, but it resisted all efforts till we inserted in the chinks the edge of a chisel. When we had thus drawn it forth, we found a very singular apparatus in the nicest order. Upon a small thin book, or rather tablet, was placed a saucer of crystal; this saucer was filled with a clear liquid—on that liquid floated a kind of compass, with a needle shifting rapidly round, but instead of the usual points of a compass were seven strange characters, not very unlike those used by astrologers to denote the planets. A very peculiar, but not strong nor displeasing odour came from this drawer, which was lined with a wood that we afterwards discovered to be hazel. Whatever the cause of this odour, it produced a material effect on the nerves. We all felt it, even the two workmen who were in the room—a creeping tingling sensation from the tips of the fingers to the roots of the hair. Impatient to examine the tablet, I removed the saucer. As I did so the needle of the compass went round and round with exceeding swiftness, and I felt a shock that ran through my whole frame, so that I dropped the saucer on the floor. The liquid was spilt—the saucer was broken—the compass rolled to the end of the room—and at that instant the walls shook to and fro, as if a giant had swayed and rocked them.

The two workmen were so frightened that they ran up the ladder by which we had descended from the trap-door; but seeing that nothing more happened, they were easily induced to return.

Meanwhile I had opened the tablet: it was bound in a plain red leather, with a silver clasp; it contained but one sheet of thick vellum, and on that sheet were inscribed, within a double pentacle, words in old monkish Latin, which are literally to be translated thus: "On all that it can reach within these walls—sentient or inanimate, living or dead—as moves the needle, so work my will! Accursed be the house, and restless be the dwellers therein."

We found no more. Mr. J—— burnt the tablet and its anathema. He razed to the foundations the part of the building containing

the secret room with the chamber over it. He had then the courage to inhabit the house himself for a month, and a quieter, better-conditioned house could not be found in all London. Subsequently he let it to advantage, and his tenant has made no complaints. But my story is not yet done. A few days after Mr. J—— had removed into the house, I paid him a visit. We were standing by the open window and conversing. A van containing some articles of furniture which he was moving from his former house was at the door. I had just urged on him my theory that all those phenomena regarded as supermundane had emanated from a human brain; adducing the charm, or rather curse, we had found and destroyed in support of my philosophy. Mr. J—— was observing in reply, "That even if mesmerism, or whatever analogous power it might be called, could really thus work in the absence of the operator, and produce effects so extraordinary, still could those effects continue when the operator himself was dead? and if the spell had been wrought, and, indeed, the room walled up, more than seventy years ago, the probability was, that the operator had long since departed this life"; Mr. J——, I say, was thus answering, when I caught hold of his arm and pointed to the street below.

A well-dressed man had crossed from the opposite side, and was accosting the carrier in charge of the van. His face, as he stood, was exactly fronting our window. It was the face of the miniature we had discovered; it was the face of the portrait of the noble three centuries ago.

"Good Heavens!" cried Mr. J——, "that is the face of de V——, and scarcely a day older than when I saw it in the Rajah's court in my youth!"

Seized by the same thought, we both hastened downstairs. I was first in the street; but the man had already gone. I caught sight of him, however, not many yards in advance, and in another moment I was by his side.

I had resolved to speak to him, but when I looked into his face I felt as if it were impossible to do so. That eye—the eye of the serpent—fixed and held me spellbound. And withal, about the man's whole person there was a dignity, an air of pride and station and superiority, that would have made anyone, habituated

to the usages of the world, hesitate long before venturing upon a liberty or impertinence. And what could I say? what was it I would ask? Thus ashamed of my first impulse, I fell a few paces back, still, however, following the stranger, undecided what else to do. Meanwhile he turned the corner of the street; a plain carriage was in waiting, with a servant out of livery, dressed like a *valet-de-place*, at the carriage door. In another moment he had stepped into the carriage, and it drove off. I returned to the house. Mr. J—— was still at the street door. He had asked the carrier what the stranger had said to him.

"Merely asked whom that house now belonged to."

The same evening I happened to go with a friend to a place in town called the Cosmopolitan Club, a place open to men of all countries, all opinions, all degrees. One orders one's coffee, smokes one's cigar. One is always sure to meet agreeable, sometimes remarkable persons.

I had not been two minutes in the room before I beheld at a table, conversing with an acquaintance of mine, whom I will designate by the initial G——, the man—the Original of the Miniature. He was now without his hat, and the likeness was yet more startling, only I observed that while he was conversing there was less severity in the countenance; there was even a smile, though a very quiet and very cold one. The dignity of mien I had acknowledged in the street was also more striking; a dignity akin to that which invests some prince of the East—conveying the idea of supreme indifference and habitual, indisputable, indolent, but resistless power.

G—— soon after left the stranger, who then took up a scientific journal, which seemed to absorb his attention.

I drew G—— aside. "Who and what is that gentleman?"

"That? Oh, a very remarkable man indeed. I met him last year amidst the caves of Petra—the scriptural Edom. He is the best Oriental scholar I know. We joined company, had an adventure with robbers, in which he showed a coolness that saved our lives; afterwards he invited me to spend a day with him in a house he had bought at Damascus—a house buried amongst almond blossoms and roses—the most beautiful thing I He had lived there

for some years, quite as an Oriental, in grand style. I half suspect he is a renegade, immensely rich, very odd; by the by, a great mesmeriser. I have seen him with my own eyes produce an effect on inanimate things. If you take a letter from your pocket and throw it to the other end of the room, he will order it to come to his feet, and you will see the letter wriggle itself along the floor till it has obeyed his command. 'Pon my honour, 'tis true: I have seen him affect even the weather, disperse or collect clouds, by means of a glass tube or wand. But he does not like talking of these matters to strangers. He has only just arrived in England; says he has not been for a great many years; let me introduce him to you."

"Certainly! He is English, then? What is his name?"

"Oh!—a very homely one—Richards."

"And what is his birth—his family?"

"How do I know? What does it signify!—no doubt some parvenu, but rich—so infernally rich!"

G—— drew me up to the stranger, and the introduction was effected. The manners of Mr. Richards were not those of an adventurous traveller. Travellers are in general constitutionally gifted with high animal spirits: they are talkative, eager, imperious. Mr. Richards was calm and subdued in tone, with manners which were made distant by the loftiness of punctilious courtesy—the manners of a former age. I observed that the English he spoke was not exactly of our day. I should even have said that the accent was slightly foreign. But then Mr. Richards remarked that he had been little in the habit for many years of speaking in his native tongue. The conversation fell upon the changes in the aspect of London since he had last visited our metropolis. G—— then glanced off to the moral changes—literary, social, political—the great men who were removed from the stage within the last twenty years—the new great men who were coming on. In all this Mr. Richards evinced no interest. He had evidently read none of our living authors, and seemed scarcely acquainted by name with our younger statesmen. Once and only once he laughed; it was when G—— asked him whether he had any thought of getting into Parliament. And the laugh was

inward—sarcastic—sinister—a sneer raised into a laugh. After a few minutes G—— left us to talk to some other acquaintances who had just lounged into the room, and I then said quietly:

"I have seen a miniature of you, Mr. Richards, in the house you once inhabited, and perhaps built, if not wholly, at least in part, in —— Street. You passed by that house this morning."

Not till I had finished did I raise my eyes to his, and then his fixed my gaze so steadfastly that I could not withdraw it—those fascinating serpent eyes. But involuntarily, and as if the words that translated my thought were dragged from me, I added in a low whisper, "I have been a student in the mysteries of life and nature; of those mysteries I have known the occult professors. I have the right to speak to you thus." And I uttered a certain password.

"Well," said he, dryly, "I concede the right—what would you ask?"

"To what extent human will in certain temperaments can extend?"

"To what extent can thought extend? Think, and before you draw breath you are in China."

"True. But my thought has no power in China."

"Give it expression, and it may have: you may write down a thought which, sooner or later, may alter the whole condition of China. What is a law but a thought? Therefore thought is infinite—therefore thought has power; not in proportion to its value —a bad thought may make a bad law as potent as a good thought can make a good one."

"Yes; what you say confirms my own theory. Through invisible currents one human brain may transmit its ideas to other human brains with the same rapidity as a thought promulgated by visible means. And as thought is imperishable—as it leaves its stamp behind it in the natural world even when the thinker has passed out of this world—so the thought of the living may have power to rouse up and revive the thoughts of the dead—such as those thoughts *were in life*—though the thought of the living cannot reach the thoughts which the dead *now* may entertain. Is it not so?"

"I decline to answer, if, in my judgment, thought has the limit you would fix to it; but proceed. You have a special question you wish to put."

"Intense malignity in an intense will, engendered in a peculiar temperament, and aided by natural means within the reach of science, may produce effects like those ascribed of old to evil magic. It might thus haunt the walls of a human habitation with spectral revivals of all guilty thoughts and guilty deeds once conceived and done within those walls; all, in short, with which the evil will claims *rapport* and affinity—imperfect, incoherent, fragmentary snatches at the old dramas acted therein years ago. Thoughts thus crossing each other haphazard, as in the nightmare of a vision, growing up into phantom sights and sounds, and all serving to create horror, not because those sights and sounds are really visitations from a world without, but that they are ghastly monstrous renewals of what have been in this world itself, set into malignant play by a malignant mortal.

"And it is through the material agency of that human brain that these things would acquire even a human power—would strike as with the shock of electricity, and might kill, if the thought of the person assailed did not rise superior to the dignity of the original assailer—might kill the most powerful animal if unnerved by fear, but not injure the feeblest man, if, while his flesh crept, his mind stood out fearless. Thus, when in old stories we read of a magician rent to pieces by the fiends he had evoked —or still more, in Eastern legends, that one magician succeeds by arts in destroying another—there may be so far truth, that a material being has clothed, from its own evil propensities, certain elements and fluids, usually quiescent or harmless, with awful shape and terrific force—just as the lightning that had lain hidden and innocent in the cloud becomes by natural law suddenly visible, takes a distinct shape to the eye, and can strike destruction on the object to which it is attracted."

"You are not without glimpses of a very mighty secret," said Mr. Richards, composedly. "According to your view, could a mortal obtain the power you speak of, he would necessarily be a malignant and evil being."

"If the power were exercised as I have said, most malignant and most evil—though I believe in the ancient traditions that he could not injure the good. His will could only injure those with whom it has established an affinity, or over whom it forces unresisted sway. I will now imagine an example that may be within the laws of nature, yet seem wild as the fables of a bewildered monk.

"You will remember that Albertus Magnus, after describing minutely the process by which spirits may be invoked and commanded, adds emphatically that the process will instruct and avail only to the few—that a *man must be born a magician*!—that is, born with a peculiar physical temperament, as a man is born a poet. Rarely are men in whose constitution lurks this occult power of the highest order of intellect;—usually in the intellect there is some twist, perversity, or disease. But, on the other hand, they must possess, to an astonishing degree, the faculty to concentrate thought on a single object—the energic faculty that we call *will*. Therefore, though their intellect be not sound, it is exceedingly forcible for the attainment of what it desires. I will imagine such a person, pre-eminently gifted with this constitution and its concomitant forces. I will place him in the loftier grades of society. I will suppose his desires emphatically those of the sensualist—he has, therefore, a strong love of life. He is an absolute egotist—his will is concentrated in himself—he has fierce passions—he knows no enduring, no holy affections, but he can covet eagerly what for the moment he desires—he can hate implacably what opposes itself to his objects—he can commit fearful crimes, yet feel small remorse—he resorts rather to curses upon others, than to penitence for his misdeeds. Circumstances, to which his constitution guides him, lead him to a rare knowledge of the natural secrets which may serve his egotism. He is a close observer where his passions encourage observation, he is a minute calculator, not from love of truth, but where love of self sharpens his faculties—therefore he can be a man of science.

"I suppose such a being, having by experience learned the power of his arts over others, trying what may be the power of will over his own frame, and studying all that in natural philosophy

may increase that power. He loves life, he dreads death; he *wills to live on*. He cannot restore himself to youth, he cannot entirely stay the progress of death, he cannot make himself immortal in the flesh and blood; but he may arrest for a time so prolonged as to appear incredible, if I said it—that hardening of the parts which constitutes old age. A year may age him no more than an hour ages another. His intense will, scientifically trained into system, operates, in short, over the wear and tear of his own frame. He lives on. That he may not seem a portent and a miracle, he *dies* from time to time, seemingly, to certain persons. Having schemed the transfer of a wealth that suffices to his wants, he disappears from one corner of the world, and contrives that his obsequies shall be celebrated. He reappears at another corner of the world, where he resides undetected, and does not revisit the scenes of his former career till all who could remember his features are no more. He would be profoundly miserable if he had affections—he has none but for himself. No good man would accept his longevity, and to no men, good or bad, would he or could he communicate its true secret. Such a man might exist; such a man as I have described I see now before me!—Duke of ——, in the court of ——, dividing time between lust and brawl, alchemists and wizards;—again, in the last century, charlatan and criminal, with name less noble, domiciled in the house at which you gazed to-day, and flying from the law you had outraged, none knew whither; traveller once more revisiting London, with the same earthly passions which filled your heart when races now no more walked through yonder streets; outlaw from the school of all the nobler and diviner mystics; execrable Image of Life in Death and Death in Life, I warn you back from the cities and homes of healthful men; back to the ruins of departed empires; back to the deserts of nature unredeemed!"

There answered me a whisper so musical, so potently musical, that it seemed to enter into my whole being, and subdue me despite myself. Thus it said:

"I have sought one like you for the last hundred years. Now I have found you, we part not till I know what I desire. The vision that sees through the Past, and cleaves through the veil of the

Future, is in you at this hour; never before, never to come again. The vision of no puling fantastic girl, of no sick-bed somnambule, but of a strong man, with a vigorous brain. Soar and look forth!"

As he spoke I felt as if I rose out of myself upon eagle wings. All the weight seemed gone from air—roofless the room, roofless the dome of space. I was not in the body—where I knew not—but aloft over time, over earth.

Again I heard the melodious whisper,—"You say right. I have mastered great secrets by the power of Will; true, by Will and by Science I can retard the process of years: but death comes not by age alone. Can I frustrate the accidents which bring death upon the young?"

"No; every accident is a providence. Before a providence snaps every human will."

"Shall I die at last, ages and ages hence, by the slow, though inevitable, growth of time, or by the cause that I call accident?"

"By a cause you call accident."

"Is not the end still remote?" asked the whisper with a slight tremor.

"Regarded as my life regards time, it is still remote."

"And shall I, before then, mix with the world of men as I did ere I learned these secrets, resume eager interest in their strife and their trouble—battle with ambition, and use the power of the sage to win the power that belongs to kings?"

"You will yet play a part on the earth that will fill earth with commotion and amaze. For wondrous designs have you, a wonder yourself, been permitted to live on through the centuries. All the secrets you have stored will then have their uses—all that now makes you a stranger amidst the generations will contribute then to make you their lord. As the trees and the straws are drawn into a whirlpool—as they spin round, are sucked to the deep, and again tossed aloft by the eddies, so shall races and thrones be plucked into the charm of your vortex. Awful Destroyer—but in destroying, made, against your own will, a Constructor!"

"And that date, too, is far off?"

"Far off; when it comes, think your end in this world is at hand!"

"How and what is the end? Look east, west, south, and north."

"In the north, where you never yet trod, towards the point whence your instincts have warned you, there a spectre will seize you. 'Tis Death! I see a ship—it is haunted—'tis chased—it sails on. Baffled navies sail after that ship. It enters the regions of ice. It passes a sky red with meteors. Two moons stand on high, over ice-reefs. I see the ship locked between white defiles—they are ice-rocks. I see the dead strew the decks—stark and livid, green mould on their limbs. All are dead, but one man—it is you! But years, though so slowly they come, have then scathed you. There is the coming of age on your brow, and the will is relaxed in the cells of the brain. Still that will, though enfeebled, exceeds all that man knew before you; through the will you live on, gnawed with famine; and nature no longer obeys you in that death-spreading region; the sky is a sky of iron, and the air has iron clamps, and the ice-rocks wedge in the ship. Hark how it cracks and groans. Ice will imbed it as amber imbeds a straw. And a man has gone forth, living yet, from the ship and its dead; and he has clambered up the spikes of an iceberg, and the two moons gaze down on his form. That man is yourself; and terror is on you—terror; and terror has swallowed your will. And I see swarming up the steep ice-rock, grey grisly things. The bears of the north have scented their quarry—they come near you and nearer, shambling and rolling their bulk. And in that day every moment shall seem to you longer than the centuries through which you have passed. And heed this—after life, moments continued make the bliss or the hell of eternity."

"Hush," said the whisper; "but the day, you assure me, is far off—very far! I go back to the almond and rose of Damascus!—sleep!"

The room swam before my eyes. I became insensible. When I recovered, I found G—— holding my hand and smiling. He said, "You who have always declared yourself proof against mesmerism have succumbed at last to my friend Richards."

"Where is Mr. Richards?"

"Gone, when you passed into a trance—saying quietly to me, 'Your friend will not wake for an hour.'"

I asked, as collectedly as I could, where Mr. Richards lodged.

"At the Trafalgar Hotel."

"Give me your arm," said I to G——; "let us call on him; I have something to say."

When we arrived at the hotel, we were told that Mr. Richards had returned twenty minutes before, paid his bill, left directions with his servant (a Greek) to pack his effects and proceed to Malta by the steamer that should leave Southampton the next day. Mr. Richards had merely said of his own movements that he had visits to pay in the neighbourhood of London, and it was uncertain whether he should be able to reach Southampton in time for that steamer; if not, he should follow in the next one.

The waiter asked me my name. On my informing him, he gave me a note that Mr. Richards had left for me, in case I called.

The note was as follows: "I wished you to utter what was in your mind. You obeyed. I have therefore established power over you. For three months from this day you can communicate to no living man what has passed between us—you cannot even show this note to the friend by your side. During three months, silence complete as to me and mine. Do you doubt my power to lay on you this command?—try to disobey me. At the end of the third month, the spell is raised. For the rest I spare you. I shall visit your grave a year and a day after it has received you."

So ends this strange story, which I ask no one to believe. I write it down exactly three months after I received the above note. I could not write it before, nor could I show to G——, in spite of his urgent request, the note which I read under the gas-lamp by his side.

Ray Bradbury

HOMECOMING

"Here they come," said Cecy, lying there flat in her bed.

"Where are they?" cried Timothy from the doorway.

"Some of them are over Europe, some over Asia, some of them over the Islands, some over South America!" said Cecy, her eyes closed, the lashes long, brown, and quivering.

Timothy came forward upon the bare plankings of the upstairs room. "Who are they?"

"Uncle Einar and Uncle Fry, and there's Cousin William, and I see Frulda and Helgar and Aunt Morgiana and Cousin Vivian, and I see Uncle Johann! They're all coming fast!"

"Are they up in the sky?" cried Timothy, his little grey eyes flashing. Standing by the bed, he looked no more than his fourteen years. The wind blew outside, the house was dark and lit only by starlight.

"They're coming through the air and travelling along the ground, in many forms," said Cecy, in her sleeping. She did not move on the bed; she thought inward on herself and told what she saw. "I see a wolf-like thing coming over a dark river—at the shallows—just above a waterfall, the starlight shining up his pelt. I see a brown oak leaf blowing far up in the sky. I see a small bat flying. I see many other things, running through the forest trees and slipping through the highest branches; and they're *all* coming this way!"

"Will they be here by to-morrow night?" Timothy clutched the bed-clothes. The spider on his lapel swung like a black pendu-

lum, excitedly dancing. He leaned over his sister. "Will they all be here in time for the Homecoming?"

"Yes, yes, Timothy, yes," sighed Cecy. She stiffened. "Ask no more of me. Go away now. Let me travel in the places I like best."

"Thanks, Cecy," he said. Out in the hall, he ran to his room. He hurriedly made his bed. He had just awakened a few minutes ago, at sunset, and as the first stars had risen, he had gone to let his excitement about the party run with Cecy. Now she slept so quietly there was not a sound. The spider hung on a silvery lasso about Timothy's slender neck as he washed his face. "Just think, Spid, tomorrow night is Allhallows Eve!"

He lifted his face and looked into the mirror. His was the only mirror allowed in the house. It was his mother's concession to his illness. Oh, if only he were not so afflicted! He opened his mouth, surveyed the poor, inadequate teeth nature had given him. No more than so many corn kernels—round, soft and pale in his jaws. Some of the high spirit died in him.

It was now totally dark and he lit a candle to see by. He felt exhausted. This past week the whole family had lived in the fashion of the old country. Sleeping by day, rousing at sunset to move about. There were blue hollows under his eyes. "Spid, I'm no good," he said, quietly, to the little creature. "I can't even get used to sleeping days like the others."

He took up the candle-holder. Oh, to have strong teeth, with incisors like steel spikes. Or strong hands, even, or a strong mind. Even to have the power to send one's mind out, free, as Cecy did. But, no, he was the imperfect one, the sick one. He was even—he shivered and drew the candle flame closer—afraid of the dark. His brothers snorted at him. Bion and Leonard and Sam. They laughed at him because he slept in a bed. With Cecy it was different; her bed was part of her comfort for the composure necessary to send her mind abroad to hunt. But Timothy, did he sleep in the wonderful polished boxes like the others? He did not! Mother let him have his own bed, his own room, his own mirror. No wonder the family skirted him like a holy man's crucifix. If only the wings would sprout from his shoulder blades. He

bared his back, stared at it. And stared again. No chance. Never.

Downstairs were exciting and mysterious sounds, the slithering black crape going up in all the halls and on the ceilings and doors. The sputter of burning black tapers in the banistered stair well. Mother's voice, high and firm. Father's voice, echoing from the damp cellar. Bion walking from outside the old country house lugging vast two-gallon jugs.

"I've just got to go to the party, Spid," said Timothy. The spider whirled at the end of its silk, and Timothy felt alone. He would polish cases, fetch toadstools and spiders, hang crape, but when the party started he'd be ignored. The less seen or said of the imperfect son the better.

All through the house below, Laura ran.

"The Homecoming!" she shouted gaily. "The Homecoming!" Her footsteps everywhere at once.

Timothy passed Cecy's room again, and she was sleeping quietly. Once a month she went below-stairs. Always she stayed in bed. Lovely Cecy. He felt like asking her, "Where are you now, Cecy? And *in* who? And what's happening? Are you beyond the hills? And what goes on there?" But he went on to Ellen's room instead.

Ellen sat at her desk, sorting out many kinds of blonde, red and black hair and little scimitars of fingernail gathered from her manicurist job at the Mellin Village beauty parlour fifteen miles over. A sturdy mahogany case lay in one corner with her name on it.

"Go away," she said, not even looking at him. "I can't work with you gawking."

"Allhallows Eve, Ellen; just think!" he said, trying to be friendly.

"Hunh!" She put some fingernail clippings in a small white sack, labelled them. "What can it mean to you? What do you know of it? It'll scare the hell out of you. Go back to bed."

His cheeks burned. "I'm needed to polish and work and help serve."

"If you don't go, you'll find a dozen raw oysters in your bed to-morrow," said Ellen, matter-of-factly. "Good-bye, Timothy."

In his anger, rushing downstairs, he bumped into Laura.

"Watch where you're going!" she shrieked from clenched teeth.

She swept away. He ran to the open cellar door, smelled the channel of moist earthy air rising from below. "Father?"

"It's about time," Father shouted up the steps. "Hurry down, or they'll be here before we're ready!"

Timothy hesitated only long enough to hear the million other sounds in the house. Brothers came and went like trains in a station, talking and arguing. If you stood in one spot long enough the entire household passed with their pale hands full of things. Leonard with his little black medical case, Samuel with his large, dusty ebon-bound book under his arm, bearing more black crape, and Bion excursioning to the car outside and bringing in many more gallons of liquid.

Father stopped polishing to give Timothy a rag and a scowl. He thumped the huge mahogany box. "Come on, shine this up, so we can start on another. Sleep your life away."

While waxing the surface, Timothy looked inside.

"Uncle Einar's a big man, isn't he, Papa?"

"Unh."

"How big is he?"

"The size of the box'll tell you."

"I was only asking. Seven feet tall?"

"You talk a lot."

About nine o'clock Timothy went out into the October weather. For two hours in the now-warm, now-cold wind he walked the meadows collecting toadstools and spiders. His heart began to beat with anticipation again. How many relatives had Mother said would come? Seventy? One hundred? He passed a farmhouse. If only you knew what was happening at our house, he said to the glowing windows. He climbed a hill and looked at the town, miles away, settling into sleep, the town-hall clock high, round and white in the distance. The town did

not know, either. He brought home many jars of toadstools and spiders.

In the little chapel below-stairs a brief ceremony was celebrated. It was like all the other rituals over the years, with Father chanting the dark lines, Mother's beautiful white ivory hands moving in the reverse blessings, and all the children gathered except Cecy, who lay upstairs in bed. But Cecy was present. You saw her peering, now from Bion's eyes, now Samuel's, now Mother's, and you felt a movement and now she was in you, fleetingly and gone.

Timothy prayed to the Dark One with a tightened stomach. "Please, please, help me grow up, help me be like my sisters and brothers. Don't let me be different. If only I could put the hair in the plastic images as Ellen does, or make people fall in love with me as Laura does with people, or read strange books as Sam does, or work in a respected job like Leonard and Bion do. Or even raise a family one day, as Mother and Father have done. . . ."

At midnight a storm hammered the house. Lightning struck outside in amazing, snow-white bolts. There was a sound of an approaching, probing, sucking tornado, funnelling and nuzzling the moist night earth. Then the front door, blasted half off its hinges, hung stiff and discarded, and in trooped Grandmama and Grandpapa, all the way from the old country!

From then on people arrived each hour. There was a flutter at the side window, a rap on the front porch, a knock at the back. There were fey noises from the cellar; autumn wind piped down the chimney throat, chanting. Mother filled the large crystal punch bowl with a scarlet fluid poured from the jugs Bion had carried home. Father swept from room to room lighting more tapers. Laura and Ellen hammered up more wolfsbane. And Timothy stood amidst this wild excitement, no expression to his face, his hands trembling at his sides, gazing now here, now there. Banging of doors, laughter, the sound of liquid pouring, darkness, sound of wind, the webbed thunder of wings, the padding of feet, the welcoming bursts of talk at the entrances, the transparent rattlings of casements, the shadows passing, coming, going, wavering.

"Well, well, and *this* must be Timothy!"

"What?"

A chilly hand took his hand. A long hairy face leaned down over him. "A good lad, a fine lad," said the stranger.

"Timothy," said his mother. "This is Uncle Jason."

"Hello, Uncle Jason."

"And over here——" Mother drifted Uncle Jason away. Uncle Jason peered back at Timothy over his caped shoulder, and winked.

Timothy stood alone.

From off a thousand miles in the candled darkness, he heard a high fluting voice; that was Ellen. "And my brothers, they *are* clever. Can you guess their occupations, Aunt Morgiana?"

"I have no idea."

"They operate the undertaking establishment in town."

"What!" A gasp.

"Yes!" Shrill laughter. "Isn't that priceless!"

Timothy stood very still.

A pause in the laughter. "They bring home sustenance for Mama, Papa and all of us," said Laura. "Except, of course, Timothy. . . ."

An uneasy silence. Uncle Jason's voice demanded, "Well? Come now. What about Timothy?"

"Oh, Laura, your tongue," said Mother.

Laura went on with it. Timothy shut his eyes. "Timothy doesn't—well—doesn't *like* blood. He's delicate."

"He'll learn," said Mother. "He'll learn," she said very firmly. "He's my son, and he'll learn. He's only fourteen."

"But I was raised on the stuff," said Uncle Jason, his voice passing from one room on into another. The wind played the trees outside like harps. A little rain spatted on the windows—"raised on the stuff," passing away into faintness.

Timothy bit his lips and opened his eyes.

"Well, it was all my fault." Mother was showing them into the kitchen now. "I tried forcing him. You can't force children, you only make them sick, and then they never get a taste for things. Look at Bion, now, he was thirteen before he . . ."

"I understand," murmured Uncle Jason. "Timothy will come around."

"I'm sure he will," said Mother, defiantly.

Candle flames quivered as shadows crossed and recrossed the dozen musty rooms. Timothy was cold. He smelled the hot tallow in his nostrils and instinctively he grabbed at a candle and walked with it around and about the house, pretending to straighten the crape.

"Timothy," someone whispered behind a patterned wall, hissing and sizzling and sighing the words, *"Timothy is afraid of the dark."*

Leonard's voice. Hateful Leonard!

"I like the candle, that's all," said Timothy in a reproachful whisper.

More lightning, more thunder. Cascades of roaring laughter. Bangings and clickings and shouts and rustles of clothing. Clammy fog swept through the front door. Out of the fog, settling his wings, stalked a tall man.

"Uncle Einar!"

Timothy propelled himself on his thin legs, straight through the fog, under the green webbing shadows. He threw himself across Einar's arms. Einar lifted him.

"You've wings, Timothy!" He tossed the boy light as thistles. "Wings, Timothy: fly!" Faces wheeled under. Darkness rotated. The house blew away. Timothy felt breezelike. He flapped his arms. Einar's fingers caught and threw him once more to the ceiling. The ceiling rushed down like a charred wall. "Fly, Timothy!" shouted Einar, loud and deep. "Fly with wings! Wings!"

He felt an exquisite ecstasy in his shoulder blades, as if roots grew, burst to explode and blossom into new, moist membrane. He babbled wild stuff; again Einar hurled him high.

The autumn wind broke in a tide on the house, rain crashed down, shaking the beams, causing chandeliers to tilt their enraged candle lights. And the one hundred relatives peered out from every black, enchanted room, circling inward, all shapes

and sizes, to where Einar balanced the child like a baton in the roaring spaces.

"Enough!" shouted Einar, at last.

Timothy, deposited on the floor timbers, exaltedly, exhaustedly fell against Uncle Einar, sobbing happily. "Uncle, Uncle, Uncle!"

"Was it good, flying? Eh, Timothy?" said Uncle Einar, bending down, patting Timothy's head. "Good, good."

It was coming toward dawn. Most had arrived and were ready to bed down for the daylight, sleep motionlessly with no sound until the following sunset, when they would shoot out of their mahogany boxes for the revelry.

Uncle Einar, followed by dozens of others, moved toward the cellar. Mother directed them downward to the crowded row on row of highly polished boxes. Einar, his wings like sea-green tarpaulins tented behind him, moved with a curious whistling down the passageway; where his wings touched they made a sound of drumheads gently beaten.

Upstairs, Timothy lay wearily thinking, trying to like the darkness. There was so much you could do in darkness that people couldn't criticize you for, because they never saw you. He *did* like the night, but it was a qualified liking: sometimes there was so much night he cried out in rebellion.

In the cellar, mahogany doors sealed downward, drawn in by pale hands. In corners, certain relatives circled three times to lie, heads on paws, eyelids shut. The sun rose. There was a sleeping.

Sunset. The revel exploded like a bat nest struck full, shrieking out, fluttering, spreading. Box doors banged wide. Steps rushed up from cellar damp. More late guests, kicking on front and back portals, were admitted.

It rained, and sodden visitors laid their capes, their water-pelleted hats, their sprinkled veils upon Timothy who bore them to a closet. The rooms were crowd-packed. The laughter of one cousin, shot from one room, angled off the wall of another,

ricocheted, banked and returned to Timothy's ears from a fourth room, accurate and cynical.

A mouse ran across the floor.

"I know you, Niece Leibersrouter!" exclaimed Father.

The mouse spiralled three women's feet and vanished into a corner. Moments later a beautiful woman rose up out of nothing and stood in the corner, smiling her white smile at them all.

Something huddled against the flooded pane of the kitchen window. It sighed and wept and tapped continually, pressed against the glass, but Timothy could make nothing of it, he saw nothing. In imagination he was outside staring in. The rain was on him, the wind at him, and the taper-dotted darkness inside was inviting. Waltzes were being danced; tall thin figures pirouetted to outlandish music. Stars of light flickered off lifted bottles; small clods of earth crumbled from casques, and a spider fell and went silently legging over the floor.

Timothy shivered. He was inside the house again. Mother was calling him to run here, run there, help, serve, out to the kitchen now, fetch this, fetch that, bring the plates, heap the food—on and on—the party happened around him but not to him. The dozens of towering people pressed in against him, elbowed him, ignored him.

Finally, he turned and slipped away up the stairs.

He called softly. "Cecy. Where are you now, Cecy?"

She waited a long while before answering. "In the Imperial Valley," she murmured faintly. "Beside the Salton Sea, near the mud pots and the steam and the quiet. I'm inside a farmer's wife. I'm sitting on a front porch. I can make her move if I want, or do anything or think anything. The sun's going down."

"What's it like, Cecy?"

"You can hear the mud pots hissing," she said, slowly, as if speaking in a church. "Little grey heads of steam push up the mud like bald men rising in the thick syrup, head first, out in the broiling channels. The grey heads rip like rubber fabric, collapse with noises like wet lips moving. And feathery plumes

of steam escape from the ripped tissue. And there is a smell of deep sulphurous burning and old time. The dinosaur has been abroiling here ten million years."

"Is he done yet, Cecy?"

"Yes, he's done. Quite done." Cecy's calm sleeper's lips turned up. The languid words fell slowly from her shaping mouth. "Inside this woman's skull I am, looking out, watching the sea that does not move, and is so quiet it makes you afraid. I sit on the porch and wait for my husband to come home. Occasionally, a fish leaps, falls back, starlight edging it. The valley, the sea, the few cars, the wooden porch, my rocking chair, myself, the silence."

"What now, Cecy?"

"I'm getting up from my rocking chair," she said.

"Yes?"

"I'm walking off the porch, toward the mud pots. Planes fly over, like primordial birds. Then it is quiet, so quiet."

"How long will you stay inside her, Cecy?"

"Until I've listened and looked and felt enough: until I've changed her life some way. I'm walking off the porch and along the wooden boards. My feet knock on the planks, tiredly, slowly."

"And now?"

"Now the sulphur fumes are all around me. I stare at the bubbles as they break and smooth. A bird darts by my temple, shrieking. Suddenly I am in the bird and fly away! And as I fly, inside my new small glass-bead eyes I see a woman below me, on a boardwalk, take one two three steps forward into the mud pots. I hear a sound as of a boulder plunged into molten depths. I keep flying, circle back. I see a white hand, like a spider, wriggle and disappear into the grey lava pool. The lava seals over. Now I'm flying home, swift, swift, swift!"

Something clapped hard against the window. Timothy started.

Cecy flicked her eyes wide, bright, full, happy, exhilarated.

"Now I'm *home*!" she said.

After a pause, Timothy ventured, "The Homecoming's on. And everybody's here."

"Then why are you upstairs?" She took his hand. "Well, ask me." She smiled slyly. "Ask me what you came to ask."

"I didn't come to ask anything," he said. "Well, almost nothing. Well—oh, Cecy!" It came from him in one long rapid flow. "I want to do something at the party to make them look at me, something to make me good as them, something to make me belong, but there's nothing I can do and I feel funny and, well, I thought you might . . ."

"I might," she said, closing her eyes, smiling inwardly. "Stand up straight. Stand very still." He obeyed. "Now, shut your eyes and blank out your thought."

He stood very straight and thought of nothing, or at least thought of thinking nothing.

She sighed. "Shall we go downstairs now, Timothy?" Like a hand into a glove, Cecy was within him.

"Look, everybody!" Timothy held the glass of warm red liquid. He held up the glass so that the whole house turned to watch him. Aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters!

He drank it straight down.

He jerked a hand at his sister Laura. He held her gaze, whispering to her in a subtle voice that kept her silent, frozen. He felt tall as the trees as he walked to her. The party now slowed. It waited on all sides of him, watching. From all the room doors the faces peered. They were not laughing. Mother's face was astonished. Dad looked bewildered, but pleased and getting prouder every instant.

He nipped Laura, gently, over the neck vein. The candle flames swayed drunkenly. The wind climbed around on the roof outside. The relatives stared from all the doors. He popped toadstools into his mouth, swallowed, then beat his arms against his flanks and circled. "Look, Uncle Einar! I can fly, at last!" Beat went his hands. Up and down pumped his feet. The faces flashed past him.

At the top of the stairs, flapping, he heard his mother cry, "Stop, Timothy!" far below. "Hey!" shouted Timothy, and leaped off the top of the well, thrashing.

Halfway down, the wings he thought he owned dissolved. He screamed. Uncle Einar caught him.

Timothy flailed whitely in the receiving arms. A voice burst out of his lips, unbidden. "This is Cecy! This is Cecy! Come see me, all of you, upstairs, first room on the left!" Followed by a long trill of high laughter. Timothy tried to cut it off with his tongue.

Everybody was laughing. Einar set him down. Running through the crowding blackness as the relatives flowed upstairs toward Cecy's room to congratulate her, Timothy banged the front door open.

"Cecy, I hate you, I hate you!"

By the sycamore tree, in deep shadow, Timothy spewed out his dinner, sobbed bitterly and threshed in a pile of autumn leaves. Then he lay still. From his blouse pocket, from the protection of the matchbox he used for his retreat, the spider crawled forth. Spid walked along Timothy's arm. Spid explored up his neck to his ear and climbed in the ear to tickle it. Timothy shook his head. "Don't, Spid. Don't."

The feathery touch of a tentative feeler probing his eardrum set Timothy shivering. "Don't, Spid!" He sobbed somewhat less.

The spider travelled down his cheek, took a station under the boy's nose, looked up into the nostrils as if to seek the brain, and then clambered softly up over the rim of the nose to sit, to squat there peering at Timothy with green gem eyes until Timothy filled with ridiculous laughter. "Go away, Spid!"

Timothy sat up, rustling the leaves. The land was very bright with the moon. In the house he could hear the faint ribaldry as Mirror, Mirror was played. Celebrants shouted, dimly muffled, as they tried to identify those of themselves whose reflections did not, had not ever appeared in a glass.

"Timothy." Uncle Einar's wings spread and twitched and came in with a sound like kettledrums. Timothy felt himself plucked up like a thimble and set upon Einar's shoulder. "Don't feel badly, Nephew Timothy. Each to his own, each in his own way. How much better things are for you. How rich. The world's dead for us. We've seen so much of it, believe me. Life's

best to those who live the least of it. It's worth more per ounce, Timothy, remember that."

The rest of the black morning, from midnight on, Uncle Einar led him about the house, from room to room, weaving and singing. A horde of late arrivals set the entire hilarity off afresh. Great-great-great-great and a thousand more great-greats Grandmother was there, wrapped in Egyptian cerements. She said not a word, but lay straight as a burnt ironing board against the wall, her eye hollows cupping a distant, wise, silent glimmering. At the breakfast, at four in the morning, one-thousand-odd-greats Grandmama was stiffly seated at the head of the longest table.

The numerous young cousins caroused at the crystal punch bowl. Their shiny olive-pit eyes, their conical, devilish faces and curly bronze hair hovered over the drinking table, their hard-soft, half-girl half-boy bodies wrestling against each other as they got unpleasantly, sullenly drunk. The wind got higher, the stars burned with fiery intensity, the noises redoubled, the dances quickened, the drinking became more positive. To Timothy there were thousands of things to hear and watch. The many darknesses roiled, bubbled, the many faces passed and repassed. . . .

"Listen!"

The party held its breath. Far away the town clock struck its chimes, saying six o'clock. The party was ending. In time to the rhythm of the striking clock, their one hundred voices began to sing songs that were four hundred years old, songs Timothy could not know. Arms twined, circling slowly, they sang, and somewhere in the cold distance of morning the town clock finished out its chimes and quieted.

Timothy sang. He knew no words, no tune, yet the words and tune came round and high and good. And he gazed at the closed door at the top of the stairs.

"Thanks, Cecy," he whispered. "You're forgiven. Thanks."

Then he just relaxed and let the words move, with Cecy's voice, free from his lips.

Good-byes were said, there was a great rustling. Mother and Father stood at the door to shake hands and kiss each departing relative in turn. The sky beyond the open door coloured in the east. A cold wind entered. And Timothy felt himself seized and settled in one body after another, felt Cecy press him into Uncle Fry's head so he stared from the wrinkled leather face, then leaped in a flurry of leaves up over the house and awakening hills. . . .

Then, loping down a dirt path, he felt his red eyes burning, his fur pelt rimed with morning, as inside Cousin William he panted through a hollow and dissolved away. . . .

Like a pebble in Uncle Einar's mouth, Timothy flew in a webbed thunder, filling the sky. And then he was back, for all time, in his own body.

In the growing dawn, the last few were embracing and crying and thinking how the world was becoming less a place for them. There had been a time when they had met every year, but now decades passed with no reconciliation. "Don't forget," someone cried, "we meet in Salem in 1970!"

Salem. Timothy's numbed mind turned the words over. Salem, 1970. And there would be Uncle Fry and a thousand-times-great Grandmother in her withered cerements, and Mother and Father and Ellen and Laura and Cecy and all the rest. But would he be there? Could he be certain of staying alive until then?

With one last withering blast, away they all went, so many scarves, so many fluttery mammals, so many sere leaves, so many whining and clustering noises, so many midnights and insanities and dreams.

Mother shut the door. Laura picked up a broom. "No," said Mother. "We'll clean tonight. Now we need sleep." And the Family vanished down cellar and upstairs. And Timothy moved in the crape-littered hall, his head down. Passing a party mirror, he saw the pale mortality of his face all cold and trembling.

"Timothy," said Mother.

She came to touch her hand on his face. "Son," she said, "we love you. Remember that. We all love you. No matter how different you are, no matter if you leave us one day." She kissed

his cheek. "And if and when you die, your bones will lie undisturbed, we'll see to that. You'll lie at ease forever, and I'll come visit every Allhallows Eve and tuck you in the more secure."

The house was silent. Far away the wind went over a hill with its last cargo of dark bats, echoing, chittering.

Timothy walked up the steps, one by one, crying to himself all the way.

D. K. Broster

COUCHING AT THE DOOR

I

The first inkling which Augustine Marchant had of the matter was on one fine summer morning about three weeks after his visit to Prague, that is to say, in June, 1898. He was reclining, as his custom was when writing his poetry, on the very comfortable sofa in his library at Abbot's Medding, near the French windows, one of which was open to the garden. Pausing for inspiration—he was nearly at the end of his poem, *Salutation to All Unbeliefs*—he let his eyes wander round the beautifully appointed room, with its cloisonné and Satsuma, Buhl and first editions, and then allowed them to stray towards the sunlight outside. And so, between the edge of the costly Herat carpet and the sill of the open window, across the strip of polished oak flooring, he observed what he took to be a small piece of dark fluff blowing in the draught; and instantly made a note to speak to his housekeeper about the parlourmaid. There was slackness somewhere; and in Augustine Marchant's house no one was allowed to be slack but himself.

There had been a time when the poet would not for a moment have been received, as he was now, in country and even county society—those days, even before the advent of *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*, when he had lived in London, writing the plays and poems which had so startled and shocked all but the "decadent" and the "advanced", *Pomegranates of Sin, Queen Theodora and Queen Marozia, The Nights of the Tour de Nesle,*

Amor Cypriacus and the rest. But when, as the 'nineties began to wane, he inherited Abbot's Medding from a distant cousin and came to live there, being then at the height of an almost international reputation, Wiltshire society at first tolerated him for his kinship with the late Lord Medding, and then, placated by the excellence of his dinners and further mollified by the patent staidness of his private life, decided that, in his personal conduct at any rate, he must have turned over a new leaf. Perhaps indeed he had never been as bad as he was painted, and if his writings continued to be no less scandalously free and free-thinking than before, and needed to be just as rigidly kept out of the hands of daughters, well, no country gentleman in the neighbourhood was obliged to read them!

And indeed Augustine Marchant in his fifty-first year was too keenly alive to the value of the good opinion of county society to risk shocking it by any overt doings of his. He kept his licence for his pen. When he went abroad, as he did at least twice a year—but that was another matter altogether. The nose of Mrs. Grundy was not sharp enough to smell out his occupations in Warsaw or Berlin or Naples, her eyes long-sighted enough to discern what kind of society he frequented even so near home as Paris. At Abbot's Medding his reputation for being "wicked" was fast declining into just enough of a sensation to titillate a croquet party. He had charming manners, could be witty at moments (though he could not keep it up), still retained his hyacinthine locks (by means of hair restorers), wore his excellently cut velvet coats and flowing ties with just the right air —half poet, half man of the world—and really had, at Abbot's Medding, no dark secret to hide beyond the fact, sedulously concealed by him for five-and-twenty years, that he had never been christened Augustine. Between Augustus and Augustine, what a gulf! But he had crossed it, and his French poems (which had to be smuggled into his native land) were signed Augustin—Augustin Lemarchant.

Removing his gaze from the objectionable evidence of domestic carelessness upon the floor Mr. Marchant now fixed it medita-

tively upon the ruby-set end of the gold pencil which he was using. Rossell & Ward, his publishers, were about to bring out an édition de luxe of *Queen Theodora and Queen Marozia* with illustrations by a hitherto unknown young artist—if they were not too daring. It would be a sumptuous affair in a limited edition. And as he thought of this the remembrance of his recent stay in Prague returned to the poet. He smiled to himself, as a man smiles when he looks at a rare wine, and thought, "Yes, if these blunt-witted Pharisees round Abbot's Medding only knew!" It was a good thing that the upholders of British petty morality were seldom great travellers; a dispensation of . . . ahem, Providence!

Twiddling his gold pencil between plump fingers, Augustine Marchant returned to his ode, weighing one epithet against another. Except in summer he was no advocate of open windows, and even in summer he considered that to get the most out of that delicate and precious instrument, his brain, his feet must always be kept thoroughly warm; he had therefore cast over them, before settling into his semi-reclining position, a beautiful rose-coloured Indian *sari* of the purest and thickest silk, leaving the ends trailing on the floor. And he became aware, with surprise and annoyance, that the piece of brown fluff or whatever it was down there, travelling in the draught from the window, had reached the nearest end of the *sari* and was now, impelled by the same current, travelling up it.

The master of Abbot's Medding reached out for the silver handbell on the table by his side. There must be more breeze coming in than he had realized, and he might take cold, a catastrophe against which he guarded himself as against the plague. Then he saw that the upward progress of the dark blob—it was about the size of a farthing—could not by any possibility be assigned to any other agency than its own. It was *climbing* up—some horrible insect, plainly, some disgusting kind of almost legless and very hairy spider, round and vague in outline. The poet sat up and shook the *sari* violently. When he looked again the invader was gone. He had obviously shaken it on to the floor, and on the floor somewhere it must still be. The

idea perturbed him, and he decided to take his writing out to the summer-house, and give orders later that the library was to be thoroughly swept out.

Ah! it was good to be out of doors and in a pleasance so delightfully laid out, so exquisitely kept, as his! In the basin of the fountain the sea-nymphs of rosy-veined marble clustered round a Thetis as beautiful as Aphrodite herself; the lightest and featheriest of acacia-trees swayed near. And as the owner of all this went past over the weedless turf he repeated snatches of Verlaine to himself about "sveltes jets d'eau" and "sanglots d'extase."

Then, turning his head to look back at the fountain, he became aware of a little dark-brown object about the size of a halfpenny running towards him over the velvet-smooth sward. . . .

He believed afterwards that he must first have had a glimpse of the truth at that instant in the garden, or he would not have acted so instinctively as he did and so promptly. For a moment later he was standing at the edge of the basin of Thetis, his face blanched in the sunshine, his hand firmly clenched. Inside that closed hand something feather-soft pulsated. . . . Holding back as best he could the disgust and the something more which clutched at him, Augustine Marchant stooped and plunged his whole fist into the bubbling water, and let the stream of the fountain whirl away what he had picked up. Then with uncertain steps he went and sat down on the nearest seat and shut his eyes. After a while he took out his lawn handkerchief and carefully dried his hand with the intaglio ring, dried it and then looked curiously at the palm. "I did not know I had so much courage," he was thinking; "so much courage and good sense!" . . . It would doubtless drown very quickly.

Burrows, his butler, was coming over the lawn. "Mr. and Mrs. Morrison have arrived, sir."

"Ah, yes; I had forgotten for the moment." Augustine Marchant got up and walked towards the house and his guests, throwing back his shoulders and practising his famous enigmatic smile, for Mrs. Morrison was a woman worth impressing.

(But what had it been exactly? Why, just what it had looked —a tuft of fur blowing over the grass, a tuft of fur! Sheer

imagination that it had moved in his closed hand with a life of its own. . . . Then why had he shut his eyes as he stooped and made a grab at it? Thank God, thank God, it was nothing now but a drenched smear swirling round the nymphs of Thetis!)

"Ah, dear lady, you must forgive me! Unpardonable of me not to be in to receive you!" He was in the drawing-room now, fragrant with its banks of hothouse flowers, bending over the hand of the fashionably attired guest on the sofa, in her tight bodice and voluminous sleeves, with a flyaway hat perched at a rakish angle on her gold-brown hair.

"Your man told us that you were writing in the garden," said her goggle-eyed husband reverentially.

"*Cher maître*, it is we who ought not to be interrupting your rendezvous with the Muse," returned Mrs. Morrison in her sweet, high voice. "Terrible to bring you from such company into that of mere visitors!"

Running his hand through his carefully tended locks the *cher maître* replied, "Between a visit from the Muse and one from Beauty's self no true poet would hesitate!—Moreover, luncheon awaits us, and I trust it is a good one."

He liked faintly to shock fair admirers by admitting that he cared for the pleasures of the table; it was quite safe to do so, since none of them had sufficient acumen to see that it was true.

The luncheon was excellent, for Augustine kept an admirable cook. Afterwards he showed his guests over the library—yes, even though it had not received the sweeping which would not be necessary now—and round the garden; and in the summer-house was prevailed upon to read some of *Amor Cypriacus* aloud. And Mrs. Frances (nowadays Francesca) Morrison was thereafter able to recount to envious friends how the Poet himself had read her stanza after stanza from that most *daring* poem of his; and how poor Fred, fanning himself meanwhile with his straw hat—not from the torridity of the verse but because of the afternoon heat—said afterwards that he had not understood a single word. A good thing, perhaps . . .

When they had gone Augustine Marchant reflected rather cynically, "All that was just so much bunkum when I wrote it."

For ten years ago, in spite of those audacious, glowing verses, he was an ignorant neophyte. Of course, since then . . . He smiled, a private, sly, self-satisfied smile. It was certainly pleasant to know oneself no longer a fraud!

Returning to the summer-house to fetch his poems he saw what he took to be Mrs. Morrison's fur boa lying on the floor just by the basket chair which she had occupied. Odd of her not to have missed it on departure—a tribute to his verses perhaps. His housekeeper must send it after her by post. But just at that moment his head gardener approached, desiring some instructions, and when the matter was settled, and Augustine Marchant turned once more to enter the summer-house, he found that he had been mistaken about the dropped boa, for there was nothing on the floor.

Besides, he remembered now that Mrs. Morrison's boa had been a rope of grey feathers, not of dark fur. As he took up *Amor Cypriacus* he asked himself lazily what could have led him to imagine a woman's boa there at all, much less a fur one.

Suddenly he knew why. A lattice in the house of memory had opened, and he remained rigid, staring out at the jets of the fountain rising and falling in the afternoon sun. Yes; of that glamorous, wonderful, abominable night in Prague, the part he least wished to recall was connected—incidentally but undeniably —with a fur boa . . . a long boa of dark fur . . .

He had to go up to town next day to a dinner in his honour. There and then he decided to go up that same night, by a late train, a most unusual proceeding, and most disturbing to his valet, who knew that it was doubtful whether he could at such short notice procure him a first-class carriage to himself. However, Augustine Marchant went, and even, to the man's amazement, deliberately chose a compartment with another occupant when he might, after all, have had an empty one.

The dinner was brilliant; Augustine had never spoken better. Next day he went round to the little street not far from the British Museum where he found Lawrence Storey, his new illustrator, working feverishly at his drawings for *Queen Theodora and Queen Marozia,* and quite overwhelmed at the

honour of a personal visit. Augustine was very kind to him, and, while offering a few criticisms, highly praised his delineation of those two Messalinas of tenth-century Rome, their long supple hands, their heavy eyes, their full, almost repellent mouths. Storey had followed the same type for mother and daughter, but with a subtle difference.

"They were certainly two most evil women, especially the younger," he observed ingenuously. "But I suppose that, from an artistic point of view, that doesn't matter nowadays!"

Augustine, smoking one of his special cigarettes, made a delicate little gesture. "My dear fellow, Art has nothing whatever to do with what is called 'morality'; happily we know that at last! Show me how you thought of depicting the scene where Marozia orders the execution of her mother's papal paramour. Good, very good! Yes, the lines there, even the fall of that loose sleeve from the extended arm, express with clarity what I had in mind. You have great gifts!"

"I have tried to make her look wicked," said the young man, reddening with pleasure. "But," he added deprecatingly, "it is very hard for a ridiculously inexperienced person like myself to have the right artistic vision. For to you, Mr. Marchant, who have penetrated into such wonderful arcana of the forbidden, it would be foolish to pretend to be other than I am."

"How do you know that I have penetrated into any such arcana?" inquired the poet, half-shutting his eyes and looking (though not to the almost worshipping gaze of young Storey) like a great cat being stroked.

"Why, one has only to read you!"

"You must come down and stay with me soon," were Augustine Marchant's parting words. (He would give the boy a few days' good living, for which he would be none the worse; let him drink some decent wine.) "How soon do you think you will be able to finish the rough sketches for the rest, and the designs for the *culs de lampe*? A fortnight or three weeks? Good; I shall look to see you then. Good-bye, my dear fellow; I am very, very much pleased with what you have shown me!"

The worst of going up to London from the country was that

one was apt to catch a cold in town. When he got back Augustine Marchant was almost sure that this misfortune had befallen him, so he ordered a fire in his bedroom, despite the season, and consumed a *recherché* little supper in seclusion. And, as the cold turned out to have been imaginary, he was very comfortable, sitting there in his silken dressing-gown, toasting his toes and holding up a glass of golden Tokay to the flames. Really *Theodora and Marozia* would make as much sensation when it came out with these illustrations as when it first appeared!

All at once he set down his glass. Not far away on his left stood a big cheval mirror, like a woman's, in which a good portion of the bed behind him was reflected. And, in this mirror, he had just seen the valance of the bed move. There could be no draught to speak of in this warm room, he never allowed a cat in the house, and it was quite impossible that there should be a rat about. If after all some stray cat should have got in it must be ejected at once. Augustine hitched round in his chair to look at the actual bed-hanging.

Yes, the topaz-hued silk valance again swung very slightly outwards as though it were being pushed. Augustine bent forward to the bell-pull to summon his valet. Then the flask of Tokay rolled over on the table as he leapt from his chair instead. Something like a huge, dark caterpillar was emerging very slowly from under his bed, moving as a caterpillar moves, with undulations running over it. Where its head should have been was merely a tapering end smaller than the rest of it, but of like substance. It was a dark fur boa.

Augustine Marchant felt that he screamed, but he could not have done so, for his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. He merely stood staring, staring, all the blood gone from his heart. Still very slowly the thing continued to creep out from under the valance, waving that eyeless, tapering end to and fro, as though uncertain where to proceed. "I am going mad, mad, mad!" thought Augustine, and then, with a revulsion, "No, it can't be! It's a real snake of some kind!"

That could be dealt with. He snatched up the poker as the boa-thing, still swaying the head which was no head, kept pour-

ing steadily out from under the lifted yellow frill, until quite three feet were clear of the bed. Then he fell upon it furiously, with blow after blow.

But they had no effect on the furry, spineless thing; it merely gave under them and rippled up in another place. Augustine hit the bed, the floor; at last, really screaming, he threw down his weapon and fell upon the thick, hairy rope with both hands, crushing it together into a mass—there was little if any resistance in it—hurled it into the fire and, panting, kept it down with shovel and tongs. The flames licked up instantly and, with a roar, made short work of it, though there seemed to be some slight effort to escape, which was perhaps only the effect of the heat. A moment later there was a very strong smell of burnt hair, and that was all.

Augustine Marchant seized the fallen flask of Tokay and drained from its mouth what little was left in the bottom ere, staggering to the bed, he flung himself upon it and buried his face in the pillows, even heaping them over his head as if he could thus stifle the memory of what he had seen.

He kept his bed next morning; the supposed cold afforded a good pretext. Long before the maid came in to re-lay the fire he had crawled out to make sure that there were no traces left of . . . what he had burnt there. There were none. A nightmare could not have left a trace, he told himself. But well he knew that it was not a nightmare.

And now he could think of nothing but that room in Prague and the long fur boa of the woman. Some department of his mind (he supposed) must have projected that thing, scarcely noticed at the time, scarcely remembered, into the present and the here. It was terrible to think that one's mind possessed such dark, unknown powers. But not so terrible as if the . . . apparition . . . had been endowed with an entirely separate objective existence. In a day or two he would consult his doctor and ask him to give him a tonic.

But, expostulated an uncomfortably lucid part of his brain, you are trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

Is it not better to believe that the thing *had* an objective existence, for you have burnt it to nothing? Well and good! But if it is merely a projection from your own mind, what is to prevent it from reappearing, like the phœnix, from ashes?

There seemed no answer to that, save in an attempt to persuade himself that he had been feverish last night. Work was the best antidote. So Augustine Marchant rose, and was surprised and delighted to find the atmosphere of his study unusually soothing and inspiring, and that day, against all expectation, *Salutation to All Unbeliefs* was completed by some stanzas with which he was not too ill-pleased. Realising nevertheless that he should be glad of company that evening, he had earlier sent round a note to the local solicitor, a good fellow, to come and dine with him; played a game of billiards with the lawyer afterwards and retired to bed after some vintage port and a good stiff whisky and soda with scarcely a thought of the visitant of the previous night.

He woke at that hour when the thrushes in early summer punctually greet the new day—three o'clock. They were greeting it even vociferously, and Augustine Marchant was annoyed with their enthusiasm. His golden damask window-curtains kept out all but a glimmer of the new day, yet as, lying upon his back, the poet opened his eyes for a moment, his only half-awakened sense of vision reported something swinging to and fro in the dimness like a pendulum of rope. It was indistinct but seemed to be hanging from the tester of the bed. And, wide awake in an instant, with an unspeakable anguish of premonition tearing through him, he felt, next moment, a light thud on the coverlet about the level of his knees. Something had arrived on the bed . . .

And Augustine Marchant neither shrieked nor leapt from his bed; he could not. Yet, now that his eyes were grown used to the twilight of the room, he saw it clearly, the fur rope which he had burnt to extinction two nights ago, dark and shining as before, rippling with a gentle movement as it coiled itself neatly together in the place where it had struck the bed and subsided there in a symmetrical round, with only that tapering end a little

raised and, as it were, looking at him—only, eyeless and featureless, it could not look. One thought of disgusted relief, that it was not at any rate going to attack him, and Augustine Marchant fainted.

Yet his swoon must have merged into sleep, for he woke in a more or less ordinary fashion to find his man placing his early tea-tray beside him and enquiring when he should draw his bath. There was nothing on the bed.

"I shall change my bedroom," thought Augustine to himself, looking at the haggard, fallen-eyed man who faced him in the mirror as he shaved. "No, better still. I will go away for a change. Then I shall not have these . . . dreams. I'll go to old Edgar Fortescue for a few days; he begged me again not long ago to come any time."

So to the house of that old Mæcenas he went. He was much too great a man now to be in need of Sir Edgar's patronage. It was homage which he received there, both from host and guests. The stay did much to soothe his scarified nerves. Unfortunately the last day undid the good of all the foregoing ones.

Sir Edgar possessed a pretty young wife—his third—and, among other charms of his place in Somerset, an apple orchard underplanted with flowers. And in the cool of the evening Augustine walked there with his host and hostess almost as if he were the Almighty with the dwellers in Eden. Presently they sat down upon a rustic seat (but a very comfortable one) under the shade of the apple boughs, amid the incongruous but pleasant parterres.

"You have come at the wrong season for these apple-trees, Marchant," observed Sir Edgar after a while, taking out his cigar. "Blossom-time or apple-time—they are showy at either, in spite of the underplanting. What is attracting you on that tree—a tit? We have all kinds here, pretty, destructive little beggars!"

"I did not know that I was looking . . . it's nothing . . . thinking of something else," stammered the poet. Surely, surely he had been mistaken in thinking that he had seen a sinuous, dark furry thing undulating like a caterpillar down the stem of that particular apple-tree at a few yards' distance?

Talk went on, even his; there was safety in it. It was only the breeze which faintly rustled that bed of heliotrope behind the seat. Augustine wanted desperately to get up and leave the orchard, but neither Sir Edgar nor his wife seemed disposed to move, and so the poet remained at his end of the seat, his left hand playing nervously with a long bent of grass which had escaped the scythe.

All at once he felt a tickling sensation on the back of his hand, looked down and saw that featureless snout of fur protruding upwards from underneath the rustic bench and sweeping itself backwards and forwards against his hand with a movement which was almost caressing. He was on his feet in a flash.

"Do you mind if I go in?" he asked abruptly. "I'm not . . . feeling very well."

If the thing could follow him it was of no use to go away. He returned to Abbot's Medding looking so much the worse for his change of air that Burrows expressed a respectful hope that he was not indisposed. And almost the first thing that occurred, when Augustine sat down at his writing-table to attend to his correspondence, was the unwinding of itself from one of its curved legs of a soft, brown, oscillating serpent which slowly waved an end at him as if in welcome . . .

In welcome, yes, that was it! The creature, incredible though it was, the creature seemed glad to see him! Standing at the other end of the room, his hands pressed over his eyes—for what was the use of attempting to hurt or destroy it?—Augustine Marchant thought shudderingly that, like a witch's cat, a "familiar" would not, presumably, be ill disposed towards its master. Its master! Oh, God!

The hysteria which he had been trying to keep down began to mount uncontrollably when, removing his hands, Augustine glanced again towards his writing-table and saw that the boa had coiled itself in his chair and was sweeping its end to and fro over the back, somewhat in the way that a cat, purring meanwhile, rubs itself against furniture or a human leg in real or simulated affection.

"Oh, go, go away from there!" he suddenly screamed at it, advancing with outstretched hand. "In the devil's name, get out!"

To his utter amazement, he was obeyed. The rhythmic movements ceased, the fur snake poured itself down out of the chair and writhed towards the door. Venturing back to his writing-table after a moment Augustine saw it coiled on the threshold, the blind end turned toward him as usual, as though watching. And he began to laugh. What would happen if he rang and someone came; would the opening door scrape it aside . . . would it vanish? Had it, in short, an existence for anyone else but himself?

But he dared not make the experiment. He left the room by the French window, feeling that he could never enter the house again. And perhaps, had it not been for the horrible knowledge just acquired that it could follow him, he might easily have gone away for good from Abbot's Medding and all his treasures and comforts. But of what use would that be—and how should he account for so extraordinary an action? No; he must think and plan while he yet remained sane.

To what, then, could he have recourse? The black magic in which he had dabbled with such disastrous consequences might possibly help him. Left to himself he was but an amateur, but he had a number of books. . . . There was also that other realm whose boundaries sometimes marched side by side with magic—religion. But how could he pray to a Deity in whom he did not believe? Rather pray to the Evil which had sent this curse upon him to show him how to banish it. Yet since he had deliberately followed what religion stigmatised as sin, what even the world would label as lust and necromancy, supplication to the dark powers was not likely to deliver him from them. They must somehow be outwitted, circumvented.

He kept his *grimoires* and books of the kind in a locked bookcase in another room, not in his study; in that room he sat up till midnight. But the spells which he read were useless; moreover, he did not really believe in them. The irony of the situation was that, in a sense, he had only played at sorcery; it had but

lent a spice to sensuality. He wandered wretchedly about the room dreading at any moment to see his "familiar" wreathed round some object in it. At last he stopped at a small bookcase which held some old forgotten books of his mother's—Longfellow and Mrs. Hemans, *John Halifax, Gentleman*, and a good many volumes of sermons and mild essays. And when he looked at that blameless assembly a cloud seemed to pass over Augustine Marchant's vision, and he saw his mother, gentle and lace-capped, as years and years ago she used to sit, hearing his lessons, in an antimacassared chair. She had been everything to him then, the little boy whose soul was not smirched. He called silently to her now: "Mamma, Mamma, can't you help me? Can't you send this thing away?"

When the cloud had passed he found that he had stretched out his hand and removed a big book. Looking at it he saw that it was her Bible, with "Sarah Amelia Marchant" on the faded yellow flyleaf. Her spirit *was* going to help him! He turned over a page or two, and out of the largish print there sprang instantly at him: *Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field.* Augustine shuddered and almost put the Bible back, but the conviction that there was help there urged him to go on. He turned a few more pages of Genesis and his eyes were caught by this verse, which he had never seen before in his life.

"And if thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

What strange words! What could they possibly mean? Was there light for him in them? "Unto thee shall be his desire." That Thing, the loathsome semblance of affection which hung about it. . . . "Thou shalt rule over him." It *had* obeyed him, up to a point. . . . Was this Book, of all others, showing him the way to be free? But the meaning of the verse was so obscure! He had not, naturally, such a thing as a commentary in the house. Yet, when he came to think of it, he remembered that some pious and anonymous person, soon after the publication

of *Pomegranates of Sin,* had sent him a Bible in the Revised Version, with an inscription recommending him to read it. He had it somewhere, though he had always meant to get rid of it.

After twenty minutes' search through the sleeping house he found it in one of the spare bedrooms. But it gave him little enlightenment, for there was scant difference in the rendering, save that for, "lieth at the door," this version had, "coucheth," and that the margin held an alternative translation for the end of the verse: "And unto thee is its desire, but thou shouldest rule over it."

Nevertheless, Augustine Marchant stood after midnight in this silent, sheeted guest-chamber repeating, *"But thou shouldest rule over it."*

And all at once he thought of a way of escape.

II

It was going to be a marvellous experience, staying with Augustine Marchant. Sometimes Lawrence Storey hoped there would be no other guests at Abbot's Medding; at other times he hoped there would be. A *tête-à-tête* of four days with the great poet—could he sustain his share worthily? For Lawrence, despite the remarkable artistic gifts which were finding their first real flowering in these illustrations to Augustine's poem, was still unspoilt, still capable of wonder and admiration, still humble and almost naïf. It was still astonishing to him that he, an architect's assistant, should have been snatched away, as Ganymede by the eagle, from the lower world of elevations and drains to serve on Olympus. It was not, indeed, Augustine Marchant who had first discovered him, but it was Augustine Marchant who was going to make him famous.

The telegraph poles flitted past the second-class carriage window and more than one traveller glanced with a certain envy and admiration at the fair, good-looking young man who diffused such an impression of happiness and candour, and had such a charming smile on his boyish lips. He carried with him a portfolio which he never let out of reach of his hand; the oldish couple

opposite, speculating upon its contents, might have changed their opinion of him had they seen them.

But no shadow of the dark weariness of things unlawful rested on Lawrence Storey; to know Augustine Marchant, to be illustrating his great poem, to have learnt from him that art and morality had no kinship, this was to plunge into a new realm of freedom and enlarging experience. Augustine Marchant's poetry, he felt, had already taught his hand what his brain and heart knew nothing of.

There was a dogcart to meet him at the station, and in the scented June evening he was driven with a beating heart past meadows and hayfields to his destination.

Mr. Marchant, awaiting him in the hall, was at his most charming. "My dear fellow, are those the drawings? Come, let us lock them away at once in my safe! If you had brought me diamonds I should not be one quarter so concerned about thieves. And did you have a comfortable journey? I have had you put in the orange room; it is next to mine. There is no one else staying here, but there are a few people coming to dinner to meet you."

There was only just time to dress for dinner, so that Lawrence did not get an opportunity to study his host until he saw him seated at the head of the table. Then he was immediately struck by the fact that he looked curiously ill. His face—ordinarily by no means attenuated—seemed to have fallen in, there were dark circles under his eyes, and the perturbed Lawrence, observing him as the meal progressed, thought that his manner too seemed strange and once or twice quite absent-minded. And there was one moment when, though the lady on his right was addressing him, he sharply turned his head away and looked down at the side of his chair just as if he saw something on the floor. Then he apologised, saying that he had a horror of cats, and that sometimes the tiresome animal from the stables . . . But after that he continued to entertain his guests in his own inimitable way, and, even to the shy Lawrence, the evening proved very pleasant.

The three ensuing days were wonderful and exciting to the young artist—days of uninterrupted contact with a master mind which acknowledged, as the poet himself admitted, none of the

petty barriers which man, for his own convenience, had set up between alleged right and wrong. Lawrence had learnt why his host did not look well; it was loss of sleep, the price exacted by inspiration. He had a new poetic drama shaping in his mind which would scale heights that he had not yet attempted.

There was almost a touch of fever in the young man's dreams to-night—his last night but one. He had several. First he was standing by the edge of a sort of mere, inexpressibly desolate and unfriendly, a place he had never seen in his life, which yet seemed in some way familiar; and something said to him, "You will never go away from here!" He was alarmed, and woke, but went to sleep again almost immediately, and this time was back, oddly enough, in the church where in his earliest years he had been taken to service by the aunt who had brought him up—a large church full of pitch-pine pews with narrow ledges for hymn-books, which ledges he used surreptitiously to lick during the long dull periods of occultation upon his knees. But most of all he remembered the window with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, on either side of an apple-tree round whose trunk was coiled a monstrous snake with a semi-human head. Lawrence had hated and dreaded that window, and because of it he would never go near an orchard and had no temptation to steal apples. . . . Now he was back in that church again, staring at the window, lit up with some infernal glow from behind. He woke again, little short of terrified—he, a grown man! But again he went to sleep quite quickly.

His third dream had for background, as sometimes happens in nightmares, the very room in which he lay. He dreamt that a door opened in the wall, and in the doorway, quite plain against the light from another room behind him, stood Augustine Marchant in his dressing-gown. He was looking down at something on the ground which Lawrence did not see, but his hand was pointing at Lawrence in the bed, and he was saying in a voice of command, "Go to him, do you hear? Go to him! Go to *him*! Am I not your master?" And Lawrence, who could neither move nor utter a syllable, wondered uneasily what this could be which was thus commanded, but his attention was chiefly focused on Augus-

tine Marchant's face. After he had said these words several times, and apparently without result, a dreadful change came upon it, a look of the most unutterable despair. It seemed visibly to age and wither; he said, in a loud, penetrating whisper, "Is there no escape then?" covered his ravaged face a moment with his hands, and then went back and softly closed the door. At that Lawrence woke; but in the morning he had forgotten all three dreams.

The *tête-à-tête* dinner on the last night of his stay would have lingered in a gourmet's memory, so that it was a pity the young man did not know in the least what he was eating. At last there was happening what he had scarcely dared hope for; the great poet of the sensuous was revealing to him some of the unimaginably strange and secret sources of his inspiration. In the shaded rosy candlelight, his elbows on the table among trails of flowers, he, who was not even a neophyte, listened like a man learning for the first time of some spell or spring which will make him more than mortal.

"Yes," said Augustine Marchant, after a long pause, "yes, it was a marvellous, an undying experience . . . one that is not given to many. It opened doors, it—but I despair of doing it justice in mere words." His look was transfigured, almost dreamy.

"But she . . . the woman . . . how did you . . . ?" asked Lawrence Storey in a hushed voice.

"Oh, the woman?" said Augustine, suddenly finishing off his wine. "The woman was only a common street-walker."

A moment or two later Lawrence was looking at his host wonderingly and wistfully. "But this was in Prague. Prague is a long way off."

"One does not need to go so far, in reality. Even in Paris——"

"One could . . . have that experience in Paris?"

"If you knew where to go. And of course, it is necessary to have credentials. I mean that—like all such enlightenments—it has to be kept secret, most secret, from the vulgar minds who lay their restrictions on the finer. That is self-evident."

"Of course," said the young man, and sighed deeply. His host looked at him affectionately.

"You, my dear Lawrence—I may call you Lawrence?—want

just that touch of . . . what shall I call them—*les choses cachées* —to liberate your immense artistic gifts from the shackles which still bind them. Through that gateway you would find the possibility of their full fruition! It would fertilise your genius to a still finer blossoming. . . . But you would have scruples . . . and you are very young."

"You know," said Lawrence in a low and trembling tone, "what I feel about your poetry. You know how I ache to lay the best that is in me at your feet. If only I could make my drawings for the Two Queens more worthy—already it is an honour which overwhelms me that you should have selected me to do them—but they are not what they should be. I am *not* sufficiently liberated. . . ."

Augustine leant forward on the flower-decked table. His eyes were glowing.

"Do you truly desire to be?"

The young man nodded, too full of emotion to find his voice.

The poet got up, went over to a cabinet in a corner and unlocked it. Lawrence watched his fine figure in a sort of trance. Then he half-rose with an exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Augustine very sharply, facing round.

"Oh, nothing, sir—only that I believe you hate cats, and I thought I saw one, or rather its tail, disappearing into that corner."

"There's no cat here," said Augustine quickly. His face had become all shiny and mottled, but Lawrence did not notice it. The poet stood a moment looking at the carpet; one might almost have thought that he was gathering resolution to cross it; then he came swiftly back to the table.

"Sit down again," he commanded. "Have you a pocket-book with you, a pocket-book which you never leave about? Good! Then write *this* in one place; and *this* on another page . . . write it small . . . among other entries is best . . . not on a blank page . . . write it in Greek characters if you know them. . . ."

"What . . . what is it?" asked Lawrence, all at once intolerably excited, his eyes fixed on the piece of paper in Augustine's hand.

"The two halves of the address in Paris."

III

Augustine Marchant kept a diary in those days, a locked diary, written in cipher. And for more than a month after Lawrence Storey's visit the tenor of the entries there was almost identical:

"No change . . . Always with me . . . How much longer can I endure it? The alteration in my looks is being remarked upon to my face. I shall have to get rid of Thornton [his man] on some pretext or other, for I begin to think that he has seen It. No wonder, since it follows me about like a dog. When It is visible to everyone it will be the end. . . . I found It in bed with me this morning, pressed up against me as if for warmth. . . ."

But there was a different class of entry also, appearing at intervals with an ever-increasing note of impatience.

"Will L.S. go there? . . . When shall I hear from L.S.? . . . Will the experiment do what I think? It is my last hope."

Then, suddenly, after five weeks had elapsed, an entry in a trembling hand:

"For twenty-four hours I have seen no sign of It! Can it be possible?"

And next day:

"Still nothing. I begin to live again.—This evening has just come an ecstatic letter from L.S., from Paris, telling me that he had 'presented his credentials' and was to have the experience next day. He has had it by now—by yesterday, in fact. Have I really freed myself? It looks like it!"

In one week from the date of that last entry it was remarked in Abbot's Medding how much better Mr. Marchant was looking again. Of late he had not seemed at all himself; his cheeks had

fallen in, his clothes seemed to hang loosely upon him, who had generally filled them so well, and he appeared nervous. Now he was as before, cheery, courtly, debonair. And last Sunday, will you believe it, he went to church! The Rector was so astonished when he first became aware of him from the pulpit that he nearly forgot to give out his text. And the poet joined in the hymns, too! Several observed this amazing phenomenon.

It was the day after this unwonted appearance at St. Peter's. Augustine was strolling in his garden. The air had a new savour, the sun a new light; he could look again with pleasure at Thetis and her nymphs of the fountain, could work undisturbed in the summer-house. Free, free! All the world was good to the senses once again, and the hues and scents of early autumn better, in truth, than the brilliance of that summer month which had seen his curse descend upon him.

The butler brought him out a letter with a French stamp. From Lawrence Storey, of course; to tell him—what? Where had he caught his first glimpse of it? In one of those oppressively furnished French bedrooms? And how had he taken it?

At first, however, Augustine was not sure that the letter was from Storey. The writing was very different, cramped instead of flowing, and, in places, spluttering, the pen having dug into the paper as if the hand which held it had not been entirely under control—almost, thought Augustine, his eyes shining with excitement, almost as though something had been twined, liana-like, round the wrist. (He had a sudden sick recollection of a day when that had happened to him, quickly submerged in a gush of eager anticipation.) Sitting down upon the edge of the fountain he read —not quite what he had looked for.

I don't know what is happening to me [began the letter without other opening]. Yesterday I was in a café by myself, and had just ordered some absinthe—though I do not like it. And quite suddenly, although I knew that I was in the café, I realised that I was also back in *that room*. I could see every feature of it, but I could see the café too, with all the people in it; the one was, as it were, superimposed upon the other, the room, which was a

good deal smaller than the café, being inside the latter, as a box may be within a larger box. And all the while the room was growing clearer, the café fading. I saw the glass of absinthe suddenly standing on nothing, as it were. All the furniture of *the room,* all the accessories you know of, were mixed up with the chairs and tables of the café. I do not know how I managed to find my way to the *comptoir,* pay and get out. I took a *fiacre* back to my hotel. By the time I arrived there I was all right. I suppose that it was only the after effects of a very strange and violent emotional experience. But I hope to God that it will not recur!

"How interesting!" said Augustine Marchant, dabbling his hand in the swirling water where he had once drowned a piece of dark fluff. "And why indeed should I have expected that It would couch at his door in the same form as at mine?"

Four days more of new-found peace and he was reading this:

In God's name—or the Devil's—come over and help me! I have hardly an hour now by night or day when I am sure of my whereabouts. I could not risk the journey back to England alone. It is like being imprisoned in some kind of infernal half-transparent box, always growing a little smaller. Wherever I go now I carry it about with me; when I am in the street I hardly know which is the pavement and which is the roadway, because I am always treading on that black carpet with the cabalistic designs; if I speak to anyone they may suddenly disappear from sight. To attempt to work is naturally useless. I would consult a doctor, but that would mean telling him everything. . . .

"I hope to God he won't do that!" muttered Augustine uneasily. "He can't—he swore to absolute secrecy. I hadn't bargained, however, for his ceasing work. Suppose he finds himself unable to complete the designs for 'Theodora and Marozia'! That would be serious . . . However, to have freed myself is worth *any* sacrifice. . . . But Storey cannot, obviously, go on living indefinitely on two planes at once. . . . Artistically, though, it might inspire him to something quite unprecedented. I'll write

to him and point that out; it might encourage him. But go near him in person—is it likely!"

The next day was one of great literary activity. Augustine was so deeply immersed in his new poetical drama that he neglected his correspondence and almost his meals—except his dinner, which seemed that evening to be shared most agreeably and excitingly by these new creations of his brain. Such, in fact, was his pre-occupation with them that it was not until he had finished the savoury and poured out a glass of his superlative port that he remembered a telegram which had been handed to him as he came in to dinner. It still lay unopened by his plate. Now, tearing apart the envelope, he read with growing bewilderment these words above his publishers' names:

Please inform us immediately what steps to take are prepared send to France recover drawings if possible what suggestions can you make as to successor Rossell and Ward.

Augustine was more than bewildered; he was stupefied. Had some accident befallen Lawrence Storey of which he knew nothing? But he had opened all his letters this morning though he had not answered any. A prey to a sudden very nasty anxiety he got up and rang the bell.

"Burrows, bring me *The Times* from the library."

The newspaper came, unopened. Augustine, now in a frenzy of uneasiness, scanned the pages rapidly. But it was some seconds before he came upon the headline: "TRAGIC DEATH OF A YOUNG ENGLISH ARTIST," and read the following, furnished by the Paris correspondent:

Connoisseurs who were looking forward to the appearance of the superb illustrated edition of Mr. Augustus Marchant's *Queen Theodora and Queen Marozia* will learn with great regret of the death by drowning of the gifted young artist, Mr. Lawrence Storey, who was engaged upon the designs for it. Mr. Storey had recently been staying in Paris, but left one day last week for a remote spot in Brittany, it was supposed in pursuance of his

work. On Friday last his body was discovered floating in a lonely pool near Carhaix. It is hard to see how Mr. Storey could have fallen in, since this piece of water—the Mare de Plougouven—has a completely level shore surrounded by reeds, and is not in itself very deep, nor is there any boat upon it. It is said that the unfortunate young Englishman had been somewhat strange in his manner recently and complained of hallucinations; it is therefore possible that under their influence he deliberately waded out into the Mare de Plougouven. A strange feature of the case is that he had fastened round him under his coat the finished drawings for Mr. Marchant's book, which were of course completely spoilt by the water before the body was found. It is to be hoped that they were not the only——

Augustine threw *The Times* furiously from him and struck the dinner-table with his clenched fist.

"Upon my soul, that is too much! It is criminal! My property —and I who had done so much for him! Fastened them round himself—he must have been crazy!"

But had he been so crazy? When his wrath had subsided a little Augustine could not but ask himself whether the young artist had not in some awful moment of insight guessed the truth, or a part of it—that his patron had deliberately corrupted him? It looked almost like it. But, if he had really taken all the finished drawings with him to this place in Brittany, what an unspeakably mean trick of revenge thus to destroy them! . . . Yet, even if it were so, he must regard their loss as the price of his own deliverance, since, from his point of view, the desperate expedient of passing on his "familiar" had been a complete success. By getting someone else to plunge even deeper than he had done into the unlawful (for he had seen to it that Lawrence Storey should do that) he had proved, as that verse in Genesis said, that he *had* rule over . . . what had pursued him in tangible form as a consequence of his own night in Prague. He could not be too thankful. The literary world might well be thankful too. For his own art was of infinitely more importance than the subservient, the parasitic art of an illustrator. He could

with a little search find half a dozen just as gifted as that poor hallucination-ridden Storey to finish "Theodora and Marozia"—even, if necessary, to begin an entirely fresh set of drawings. And meanwhile, in the new lease of creative energy which this unfortunate but necessary sacrifice had made possible for him, he would begin to put on paper the masterpiece which was now taking brilliant shape in his liberated mind. A final glass, and then an evening in the workshop!

Augustine poured out some port, and was raising the glass, prepared to drink to his own success, when he thought he heard a sound near the door. He looked over his shoulder. Next instant the stem of the wineglass had snapped in his hand and he had sprung back to the farthest limit of the room.

Reared up for quite five feet against the door, huge, dark, sleeked with wet and flecked with bits of green waterweed, was something half-python, half-gigantic cobra, its head drawn back as if to strike . . . its head, for in its former featureless tapering end were now two reddish eyes, such as furriers put into the heads of stuffed creatures. And they were fixed in an unwavering and malevolent glare upon him, as he cowered there clutching the bowl of the broken wineglass, the crumpled copy of *The Times* lying at his feet.

Theodore Sturgeon

A WAY OF THINKING

I'll have to start with an anecdote or two that you may have heard from me before, but they'll bear repeating, since it's Kelley we're talking about.

I shipped out with Kelley when I was a kid. Tank-ships, mostly coastwise: load somewhere in the oil country—New Orleans, Aransas Pass, Port Arthur, or some such—and unload at ports north of Hatteras. Eight days out, eighteen hours in, give or take a day or six hours. Kelley was ordinary seaman on my watch, which was a laugh; he knew more about the sea than anyone aft of the galley. But he never ribbed me, stumbling around the place with my blue A.B. ticket. He had a sense of humour in his peculiar quiet way, but he never gratified it by proofs of the obvious—that he was twice the seaman I could ever be.

There were a lot of unusual things about Kelley, the way he looked, the way he moved; the most unusual was the way he thought. He was like one of those extra-terrestrials you read about, who can think as well as a human being but not *like* a human being.

Just for example, there was that night in Port Arthur. I was sitting in a honkytonk up over a bar with a red-headed girl called Red, trying to mind my own business while watching a chick known as Boots, who sat alone over by the juke-box. This girl Boots was watching the door and grinding her teeth, and I knew why, and I was worried. See, Kelley had been seeing her

pretty regularly, but this trip he'd made the break and word was around that he was romancing a girl in Pete's place—a very unpopular kind of rumour for Boots to be chewing on. I also knew that Kelley would be along any minute because he'd promised to meet me here.

And in he came, running up that long straight flight of steps easy as a cat, and when he got in the door everybody just hushed, except the juke-box, and it sounded scared.

Now, just above Boots' shoulder on a little shelf was an electric fan. It had sixteen-inch blades and no guard. The very second Kelley's face showed in the doorway Boots rose up like a snake out of a basket, reached behind her, snatched that fan off the shelf and threw it.

It might as well have been done with a slow-motion camera as far as Kelley was concerned. He didn't move his feet at all. He bent sideways, just a little, from the waist, and turned his wide shoulders. Very clearly I heard three of those whining blade-tips touch a button on his shirt *bip-bip-bip!* and then the fan hit the doorpost.

Even the juke-box shut up then. It was *so* quiet. Kelley didn't say anything and neither did anyone else.

Now, if you believe in do-as-you-get-done-to, and someone heaves an infernal machine at you, you'll pick it right up and heave it back. But Kelley doesn't think like you. He didn't look at the fan. He just watched Boots, and she was white and crazed-looking, waiting for whatever he might have in mind.

He went across the room to her, fast but not really hurrying, and he picked her out from behind that table, and he threw her.

He threw her at the fan.

She hit the floor and slid, sweeping up the fan where it lay, hitting the doorjamb with her head, spinning out into the stairway. Kelley walked after her, stepped over her, went on downstairs and back to the ship.

And there was the time we shipped a new main spur gear for the starboard winch. The deck engineer used up the whole morning watch trying to get the old gear-wheel off its shaft. He heated the hub. He pounded it. He put in wedges. He hooked

on with a handybilly—that's a four-sheave block-and-tackle to you—and all he did with that was break a U-bolt.

Then Kelley came on deck, rubbing sleep out of his eyes, and took one brief look. He walked over to the winch, snatched up a crescent wrench, and relieved the four bolts that held the housing tight around the shaft. He then picked up a twelve-pound maul, hefted it, and swung it just once. The maul hit the end of the shaft and the shaft shot out of the other side of the machine like a torpedo out of its tube. The gearwheel fell down on the deck. Kelley went forward to take the helm and thought no more about it, while the deck crew stared after him, wall-eyed. You see what I mean? Problem: Get a wheel off a shaft. But in Kelley's book it's: Get the shaft out of the wheel.

I kibitzed him at poker one time and saw him discard two pair and draw a winning straight flush. Why that discard? Because he'd just realized the deck was stacked. Why the flush? God knows. All Kelley did was pick up the pot—a big one—grin at the sharper, and leave.

I have plenty more yarns like that, but you get the idea. The guy had a special way of thinking, that's all, and it never failed him.

I lost track of Kelley. I came to regret that now and then; he made a huge impression on me, and sometimes I used to think about him when I had a tough problem to solve. What would Kelley do? And sometimes it helped, and sometimes it didn't; and when it didn't, I guess it was because I'm not Kelley.

I came ashore and got married and did all sorts of other things, and the years went by, and a war came and went, and one warm spring evening I went into a place I know on West 48th St. because I felt like drinking *tequila* and I can always get it there. And who should be sitting in a booth finishing up a big Mexican dinner but—no, not Kelley.

It was Milton. He looks like a college sophomore with money. His suits are always cut just so, but quiet; and when he's relaxed he looks as if he's just been tagged for a fraternity and it matters to him, and when he's worried you want to ask him has he been cutting classes again. It happens he's a damn good doctor.

He was worried, but he gave me a good hello and waved me into the booth while he finished up. We had small talk and I tried to buy him a drink. He looked real wistful and then shook his head. "Patient in ten minutes," he said, looking at his watch.

"Then it's nearby. Come back afterwards."

"Better yet," he said, getting up, "come with me. This might interest you, come to think of it."

He got his hat and paid Rudy, and I said, *"Luego,"* and Rudy grinned and slapped the *tequila* bottle. Nice place, Rudy's.

"What about the patient?" I asked as we turned up the avenue. I thought for a while he hadn't heard me, but at last he said, "Four busted ribs and a compound femoral. Minor internal haemorrhage which might or might not be a ruptured spleen. Necrosis of the oral frenum—or was while there was any frenum left."

"What's a frenum?"

"That little strip of tissue under your tongue."

"Ongk," I said, trying to reach it with the tip of my tongue. "What a healthy fellow."

"Pulmonary adhesions," Milton ruminated. "Not serious, certainly not tubercular. But they hurt and they bleed and I don't like 'em. And acne rosacea."

"That's the nose like a stop light, isn't it?"

"It isn't as funny as that to the guy that has it."

I was quelled. "What was it—a goon-squad?"

He shook his head.

"A truck?"

"No."

"He fell off something."

Milton stopped and turned and looked me straight in the eye. "No," he said. "Nothing like anything. Nothing," he said, walking again, "at all."

I said nothing to that because there was nothing to say.

"He just went to bed," said Milton thoughtfully, "because he felt off his oats. And one by one these things happened to him."

"In *bed*?"

"Well," said Milton, in a to-be-absolutely-accurate tone, "when the ribs broke he was on his way back from the bathroom."

"You're kidding."

"No I'm not."

"He's lying."

Milton said, "I believe him."

I know Milton. There's no doubt that he believed the man. I said, "I keep reading things about psychosomatic disorders. But a broken—what did you say it was?"

"Femur. Thigh, that is. Compound. Oh, it's rare, all right. But it can happen, has happened. These muscles are pretty powerful, you know. They deliver two-fifty, three-hundred-pound thrusts every time you walk upstairs. In certain spastic hysteria, they'll break bones easily enough."

"What about all those other things?"

"Functional disorders, every one of 'em. No germ disease."

"Now this boy," I said, "*really* has something on his mind."

"Yes, he has."

But I didn't ask what. I could hear the discussion closing as if it had a spring latch on it.

We went into a door tucked between store fronts and climbed three flights. Milton put out his hand to a bell-push and then dropped it without ringing. There was a paper tacked to the door.

DOC I WENT FOR SHOTS COME ON IN.

It was unsigned. Milton turned the knob and we went in.

The first thing that hit me was the smell. Not too strong, but not the kind of thing you ever forget if you ever had to dig a slit trench through last week's burial pit. "That's the necrosis," muttered Milton. "Damn it." He gestured. "Hang your hat over there. Sit down. I'll be out soon." He went into an inner room, saying "Hi, Hal," at the doorway. From inside came an answering rumble, and something twisted in my throat to hear it, for no voice which is that tired should sound that cheerful.

I sat watching the wallpaper and laboriously un-listening to those clinical grunts and the gay-weary responses in the other

room. The wallpaper was awful. I remember a night-club act where Reginald Gardiner used to give sound-effect renditions of wallpaper designs. This one, I decided, would run "Body to *weep* . . . yawp, yawp; body to *weep* . . . yawp, yawp", very faintly, with the final syllable a straining retch. I had just reached a particularly clumsy join where the paper utterly demolished its own rhythm and went "Yawp yawp body to *weep*" when the outer door opened and I leaped to my feet with the rush of utter guilt one feels when caught in an unlikely place with no curt and lucid explanation.

He was two long strides into the room, tall and soft-footed, his face and long green eyes quite at rest, when he saw me. He stopped as if on leaf springs and shock absorbers, not suddenly, completely controlled, and asked, "Who are you?"

"I'll be damned," I answered. "Kelley!"

He peered at me with precisely the expression I had seen so many times when he watched the little square windows on the one-arm bandits we used to play together. I could almost hear the tumblers, see the drums stop; not lemon . . . cherry . . . cherry . . . and *click*! this time but tank-ship . . . Texas . . . him! . . . and *click*! "I be *god*dam," he drawled, to indicate that he was even more surprised than I was. He transferred the small package he carried from his right hand to his left and shook hands. His hand went once and a half times round mine with enough left over to tie a half-hitch. "Where in time you keep keepin' yourse'f? How'd you smoke me out?"

"I never," I said. (Saying it, I was aware that I always fell into the idiom of people who impressed me, to the exact degree of that impression. So I always found myself talking more like Kelley than Kelley's shaving mirror.) I was grinning so wide my face hurt. "I'm glad to see you." I shook hands with him again, foolishly. "I came with the doctor."

"You a doctor now?" he said, his tone prepared for wonders.

"I'm a writer," I said deprecatingly.

"Yeah, I heard," he reminded himself. His eyes narrowed; as of old, it had the effect of sharp-focusing a searchlight beam. "I heard!" he repeated, with deeper interest. "Stories. Gremlins

and flyin' saucers an' all like that." I nodded. He said, without insult, "Hell of a way to make a living."

"What about you?"

"Ships. Some dry-dock. Tank cleaning. Compass 'djustin'. For a while had a job holdin' a insurance inspector's head. You know."

I glanced at the big hands that could weld or steer or compute certainly with the excellence I used to know, and marvelled that he found himself so unremarkable. I pulled myself back to here and now and nodded toward the inner room. "I'm holding you up."

"No you ain't. Milton, he knows what he's doin'. He wants me, he'll holler."

"Who's sick?"

His face darkened like the sea in scud-weather, abruptly and deep down. "My brother." He looked at me searchingly. "He's . . ." Then he seemed to check himself. "He's sick," he said unnecessarily, and added quickly, "He's going to be all right, though."

"Sure," I said quickly.

I had the feeling that we were both lying and that neither of us knew why.

Milton came out, laughing a laugh that cut off as soon as he was out of range of the sick man. Kelley turned to him slowly, as if slowness were the only alternative to leaping on the doctor, pounding the news out of him. "Hello, Kelley. Heard you come in."

"How is he, Doc?"

Milton looked up quickly, his bright round eyes clashing with Kelley's slitted fierce ones. "You got to take it easy, Kelley. What'll happen to him if you crack up?"

"Nobody's cracking up. What do you want me to do?"

Milton saw the package on the table. He picked it up and opened it. There was a leather case and two phials. "Ever use one of these before?"

"He was a pre-med before he went to sea," I said suddenly.

Milton stared at me. "You two know each other?"

I looked at Kelley. "Sometimes I think I invented him."

Kelley snorted and thumped my shoulder. Happily I had one hand on a built-in china shelf. His big hand continued the motion and took the hypodermic case from the doctor. "Sterilize the shaft and needle," he said sleepily, as if reading. "Assemble without touching needle with fingers. To fill, puncture diaphragm and withdraw plunger. Squirt upward to remove air an' prevent embolism. Locate major vein in——"

Milton laughed. "Okay, okay. But forget the vein. Any place will do—it's subcutaneous, that's all. I've written the exact amounts to be used for exactly the symptoms you can expect. Don't jump the gun, Kelley. And remember how you salt your stew. Just because a little is good, it doesn't figure that a lot has to be better."

Kelley was wearing that sleepy inattention which, I remembered, meant only that he was taking in every single word like a tape recorder. He tossed the leather case gently, caught it. "Now?" he said.

"Not now," the doctor said positively. "Only when you have to."

Kelley seemed frustrated. I suddenly understood that he wanted to do something, build something, fight something. Anything but sit and wait for therapy to bring results. I said, "Kelley, any brother of yours is a—well, you know. I'd like to say hello, if it's all——"

Immediately and together Kelley and the doctor said loudly, "Sure, when he's on his feet," and "Better not just now, I've just given him a sedat——" And together they stopped awkwardly.

"Let's go get that drink," I said before they could flounder any more.

"Now you're talking. You too, Kelley. It'll do you good."

"Not me," said Kelley. "Hal——"

"I knocked him out," said the doctor bluntly. "You'll cluck around scratching for worms and looking for hawks till you wake him up, and he needs his sleep. Come on."

Painfully I had to add to my many mental images of Kelley the very first one in which he was indecisive. I hated it.

"Well," said Kelley, "let me go see."

He disappeared. I looked at Milton's face, and turned quickly away. I was sure he wouldn't want me to see that expression of sick pity and bafflement.

Kelley came out, moving silently as always. "Yeah, asleep," he said. "For how long?"

"I'd say four hours at least."

"Well, all right." From the old-fashioned clothes tree he took a battered black engineer's cap with a shiny, crazed patent leather visor. I laughed. Both men turned to me, with annoyance, I thought.

On the landing outside I explained. "The hat," I said. "Remember? Tampico?"

"Oh," he grunted. He thwacked it against his forearm.

"He left it on the bar of this ginmill," I told Milton. "We got back to the gang-plank and he missed it. Nothing would do but he has to go back for it, so I went with him."

"You was wearin' a *tequila* label on your face," Kelley said. "Kept tryin' to tell the taxi man you was a bottle."

"He didn't speak English."

Kelley flashed something like his old grin. "He got the idea."

"Anyway," I told Milton, "the place was closed when we got there. We tried the front door and the side doors and they were locked like Alcatraz. We made so much racket I guess if anyone was inside they were afraid to open up. We could see Kelley's hat in there on the bar. Nobody's *about* to steal that hat."

"It's a good hat," he said in an injured tone.

"Kelley goes into action," I said. "Kelley don't think like other people, you know, Milt. He squints through the window at the other wall, goes around the building, sets one foot against the corner stud, gets his fingers under the edge of that corrugated iron siding they use. 'I'll pry this out a bit,' he says. 'You slide in and get my hat.'"

"Corrugated was only nailed on one-by-twos," said Kelley.

"He gives one almighty pull," I chuckled, "and the whole damn side falls out of the building, I mean the second floor too. You never heard such a clap-o'-thunder in your life."

"I got my hat," said Kelley. He uttered two syllables of a laugh. "Whole second floor was a cat-house, an' the one single stairway come out with the wall."

"Taxi driver just took off. But he left his taxi. Kelley drove back. I couldn't. I was laughing."

"You was drunk."

"Well, *some*," I said.

We walked together quietly, happily. Out of Kelley's sight, Milton thumped me gently on the ribs. It was eloquent and it pleased me. It said that it was a long time since Kelley had laughed. It was a long time since he had thought about anything but Hal.

I guess we felt it equally when, with no trace of humour . . . more as if he had let my episode just blow itself out until he could be heard . . . Kelley said, "Doc, what's with the hand?"

"It'll be all right," Milton said.

"You put splints."

Milton sighed. "All right, all right. Three fractures. Two on the middle finger and one on the ring."

Kelley said, "I saw they were swollen."

I looked at Kelley's face and I looked at Milton's and I didn't like either, and I wished to God I were somewhere else, in a uranium mine maybe, or making out my income tax. I said, "Here we are. Ever been to Rudy's, Kelley?"

He looked up at the little yellow-and-red marquee. "No."

"Come on," I said. *"Tequila."*

We went in and got a booth. Kelley ordered beer. I got mad then and started to call him some things I'd picked up on waterfronts from here to Tierra del Fuego. Milton stared wall-eyed at me and Kelley stared at his hands. After a while Milton began to jot some of it down on a prescription pad he took from his pocket. I was pretty proud.

Kelley gradually got the idea. If I wanted to pick up the tab and he wouldn't let me, his habits were those of *uno puñeto sin cojones* (which a Spanish dictionary will reliably misinform you means "a weakling without eggs"), and his affections for his forebears were powerful but irreverent. I won, and soon he was

lapping up a huge combination plate of beef *tostadas,* chicken *enchiladas,* and pork *tacos.* He endeared himself to Rudy by demanding salt and lemon with his *tequila* and despatching same with flawless ritual: hold the lemon between left thumb and forefinger, lick the back of the left hand, sprinkle salt on the wet spot, lift the *tequila* with the right, lick the salt, drink the *tequila,* bite the lemon. Soon he was imitating the German second mate we shipped out of Puerto Barrios one night, who ate fourteen green bananas and lost them and all his teeth over the side, in gummed gutturals which had us roaring.

But after that question about fractured fingers back there in the street, Milton and I weren't fooled any more, and though everyone tried hard and it was a fine try, none of the laughter went deep enough or stayed long enough, and I wanted to cry.

We all had a huge hunk of the nesselrode pie made by Rudy's beautiful blonde wife—pie you can blow off your plate by flapping a napkin . . . sweet smoke with calories. And then Kelley demanded to know what time it was and cussed and stood up.

"It's only been two hours," Milton said.

"I just as soon head home all the same," said Kelley. "Thanks."

"Wait," I said. I got a scrap of paper out of my wallet and wrote on it. "Here's my phone. I want to see you some more. I'm working for myself these days; my time's my own. I don't sleep much, so call me any time you feel like it."

He took the paper. "You're no good," he said. "You never were no good." The way he said it, I felt fine.

"On the corner is a news-stand," I told him. "There's a magazine called *Amazing* with one of my lousy stories in it."

"They print it on a roll?" he demanded. He waved at us, nodded to Rudy, and went out.

I swept up some spilled sugar on the table top and pushed it around until it was a perfect square. After a while I shoved in the sides until it was a lozenge. Milton didn't say anything either. Rudy, as is his way, had sense enough to stay away from us.

"Well, that did him some good," Milton said after a while.

"You know better than that," I said bitterly.

Milton said patiently, "Kelley thinks *we* think it did him some good. And thinking that does him good."

I had to smile at that contortion, and after that it was easier to talk. "The kid going to live?"

Milton waited, as if some other answer might spring from somewhere, but it didn't. He said, "No."

"Fine doctor."

"Don't kid like that!" he snapped. He looked up at me. "Look, if this was one of those—well, say pleurisy cases on the critical list, without the will to live, why I'd know what to do. Usually those depressed cases have such a violent desire to be reassured, down deep, that you can snap 'em right out of it if only you can think of the right thing to say. And you usually can. But Hal's not one of those. He wants to live. If he didn't want so much to live he'd've been dead three weeks ago. What's killing him is sheer somatic trauma—one broken bone after another, one failing or inflamed internal organ after another."

"Who's doing it?"

"Damn it, *no*body's doing it!" He caught me biting my lip. "If either one of us should say Kelley's doing it, the other one will punch him in the mouth. Right?"

"Right."

"Just so that doesn't have to happen," said Milton carefully, "I'll tell you what you're bound to ask me in a minute: why isn't he in a hospital?"

"Okay, why?"

"He was. For weeks. And all the time he was there these things kept on happening to him, only worse. More, and more often. I got him home as soon as it was safe to get him out of traction for that broken thigh. He's much better off with Kelley. Kelley keeps him cheered up, cooks for him, medicates him—the works. It's all Kelley does these days."

"I figured. It must be getting tough."

"It is. I wish I had your ability with invective. You can't lend that man anything, give him anything . . . proud? God!"

"Don't take this personally, but have you had consultations?"

He shrugged. "Six ways from the middle. And nine-tenths of it behind Kelley's back, which isn't easy. The lies I've told him! Hal's just *got* to have a special kind of Persian melon that someone is receiving in a little store in Yonkers. Out Kelley goes, and in the meantime I have to corral two or three doctors and whip 'em in to see Hal and out again before Kelley gets back. Or Hal has to have a special prescription, and I fix up with the druggist to take a good two hours compounding it. Hal saw Grundage, the osteo man, that way, but poor old Ancelowics the pharmacist got punched in the chops for the delay."

"Milton, you're all right."

He snarled at me, and then went on quietly, "None of it's done any good. I've learned a whole encyclopedia full of wise words and some therapeutic tricks I didn't know existed. But . . ." He shook his head. "Do you know why Kelley and I wouldn't let you meet Hal?" He wet his lips and cast about for an example. "Remember the pictures of Mussolini's corpse after the mob got through with it?"

I shuddered. "I saw 'em."

"Well, that's what he looks like, only he's alive, which doesn't make it any prettier. Hal doesn't know how bad it is, and neither Kelley nor I would run the risk of having him see it reflected in someone else's face. I wouldn't send a wooden Indian into that room."

I began to pound the table, barely touching it, hitting it harder and harder until Milton caught my wrist. I froze then, unhappily conscious of the eyes of everyone in the place looking at me. Gradually the normal sound of the restaurant resumed. "Sorry."

"It's all right."

"There's got to be some sort of reason!"

His lips twitched in a small acid smile. "That's what you get down to at last, isn't it? There's always a reason for everything, and if we don't know it, we can find it out. But just one single example of real unreason is enough to shake our belief in everything. And then the fear gets bigger than the case at hand

and extends to a whole universe of concepts labelled 'unproven'. Shows you how little we believe in anything, basically."

"That's a miserable piece of philosophy!"

"Sure. If you have another arrival point for a case like this, I'll buy it with a bonus. Meantime I'll just go on worrying at this one and feeling more scared than I ought to."

"Let's get drunk."

"A wonderful idea."

Neither of us ordered. We just sat there looking at the lozenge of sugar I'd made on the table top. After a while I said, "Hasn't Kelley any idea of what's wrong?"

"You know Kelley. If he had an idea he'd be working on it. All he's doing is sitting by watching his brother's body stew and swell like yeast in a vat."

"What about Hal?"

"He isn't lucid much any more. Not if I can help it."

"But maybe he——"

"Look," said Milton, "I don't want to sound cranky or anything, but I can't hold still for a lot of questions like . . ." He stopped, took out his display handkerchief, looked at it, put it away. "I'm sorry. You don't seem to understand that I didn't take this case yesterday afternoon. I've been sweating it out for nearly three months now. I've already thought of everything you're going to think of. Yes, I questioned Hal, back and forth and sideways. Nothing. N-n-nothing."

That last word trailed off in such a peculiar way that I looked up abruptly. "Tell me," I demanded.

"Tell you what?" Suddenly he looked at his watch. I covered it with my hand. "Come on, Milt."

"I don't know what you're—damn it, leave me alone, will you? If it was anything important, I'd've chased it down long ago."

"Tell me the unimportant something."

"No."

"Tell me why you won't tell me."

"Damn you, I'll do that. It's because you're a crackpot. You're a nice guy and I like you, but you're a crackpot." He laughed

suddenly, and it hit me like the flare of a flashbulb. "I didn't know you could look so astonished!" he said. "Now take it easy and listen to me. A guy comes out of a steak house and steps on a rusty nail, and ups and dies of tetanus. But your crackpot vegetarian will swear up and down that the man would still be alive if he hadn't poisoned his system with meat, and uses the death to prove his point. The perennial Dry will call the same casualty a victim of John Barleycorn if he knows the man had a beer with his steak. This one death can be ardently and wholeheartedly blamed on the man's divorce, his religion, his political affiliations or on a hereditary taint from his great-great-grandfather who worked for Oliver Cromwell. You're a nice guy and I like you," he said again, "and I am not going to sit across from you and watch you do the crackpot act."

"I do not know," I said slowly and distinctly, "what the hell you are talking about. And now you *have* to tell me."

"I suppose so," he said sadly. He drew a deep breath. "You believe what you write. No," he said quickly, "I'm not asking you, I'm telling you. You grind out all this fantasy and horror stuff and you believe every word of it. More basically, you'd rather believe in the *outré* and the so-called 'unknowable' than in what I'd call *real* things. You think I'm talking through my hat."

"I do," I said, "but go ahead."

"If I called you up to-morrow and told you with great joy that they'd isolated a virus for Hal's condition and a serum was on the way, you'd be just as happy about it as I would be, but way down deep you'd wonder if that was what was really wrong with him, or if the serum is what really cured him. If on the other hand I admitted to you that I'd found two small punctures on Hal's throat and a wisp of fog slipping out of the room—by God! see what I mean? You have a gleam in your eye already!"

I covered my eyes. "Don't let me stop you now," I said coldly. "Since you are not going to admit Dracula's punctures, what are you going to admit?"

"A year ago Kelley gave his brother a present. An ugly little brute of a Haitian doll. Hal kept it around to makes faces at for

a while and then gave it to a girl. He had bad trouble with the girl. She hates him—really hates him. As far as anyone knows she still has the doll. Are you happy now?"

"Happy," I said disgustedly. "But Milt—you're not just ignoring this doll thing. Why, that could easily be the whole basis of . . . hey, sit down! Where are you going?"

"I told you I wouldn't sit across from a damn hobbyist. Enter hobbies, exit reason." He recoiled. "Wait—*you* sit down now."

I gathered up a handful of his well-cut lapels. "We'll both sit down," I said gently, "or I'll prove to your heart's desire that I've reached the end of reason."

"Yessir," he said good-naturedly, and sat down. I felt like a damn fool. The twinkle left his eyes and he leaned forward. "Perhaps now you'll listen instead of riding off like that. I suppose you know that in many cases the voodoo doll does work, and you know why?"

"Well, yes. I didn't think you'd admit it." I got no response from his stony gaze, and at last realized that a fantasist's pose of authority on such matters is bound to sit ill with a serious and progressive physician. A lot less positively, I said, "It comes down to a matter of subjective reality, or what some people call faith. If you believe firmly that the mutilation of a doll with which you identify yourself will result in your own mutilation, well, that's what will happen."

"That, and a lot of things even a horror story writer could finds out if he researched anywhere else except in his projective imagination. For example, there are Arabs in North Africa to-day whom you dare not insult in any way really important to them. If they feel injured, they'll threaten to die, and if you call their bluff they'll sit down, cover their heads, and damn well *die*. There are psychosomatic phenomena like the stigmata, or wounds of the cross, which appear from time to time on the hands, feet and breasts of exceptionally devout people. I know you know a lot of this," he added abruptly, apparently reading something in my expression, "but I'm not going to get my knee out of your chest until you'll admit I'm at least capable of taking a thing like this into consideration and tracking it down."

"I never saw you before in my life," I said, and in an important way I meant it.

"Good," he said, with considerable relief. "Now I'll tell you what I did. I jumped at this doll episode almost as wildly as you did. It came late in the questioning because apparently it *really didn't matter* to Hal."

"Oh, well, but the subconscious——"

"Shaddup!" He stuck a surprisingly sharp forefinger into my collarbone. "I'm telling you; you're not telling me. I won't disallow that a deep belief in voodoo might be hidden in Hal's subconscious, but if it is, it's where sodium amytal and word association and light and profound hypnosis and a half-dozen other therapies give not a smidgin of evidence. I'll take that as proof that he carries no such conviction. I guess from the looks of you I'll have to remind you again that I've dug into this thing in more ways for longer and with more tools than you have —and I doubt that it means any less to me than it does to you."

"You know, I'm just going to shut up," I said plaintively.

"High time," he said, and grinned. "Now, in every case of voodoo damage or death, there has to be that element of devout belief in the powers of the witch or wizard, and through it a complete sense of identification with the doll. In addition, it helps if the victim knows what sort of damage the doll is sustaining—crushing, or pins sticking into it, or what. And you can take my word for it that no such news has reached Hal."

"What about the doll? Just to be absolutely sure, shouldn't we get it back?"

"I thought of that. But there's no way I know of getting it back without making it look valuable to the woman. And if she thinks it's valuable to Hal, we'll *never* see it."

"Hm. Who is she, and what's her royal gripe?"

"She's as nasty a piece of fluff as they come. She got involved with Hal for a little while—nothing serious, certainly not on his part. He was . . . he's a big good-natured kid who thinks the only evil people around are the ones who get killed at the end of the movie. Kelley was at sea at the time and he blew in to find

this little vampire taking Hal for everything she could, first by sympathy, then by threats. The old badger game. Hal was just bewildered. Kelley got his word that nothing had occurred between them, and then forced Hal to lower the boom. She called his bluff and it went to court. They forced a physical examination on her and she got laughed out of court. She wasn't the mother of anyone's unborn child. She never will be. She swore to get even with him. She's without brains or education or resources, but that doesn't stop her from being pathological. She sure can hate."

"Oh. You've seen her."

Milton shuddered. "I've seen her. I tried to get all Hal's gifts back from her. I had to say all because I didn't dare itemize. All I wanted, it might surprise you to know, was that damned doll. Just in case, you know . . . although I'm morally convinced that the thing has nothing to do with it. Now do you see what I mean about a single example of unreason?"

" 'Fraid I do." I felt upset and quelled and sat upon and I wasn't fond of the feeling. I've read too many stories where the scientist just hasn't the imagination to solve a haunt. It had been great, feeling superior to a bright guy like Milton.

We walked out of there and for the first time I felt the mood of a night without feeling that an author was ramming it down my throat for story purposes. I looked at the clean-swept, star-reaching cubism of the Radio City area and its living snakes of neon, and I suddenly thought of an Evelyn Smith story the general idea of which was "After they found out the atom bomb was magic, the rest of the magicians who enchanted refrigerators and washing machines and the telephone system came out into the open". I felt a breath of wind and wondered what it was that had breathed. I heard the snoring of the city and for an awesome second felt it would roll over, open its eyes, and . . . *speak*.

On the corner I said to Milton, "Thanks. You've given me a thumping around. I guess I needed it." I looked at him. "By the Lord I'd like to find some place where you've been stupid in this thing."

"I'd be happy if you could," he said seriously.

I whacked him on the shoulder. "See? You take all the fun out of it."

He got a cab and I started to walk. I walked a whole lot that night, just anywhere. I thought about a lot of things. When I got home the phone was ringing. It was Kelley.

I'm not going to give you a blow-by-blow of that talk with Kelley. It was in that small front room of his place—an apartment he'd rented after Hal got sick, and not the one Hal used to have —and we talked the night away. All I'm withholding is Kelley's expression of things you already know: that he was deeply attached to his brother, that he had no hope left for him, that he would find who or what was responsible and deal with it his way. It is a strong man's right to break down if he must, with whom and where he chooses, and such an occasion is only an expression of strength. But when it happens in a quiet sick place, where he must keep the command of hope strongly in the air; when a chest heaves and a throat must be held wide open to sob silently so that the dying one shall not know: these things are not pleasant to describe in detail. Whatever my ultimate feeling for Kelley, his emotions and the expressions of them are for him to keep.

He did, however, know the name of the girl and where she was. He did not hold her responsible. I thought he might have a suspicion, but it turned out to be only a certainty that this was no disease, no subjective internal disorder. If a great hate and a great determination could solve the problem, Kelley would solve it. If research and logic could solve it, Milton would do it. If I could do it, I would.

She was checking hats in a sleazy club out where Brooklyn and Queens, in a remote meeting, agree to be known as Long Island. The contact was easy to make. I gave her my spring coat with the label outward. It's a good label. When she turned away with it I called her back and drunkenly asked her for the bill in the right-hand pocket. She found it and handed it to me. It was a hundred. "Damn taxis never got change," I mumbled and took it before

her astonishment turned to sleight-of-hand. I got out my wallet, crowded the crumpled note into it clumsily enough to display the two other C-notes there, shoved it into the front of my jacket so that it missed the pocket and fell to the floor. Then I walked off. I walked back before she could lift the hinged counter and skin out after it. I picked it up and smiled foolishly at her. "Lose more business cards that way," I said. Then I brought her into focus. "Hey, you know, you're cute."

I suppose "cute" is one of the four-letter words that describe her. "What's your name?"

"Charity," she said. "But don't get ideas." She was wearing so much pancake make-up that I couldn't tell what her complexion was. She leaned so far over the counter that I could see lipstick stains on her brassière.

"I don't have a favourite charity yet," I said. "You work here alla time?"

"I go home once in a while," she said.

"What time?"

"One o'clock."

"Tell you what," I confided, "let's both be in front of this place at a quarter after and see who stands who up, okay?" Without waiting for an answer I stuck the wallet into my back pocket so that my jacket hung on it. All the way into the dining room I could feel her eyes on it like two hot, glistening, broiled mushrooms. I came within an ace of losing it to the head waiter when he collided with me, too.

She was there all right, with a yellowish fur around her neck and heels you could have driven into a pine plank. She was up to the elbows in jangly brass and chrome, and when we got into a cab she threw herself on me with her mouth open. I don't know where I got the reflexes, but I threw my head down and cracked her in the cheekbone with my forehead, and when she squeaked indignantly I said I'd dropped the wallet again and she went about helping me find it quietly as you please. We went to a place and another place and an after-hours place, all her choice. They served her sherry in her whisky-ponies and doubled all my orders, and tilted the cheques something outrageous. Once I

tipped a waiter eight dollars and she palmed the five. Once she wormed my leather notebook out of my breast pocket thinking it was the wallet, which by this time was safely tucked away in my knit shorts. She did get one enamel cufflink with a rhinestone in it, and my fountain pen. All in all it was quite a duel. I was loaded to the eyeballs with thiamin hydrochloride and caffeine citrate, but a most respectable amount of alcohol soaked through them, and it was all I could do to play it through. I made it, though, and blocked her at every turn until she had no further choice but to take me home. She was furious and made only the barest attempts to hide it.

We got each other up the dim dawnlit stairs, shushing each other drunkenly, both much soberer than we acted, each promising what we expected not to deliver. She negotiated her lock successfully and waved me inside.

I hadn't expected it to be so neat. Or so cold. "I didn't leave that window open," she said complainingly. She crossed the room and closed it. She pulled her fur around her throat. "This is awful."

It was a long low room with three windows. At one end, covered by a venetian blind, was a kitchenette. A door at one side of it was probably a bathroom.

She went to the venetian blind and raised it. "Have it warmed up in a jiffy," she said.

I looked at the kitchenette. "Hey," I said as she lit the little oven, "coffee. How's about coffee?"

"Oh, all right," she said glumly. "But talk quiet, huh?"

"Sh-h-h-h." I pushed my lips around with a forefinger. I circled the room. Cheap phonograph and records. Small screen TV. A big double studio couch. A bookcase with no books in it, just china dogs. It occurred to me that her unsubtle approach was probably not successful as often as she might wish.

But where was the thing I was looking for?

"Hey, I wanna powder my nose," I announced.

"In there," she said. "Can't you talk quiet?"

I went into the bathroom. It was tiny. There was a foreshortened tub with a circular frame over it from which hung a

horribly cheerful shower curtain, with big red roses. I closed the door behind me and carefully opened the medicine chest. Just the usual. I closed it carefully so it wouldn't click. A built-in shelf held towels.

Must be a closet in the main room, I thought. Hat-box, trunk, suitcase, maybe. Where would I put a devil-doll if I were hexing someone?

I wouldn't hide it away, I answered myself. I don't know why, but I'd sort of have it out in the open somehow . . .

I opened the shower curtain and let it close. Round curtain, square tub.

"Yup!"

I pushed the whole round curtain back, and there in the corner, just at eye level, was a triangular shelf. Grouped on it were four figurines, made apparently from kneaded wax. Three had wisps of hair fastened by candle-droppings. The fourth was hairless, but had slivers of a horny substance pressed into the ends of the arms. Fingernail parings.

I stood for a moment thinking. Then I picked up the hairless doll, turned to the door. I checked myself, flushed the toilet, took a towel, shook it out, dropped it over the edge of the tub. Then I reeled out, "Hey, honey, look what I got, ain't it *cute*?"

"Shh!" she said. "Oh, for crying out loud. Put that back, will you?"

"Well, what is it?"

"It's none of your business, that's what it is. Come on, put it back."

I wagged my finger at her. "You're not being nice to me," I complained.

She pulled some shreds of patience together with an obvious effort. "It's just some sort of toys I have around. Here."

I snatched it away. "All right, you don't wanna be nice!" I whipped my coat together and began to button it clumsily, still holding the figurine.

She sighed, rolled her eyes, and came to me. "Come on, Dadsy. Have a nice cup of coffee and let's not fight." She reached for the doll and I snatched it away again.

"You got to tell me," I pouted.

"It's pers'nal."

"I wanna be personal," I pointed out.

"Oh, all right," she said. "I had a room-mate one time, she used to make these things. She said you make one, and s'pose I decide I don't like you, I got something of yours, hair or toenails or something. Say your name is George. What is your name?"

"George," I said.

"All right, I call the doll George. Then I stick pins in it. That's all. Give it to me."

"Who's this one?"

"That's Al."

"Hal?"

"Al. I got one called Hal. He's in there. I hate him the most."

"Yeah, huh. Well, what happens to Al and George and all when you stick pins in 'em?"

"They're s'posed to get sick. Even die."

"Do they?"

"Nah," she said with immediate and complete candour. "I told you, it's just a game, sort of. If it worked believe me old Al would bleed to death. He runs the delicatessen." I handed her the doll, and she looked at it pensively. "I wish it did work, sometimes. Sometimes I almost believe in it. I stick 'em and they just *yell*."

"Introduce me," I demanded.

"What?"

"Introduce me," I said. I pulled her toward the bathroom. She made a small irritated "oh-h", and came along.

"This is Fritz and this is Bruno and—where's the other one?"

"What other one?"

"Maybe he fell behind the—down back of——" She knelt on the edge of the tub and leaned over to the wall, to peer behind it. She regained her feet, her face red from effort and anger. "What are you trying to pull? You kidding around or something?"

I spread my arms. "What you mean?"

"Come on," she said between her teeth. She felt my coat, my jacket. "You hid it some place."

"No, I didn't. There was only four." I pointed. "Al and Fritz and Bruno and Hal. Which one's Hal?"

"That's Freddie. He give me twenny bucks and took twenny-three out of my purse, the dirty ——. But Hal's gone. He was the best one of all. You *sure* you didn't hide him?" Then she thumped her forehead.

"The window!" she said, and ran into the other room. I was on my four bones peering under the tub when I understood what she meant. I took a last good look around and then followed her. She was standing by the window, shading her eyes and peering out. "What do you know. Imagine somebody would swipe a thing like that!"

A sick sense of loss was born in my solar plexus.

"Aw, forget it. I'll make another one for that Hal. But I'll never make another one that ugly," she added wistfully. "Come on, the coffee's—what's the matter? You sick?"

"Yeah," I said, "I'm sick."

"Of all the things to steal," she said from the kitchenette. "Who do you suppose would do such a thing?"

Suddenly I knew who would. I cracked my fist into my palm and laughed.

"What's the matter, you crazy?"

"Yes," I said. "You got a phone?"

"No. Where you going?"

"Out. Good-bye, Charity."

"Hey, now wait, honey. Just when I got coffee for you."

I snatched the door open. She caught my sleeve.

"You can't go away like this! How's about a little something for Charity?"

"You'll get yours when you make the rounds to-morrow, if you don't have a hangover from those sherry highballs," I said cheerfully. "And don't forget the five you swiped from the tip plate. Better watch out for that waiter, by the way. I think he saw you do it."

"You're not drunk!" she gasped.

"You're not a witch," I grinned. I blew her a kiss and ran out.

I shall always remember her like that, round-eyed, a little more astonished than she was resentful, the beloved dollar signs fading from her hot brown eyes, the pathetic, useless little twitch of her hips she summoned up as a last plea.

Ever try to find a phone booth at five a.m.? I half-trotted nine blocks before I found a cab, and I was on the Queens side of the Triboro Bridge before I found a gas station open.

I dialled. The phone said, "Hello?"

"Kelley!" I roared happily. "Why didn't you tell me? You'd 'a saved me sixty bucks' worth of the most dismal fun I ever——"

"This is Milton," said the telephone. "Hal just died."

My mouth was still open and I guess it just stayed that way. Anyway it was cold inside when I closed it. "I'll be right over."

"Better not," said Milton. His voice was shaking with incomplete control. "Unless you really want to . . . there's nothing you can do, and I'm going to be . . . busy."

"Where's Kelley?" I whispered.

"I don't know."

"Well," I said. "Call me."

I got back into my taxi and went home. I don't remember the trip.

Sometimes I think I dreamed I saw Kelley that morning.

A lot of alcohol and enough emotion to kill it, mixed with no sleep for thirty hours, makes for blackout. I came up out of it reluctantly, feeling that this was no kind of world to be aware of. Not to-day.

I lay looking at the bookcase. It was very quiet. I closed my eyes, turned over, burrowed into the pillow, opened my eyes again and saw Kelley sitting in the easy chair, poured out in his relaxed feline fashion, legs too long, arms too long, eyes too long and only partly open.

I didn't ask him how he got in because he was already in, and welcome. I didn't say anything because I didn't want to be the one to tell him about Hal. And besides I wasn't awake yet. I just lay there.

"Milton told me," he said. "It's all right."

I nodded.

Kelley said, "I read your story. I found some more and read them too. You got a lot of imagination."

He hung a cigarette on his lower lip and lit it. "Milton, he's got a lot of knowledge. Now, both of you think real good up to a point. Then too much knowledge presses him off to the no'theast. And too much imagination squeezes you off to the no'thwest!"

He smoked a while.

"Me, I think straight through but it takes me a while."

I palmed my eyeballs. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"That's okay," he said quietly. "Look, I'm goin' after what killed Hal."

I closed my eyes and saw a vicious, pretty, empty little face. I said, "I was most of the night with Charity."

"Were you now."

"Kelley," I said, "if it's her you're after, forget it. She's a sleazy little tramp but she's also a little kid who never had a chance. She didn't kill Hal."

"I know she didn't. I don't feel about her one way or the other. I know what killed Hal, though, and I'm goin' after it the only way I know for sure."

"All right then," I said. I let my head dig back into the pillow. "What did kill him?"

"Milton told you about that doll Hal give her."

"He told me. There's nothing in that, Kelley. For a man to be a voodoo victim, he's got to believe that——"

"Yeh, yeh, yeh. Milt told me. For hours he told me."

"Well, all right."

"You got imagination," Kelley said sleepily. "Now just imagine along with me a while. Milt tell you how some folks, if you point a gun at 'em and go bang, they drop dead, even if there was only blanks in the gun?"

"He didn't, but I read it somewhere. Same general idea."

"Now imagine all the shootings you ever heard of was like that, with blanks."

"Go ahead."

"You got a lot of evidence, a lot of experts, to prove about this believing business, ever' time anyone gets shot."

"Got it."

"Now imagine somebody shows up with live ammunition in his gun. Do you think those bullets going to give a damn who believes what?"

I didn't say anything.

"For a long time people been makin' dolls and stickin' pins in 'em. Wherever somebody believes it can happen, they get it. Now suppose somebody shows up with the doll all those dolls was copied from. The real one."

I lay still.

"You don't have to know nothin' about it," said Kelly lazily. "You don't have to be anybody special. You don't have to understand how it works. Nobody has to believe nothing. All you do, you just point it where you want it to work."

"Point it how?" I whispered.

He shrugged. "Call the doll by a name. Hate it, maybe."

"For God's sake, Kelley, you're crazy! Why, there can't be anything like that!"

"You eat a steak," Kelley said. "How's your gut know what to take and what to pass? Do *you* know?"

"Some people know."

"You don't. But your gut does. So there's lots of natural laws that are goin' to work whether anyone understands 'em or not. Lots of sailors take a trick at the wheel without knowin' how a steering engine works. Well, that's me. I know where I'm goin' and I know I'll get there. What do I care how does it work, or who believes what?"

"Fine, so what are you going to do?"

"Get what got Hal." His tone was just as lazy but his voice was very deep, and I knew when not to ask any more questions. Instead I said, with a certain amount of annoyance, "Why tell me?"

"Want you to do something for me."

"What?"

"Don't tell no one what I just said for a while. And keep something for me."

"What? And for how long?"

"You'll know."

I'd have risen up and roared at him if he had not chosen just that second to get up and drift out of the bedroom. "What gets me," he said quietly from the other room, "is I could have figured this out six months ago."

I fell asleep straining to hear him go out. He moves quieter than any big man I ever saw.

It was afternoon when I awoke. The doll was sitting on the mantelpiece glaring at me. Ugliest thing ever happened.

I saw Kelley at Hal's funeral. He and Milt and I had a sombre drink afterward. We didn't talk about dolls. Far as I know Kelley shipped out right afterward. You assume that seamen do, when they drop out of sight. Milton was as busy as a doctor, which is very. I left the doll where it was for a week or two, wondering when Kelley was going to get around to his project. He'd probably call for it when he was ready. Meanwhile I respected his request and told no one about it. One day when some people were coming over I shoved it in the top shelf of the closet, and somehow it just got left there.

About a month afterward I began to notice the smell. I couldn't identify it right away; it was too faint; but whatever it was, I didn't like it. I traced it to the closet, and then to the doll. I took it down and sniffed it. My breath exploded out. It was that same smell a lot of people wish they could forget—what Milton called necrotic flesh. I came within an inch of pitching the filthy thing down the incinerator, but a promise is a promise. I put it down on the table, where it slumped repulsively. One of the legs was broken above the knee. I mean, it seemed to have two knee joints. And it was somehow puffy, sick-looking.

I had an old bell-jar somewhere, that once had a clock in it. I found it and a piece of inlaid linoleum, and put the doll under the jar at least so I could live with it.

I worked and saw people—dinner with Milton, once—and the

days went by the way they do, and then one night it occurred to me to look at the doll again.

It was in pretty sorry shape. I'd tried to keep it fairly cool, but it seemed to be melting and running all over. For a moment I worried about what Kelley might say, and then I heartily damned Kelley and put the whole mess down in the cellar.

And I guess it was altogether two months after Hal's death that I wondered why I'd assumed Kelley would have to call for the little horror before he did what he had to do. He said he was going to get what got Hal, and he intimated that the doll was that something.

Well, that doll was being got, but good. I brought it up and put it under the light. It was still a figurine, but it was one unholy mess. "Attaboy, Kelley," I gloated. "Go get 'em, kid."

Milton called me up and asked me to meet him at Rudy's. He sounded pretty bad. We had the shortest drink yet.

He was sitting in the back booth chewing on the insides of his cheeks. His lips were grey and he slopped his drink when he lifted it.

"What in time happened to you?" I gasped.

He gave me a ghastly smile. "I'm famous," he said. I heard his glass chatter against his teeth. He said, "I called in so many consultants on Hal Kelley that I'm supposed to be an expert on that —on that . . . condition." He forced his glass back to the table with both hands and held it down. He tried to smile and I wished he wouldn't. He stopped trying and almost whimpered, "I can't nurse one of 'em like that again. I can't."

"You going to tell me what happened?" I asked harshly. That works sometimes.

"Oh, oh yes. Well, they brought in a . . . another one. At General. They called me in. Just like Hal. I mean *exactly* like Hal. Only I won't have to nurse this one, no I won't, I won't have to. She died six hours after she arrived."

"She?"

"You know what you'd have to do to someone to make them look like that?" he said shrilly. "You'd have to tie off parts so they mortified. You'd have to use a wood rasp, maybe; a club;

filth to rub into the wounds. You'd have to break bones in a vice."

"All right, all right, but nobody——"

"And you'd have to do that for about two months, every day, every night." He rubbed his eyes. He drove his knuckles in so hard that I caught at his wrists. "I *know* nobody did it; did I say anyone did it?" he barked. "Nobody did anything to Hal, did they?"

"Drink up."

He didn't. He whispered, "She just said the same thing over and over every time anyone talked to her. They'd say, 'What happened?' or 'Who did this to you?' or 'What's your name?' and she'd say, 'He called me Dolly.' That's all she'd say, just 'He called me Dolly'."

I got up. " 'Bye, Milt."

He looked stricken. "Don't go, will you, you just got——"

"I got to go," I said. I didn't look back. I had to get out and ask myself some questions. Think.

Who's guilty of murder, I asked myself, the one who pulls the trigger, or the gun?

I thought of a poor damn pretty, empty little face with greedy hot brown eyes, and what Kelley said, "I don't care about her one way or the other."

I thought, when she was twisting and breaking and sticking, how did it look to the doll? Bet she never even wondered about that.

I thought, action. A girl throws a fan at a man. Reaction: The man throws the girl at the fan. Action: A wheel sticks on a shaft. Reaction: Knock the shaft out of the wheel. Situation: We can't get inside. Resolution: Take the outside off it.

It's a way of thinking.

How do you kill a person? Use a doll.

How do you kill a doll?

Who's guilty, the one who pulls the trigger, or the gun?

"He called me Dolly."

"He called me Dolly."

"He called me Dolly."

When I got home the phone was ringing.

"Hi," said Kelley.

I said, "It's all gone. The doll's all gone. Kelley," I said, "stay away from me."

"All right," said Kelley.

Joris-Karl Huysmans

THE BLACK MASS

from Là-Bas

Paris, towards the end of the last century.

Durtal is a student of occultism in all its forms, with particular emphasis on the field of the succubus and the incubus and the activities of Gilles de Rais. (Among many other strange things, Là-Bas contains a full life-history of that monster-adept, Marshal of France and associate of the great witch, Jeanne d'Arc.)

In the course of his investigations, Durtal learns that his mistress, Hyacinthe Chantelouve—whom he suspects of being a succubus herself—is a disciple of the notorious diabolist, Canon Docre; and he at last persuades her to take him to a celebration by Docre of the Black Mass.

They were in a cab jolting along the Rue de Vaugirard. Mme Chantelouve had drawn herself into one corner, where she sat without breathing a syllable. Durtal scrutinized her face when, on passing a street-lamp, a fleeting gleam of light fell momentarily across her veil. She seemed to him agitated and nervous under her quiet exterior. He took her hand and she did not draw it away, but he could feel its coldness through her glove, and her hair this evening looked disordered, and less fine and glossy than usual.

"We are nearly there, dear?" he asked. But in a low strained voice she bade him: "Please, don't talk!"—and embarrassed by

her silent, almost hostile attitude, he occupied himself by observing from the windows the route they were following.

The street stretched in endless perspective, almost deserted and so ill-paved that the springs of their conveyance creaked at every yard; the pavement too was dimly lighted, the lamp-posts getting more and more widely spaced the nearer they approached the fortifications.

"What an odd caprice!" he muttered to himself, vexed at the woman's cold, reserved bearing.

At last the vehicle turned sharply down a dark side street, swung round a corner and stopped.

Hyacinthe got out. While waiting for the change the driver had to give him, Durtal glanced about him, examining his surroundings, to discover he was in a sort of blind alley. Low, dreary-looking houses lined a roadway cobbled and without sidewalks; turning round when the cabman took his departure, he found himself in front of a long, high wall, over which the rustle of shadowy trees could be heard. A small door, pierced by a wicket, was sunk in the thickness of the gloomy wall, which had been mended with streaks of plaster stopping up cracks and plugging holes. Suddenly, further off, a light shone out from a shop-front, and, attracted no doubt by the rumbling of wheels, a man wearing a wine-dealer's apron peered from a doorway, and spat on the doorstep.

"This is the place," announced Mme Chantelouve.

She rang and the wicket opened; she raised her veil and the light of a lantern fell on her face; the door fell back noiselessly and they walked on into a garden.

"Good evening, Madame."

"Good evening, Marie. It is in the Chapel?"

"Yes, shall I show Madame the way?"

"No, thank you."

The woman carrying the lantern stared hard at Durtal, who saw under her frilled cap grey locks coiled untidily above an old, wrinkled visage: however, she gave him no time for further scrutiny as she at once retired into an outbuilding near the wall that served her as porter's lodge.

He followed Hyacinthe, who advanced along dark paths smelling of box up to the steps of a detached building. She seemed quite at home, pushing open the doors, and whilst her heels sounded over the gravel path.

"Take care," she cried, after crossing an outer lobby, "there are three steps."

They emerged into a courtyard, and halted before the door of an old house, where she rang the bell. A short slight young man appeared and drew to one side, asking her how she did in an affected, sing-song voice. She passed on with a bow, and Durtal was confronted with a pale unhealthy countenance, watery, gummy eyes, cheeks plastered with rouge, and painted lips.

"You never told me I should be mixing with such company," he said to Hyacinthe, whom he came up with at the bend of a corridor lighted by a lamp.

"Were you expecting to meet Saints here?"—and she shrugged her shoulders as she pulled open a door. They were in a Chapel, a room with a low ceiling crossed by beams daubed with tar, windows hidden behind heavy curtains, and cracked and discoloured walls. Durtal recoiled the instant he was inside. From overheated radiators came a blast of stifling air, while an abominable stench of mingled damp, mildew and a smelly stove, intensified by the acrid odour of saltwort, resin, and burning herbs, almost choked him and made his temples throb.

He groped his way forward, his eyes exploring the Chapel by the light of sanctuary lamps in bowls of gilt bronze and rose-coloured glass which were suspended from the roof. Hyacinthe signed to him to be seated, and moved away towards a group of persons lounging on divans in a corner among the shadows. Somewhat embarrassed to find himself thus left alone, he noticed how these included very few men and a good many women; but it was in vain that he strove to distinguish their features. Here and there, however, when a lamp flared up for a moment, he caught a glimpse of the Juno-like figure of a big dark woman, then of a man's clean-shaven and grave face. He watched them, and observed that the women were not chatting together, but

talked in frightened, serious tones; not a laugh, not an exclamation was to be heard, only a vague, furtive whispering, unpunctuated by a single gesture.

"Upon my soul," he said to himself, "Satan does not appear to make his flock very cheerful!"

An acolyte, robed in red, advanced to the upper end of the Chapel and lit a row of wax candles. The altar became visible, an ordinary church altar, surmounted by a tabernacle, and above it a Crucifix with a grotesque, squalid figure. The head was carried high on an absurdly elongated neck, while lines daubed on the cheeks transformed the suffering face into a mask twisted in an ignoble grin. Before the tabernacle was placed a chalice covered with the veil; the acolyte was smoothing out the altar linen with his hands, raising himself tiptoe on one foot, under pretence of reaching up to the black candles whose reek of bitumen and pitch was now added to the other suffocating effluvia of the place.

Durtal recognized under his red cassock the young fellow who was in charge of the door at his entrance, and understood the rôle reserved for the wretch, whose vile filthiness was a mockery in place of the purity the Church requires from servers at her altars.

Then another, uglier than his comrade, stepped forward. Emaciated, hollow-chested, racked with coughing, his face made up with rouge and white grease-paint, he limped in, intoning a chant. He went up to the tripods standing on either side the altar, stirred the embers smouldering in the ashes, and threw on lumps of resin and handfuls of dry leaves.

Durtal was beginning to feel bored when Hyacinthe rejoined him; she excused herself for having left him so long alone, urged him to move his seat and led him to a spot behind all the rows of chairs, right at the back.

"So we are in a real Chapel?" he asked.

"Yes, this house, the church and the garden we came through are the remains of a Convent of Ursulines, now suppressed. For a long time the Chapel was used to store fodder in; the house belonged to a livery-stable keeper, who sold it to that lady over there," and she indicated a big dark woman, the same Durtal had had a glimpse of before.

"And is she married, this lady?"

"No, she was once a nun, who was debauched by Canon Docre."

"Oh!—and those gentlemen who seem so anxious to remain in obscurity?"

"They are Satanists . . . there is one of them who was a Professor at the École de Médecine; he has an oratory in his house, where he prays before a statue of Venus Astarte set up on an altar."

"Nonsense!"

"It is a fact; he is getting old and his supplications to demons invigorate him. He spends his time and money on creatures of that sort,"—and she pointed to the acolytes.

"You vouch for the truth of this story?"

"I am so far from inventing it that you will find it all told at full length in a religious periodical, *Les Annales de la Sainteté*. Well, though he was plainly pointed to in the article, he has never dared to proceed against the paper!—Why, what is the matter with you?" she asked, staring at him.

"The matter is . . . I am suffocating; the smell of these perfuming pans is insufferable."

"You will get used to it in a few moments."

"But what is it they burn to stink like that?"

"Rue, henbane and thorn-apple leaves, dried nightshade and myrtle; they are perfumes beloved of Satan, our master!"

She said this in the guttural, unnatural voice that on certain emotional occasions characterized her.

He looked hard at her; her face was pale, her teeth clenched, the lids flickering over her stormy eyes.

"Here he is!" she cried suddenly, while the women hurried across to kneel at the chairs in front.

Preceded by two acolytes and wearing a scarlet biretta decorated with a pair of bison's horns of red material, the Canon entered.

Durtal watched him as he advanced to the altar. He was tall, but ill proportioned, all head and shoulders; a bald forehead ran down in one unbroken line to a straight nose; lips and cheeks showed the harsh, dry stubble common to ecclesiastics who have

shaved for years; the features were irregular and coarse; the eyes, like apple-pips, small, black, and close together on either side the nose, had a phosphorescent glitter. Taken all together, the expression was thoroughly bad and untrustworthy, but full of fire and energy, and those hard, steady eyes had none of the sly, shifty look Durtal had expected to see.

He bowed solemnly before the altar, mounted the steps and began his mass.

Durtal then saw that, under his sacrificial robes, he was naked. The chasuble was of the usual shape, but of a dark blood-red colour, and in the middle, within a triangle, surrounded by a tangled growth of meadow-saffron, sorrel-apple and spurge, a black he-goat stood, butting with its horns.

Docre made the genuflexions and bowings, less or more profound, as specified in the ritual; the servers kneeling intoned the Latin responses in clear, ringing voices, dwelling long on the final syllables of the words.

"Why, it is just an ordinary low mass," Durtal observed to Mme Chantelouve.

She shook her head. In fact, at that moment the two servers passed behind the altar and brought back with them, the one copper chafing-dishes, the other small censers, which they distributed among the congregation. Soon all the women were wrapped in clouds of smoke; some of them dropped their heads over the chafing-dishes and eagerly inhaled the fumes, emitting hoarse gasps.

At this point the office was suspended. The priest descended the altar steps backwards and in a quavering, high-pitched voice cried:

"Lord of evil, thou who dost reward sins and heinous vices, Satan, it is thou whom we adore, God of reason, God of justice!

"Suzerain of the scornful, Defence of the down-trodden, Depository of cherished hatreds, thou only dost make fertile the brain of the man crushed by injustice; thou dost whisper in his ear ideas of long-meditated vengeance and sure retaliation! thou dost incite him to murder and give him the exuberant joy of reprisals inflicted, the glorious intoxication of punishments he has accomplished and tears he has caused to flow!

"Master, thy faithful servants implore thee on their knees. They beseech thee grant them assurance of those sweet sins Justice takes no heed of; they beseech thee assist the spells whose unrecognised traces baffle human reason. Fame, fortune, power they ask of thee, King of the disinherited whom the inexorable Father drove forth from Heaven!"

Then Docre got to his feet and, with outstretched arms, in a ringing voice of hate vociferated:

"And Thou, Thou, whom by right of my priesthood I force to come down and enter into this host and become transubstantiated in this bread . . ."

Then followed a litany of insults, of invective that was almost insane in its vileness and its hate.

"Amen," shrilled the clear voice of the acolytes.

Durtal, listening to this torrent of blasphemies and abuse, was astounded at the foul profanity of the priest. A silence ensued after his ravings; the Chapel was misty with the smoke of censers. The women, hitherto silent, stirred restlessly when, mounting again to the altar, the Canon turned towards them and blessed them with a sweeping gesture of the left hand.

And suddenly the servers tinkled little bells. This seemed to be a signal; women fell to the floor and rolled on the carpets. One, her eyes suddenly convulsed in a horrible squint, clucked like a hen, then, fallen dumb, gaped with wide-open jaws, the tongue retracted till its tip touched the palate high up; another, her face puffed and livid, pupils dilated, lolled back her head on her shoulders, then stiffened in a sudden spasm and tore at her bosom with her nails; another, grimacing horribly, shot out a white tongue, which she could not draw in again, from a bleeding mouth guarded by a portcullis of red teeth.

At that moment Durtal stood up to get a better view and could plainly see and hear the Canon.

He was gazing at the Crucifix surmounting the tabernacle and with outspread arms was belching forth appalling outrages, using what strength was left him to bellow a torrent of obscenities which would have shamed a drunken gangster. One of the servers knelt before him, turning his back on the altar. A shudder

ran through the priest's limbs. Solemnly, but in a quavering voice, he pronounced the words: *Hoc est enim corpus meum*, then instead of genuflecting after the consecration before the Sacred Body, he faced round to the congregation and stood there bloated, haggard and dripping with sweat.

He was staggering between the two acolytes, while the host he held in his hands tumbled, defiled and filthy, on the altar steps.

Then Durtal felt a shudder run through him, for a wind of madness shook the assemblage. The breath of high hysteria succeeded the profane outrage and bowed the women's heads; they fell upon the Eucharistic bread, clawed at it, and tearing off fragments, ate this filth.

One woman burst out in a strident laugh and insanely yelled: "Father, Father!" An old beldam wrenched out handfuls of her hair, leapt high in the air, spun round on her heels, stood on one leg and collapsed beside a girl who, crouching against one wall, was writhing in convulsions, slavering at the mouth, weeping as she spat out hideous blasphemies. And Durtal, appalled, saw through the smoke as in a fog the red horns on Docre's head.

Then, at the back of the Chapel in the shadows a little girl, who had not stirred till that moment, reeled forward and began to howl like a rabid bitch!

Overwhelmed with disgust and almost stifled, Durtal longed to escape. He looked for Hyacinthe, but she was not there. At last he saw her beside the Canon; stepping over the bodies on the carpets, he approached her. With quivering nostrils she was inhaling the odours of the perfumes.

"The savour of the Witches' Sabbath!" she said to him in a low voice through clenched teeth.

"Are you coming?" he said sharply.

She seemed to awake from a dream, hesitated a moment, then without a word she followed him.

He plied his elbows, forcing a way through the women, who with teeth bare seemed ready to snap and bite; he pushed Mme Chantelouve towards the door and, the porter's lodge being open, pulled the cord and found himself in the street.

There he halted and drew in deep breaths of fresh air; Hyacinthe, eyes fixed on vacancy, stood motionless, leaning against the wall.

He looked at her. "Do you wish to go back home?" he asked in a tone that betrayed a touch of scorn.

"No," she brought out with an effort, "but these scenes overcome me. I feel dizzy, I want a glass of water to put me right," —and she set off up the street, making straight for a wine-shop where the light streamed from the open door.

It was a disreputable hole, a small hall with wooden tables and chairs, a zinc-covered counter, a zanzibar board, some blue jars, and hanging from the ceiling a gas-bracket in the shape of a U; two rather rough-looking navvies sat playing cards; they turned round and laughed, while the landlord took a short pipe from his mouth and expectorated on the sanded floor. He showed no surprise at seeing this elegantly attired woman in his den of a place. Durtal, who was eyeing him, even fancied he caught a wink exchanged between the fellow and Mme Chantelouve.

The man lit a candle, and said under his breath:

"You can't drink, without attracting attention, along with these chaps. I'm going to take you to a room you will have to yourselves."

"Well, well," grumbled Durtal to his companion, who was already mounting a spiral staircase, "here's a fine how-d'ye-do for a simple glass of water."

But she had already entered a bedroom with a tattered paper peeling off the damp walls, which were adorned with pictures cut from the illustrated papers and stuck up with drawing-pins; the floor was paved with cracked tiles gaping in holes and hollows, and it was barely furnished with a pole-bedstead without curtains, a table, a wash-hand basin and a couple of chairs.

Their host fetched a small decanter of brandy, sugar, a water-jug and glasses, then returned downstairs. Thereupon, with wild, sombre eyes, she threw her arms about Durtal's neck.

"No, no!" he cried, furious at having fallen into this trap, "I have had enough of all that! And besides, it is getting late and

your husband is expecting you; it is high time for you to go back to him!"

She did not so much as listen to what he said.

Suddenly he shuddered to see crumbs of consecrated wafers scattered about.

"Oh! you horrify me!" he told her. "Come, let us go!"

The foulness of the room sickened him. He was not absolutely certain about Transubstantiation. "But supposing it to be true," he said to himself, "supposing the Presence to be real, as Hyacinthe and that scurvy priest avouch it is! No, decidedly I am more than fed up with filth and foulness; this is the end; here is a good opportunity to finish with this creature, whom after all, since our first meeting, I have only tolerated—and I am going to do it!"

Downstairs in the bar as he quickly passed through he had to put up with the sniggering of the navvies; he paid, and without bothering to wait for his change, made off as quickly as he could. They reached the Rue de Vaugirard, where he hailed a conveyance. They were driven along without once glancing at each other, absorbed in their own thoughts.

"I shall see you again soon!" whispered Mme Chantelouve almost timidly when she was put down at her door.

"No," he answered her aloud, in a firm tone; "there is really and truly no chance of our coming to an understanding; you want everything, and I want nothing. Far better to break off our relations, which will only drag on and on, to end in quarrels and mutual recriminations. Oh! and then, after what happened this evening, no! I say, no!"—and he gave his address to the cabman, flinging himself into the furthermost corner of the cab.

And so, in the rest of the book, and through its several sequels, Durtal-Huysmans turns from his pre-occupations with occultism, and moves towards his final conversion.

ENVOI

The sequel to the anecdote of the Devil as Broadcaster is perhaps—like the Huysmans Black Mass description which you have just read—a shade disappointing; yet it too might bear looking at twice.

When the last red light had gone out, I went home to a flat I had at that time in a respectable, even rather genteel district of Glasgow. My wife and I had a late meal, discussed the programme in the half-weary way one does when all the inevitable crises are over, and went to bed . . . and were suddenly affrighted by a terrified screaming from our six-months-old son in the room next door.

We rushed through and found him streaming with blood over the mouth and hands—got him out of the room and slammed the door—and even as we did so heard something scrabbling and gnawing in utmost ferocity along the inside sill.

The doctor came and dressed the considerable wounds (the marks are still there on the boy to this day), and suggested an attack by a rat—a conclusion we had already come to from the feverish gnarlings still going on inside the nursery.

We eventually, to cut it short, found and killed the creature: the biggest buck-rat that I, or even the rat expert who came to help us, had ever seen. But what we never found was how the huge thing had ever entered that impregnable little room with a concrete surround, no fireplace, no gaps or cracks in any of the walls—nor why it had climbed the long hill from dockland to that indeed respectable suburb.

A Scots author friend was staying with us at the time, and

when all was done, and the gentian-plastered boy was out of danger, he said:

"You know what happened, of course?"

And when we said that we did not, except that the pointless attack had been made by the malevolent thing, he went on:

"Tonight, you invited the Devil to come. And so he did; but not in the little catchpenny way you thought he might—in a way that he knew would touch you, personally, so much more deeply. That rat—poor little devil itself, now that it lies there empty—was only the instrument."

Well: indeed in cold print and over the years it does seem paltry; and our friend was a devout believer; but it did happen. In its small way, I could hardly help but think, it was a warning. The anecdote becomes a parable; and the very smallness of the occurrence was important: its very *gentleness* was important.

In their different ways, all the stories in this book have illustrated just that, I think. We are back at the woman who, for her sins, wished for company. If we lay ourselves open to evil, evil will come, in whatever unexpected guise, from within or even indeed from without; and bad things will happen. If we invite the Devil, in short—if we are "at home" to him . . . he will gratefully accept, and put an end to couching only at the door. I shouldn't dance: for him, it is always Hallowe'en.

"What's o'clock?" one of the characters in a Beddoes play has the innocent temerity to ask. And the answer, coming pat, is the book's gothic epigraph—which should, of course, have appeared at the beginning, but since all is widdershins comes now instead:

It wants a quarter to twelve,
And to-morrow's Doomsday.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments are due to the holders of copyrights, or their agents, for their kind permission to include certain stories in this book, as follows:

To Messrs. A. D. Peters for "The Earlier Service" by Margaret Irwin, and to the same firm and Messrs. Rupert Hart-Davis for "Homecoming" by Ray Bradbury, from *The October Country*, and for "The Lady on the Grey" by John Collier.

To Messrs. Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., and the representatives of Dr. M. R. James for "Casting the Runes", from *The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James.*

To Mr. John Wyndham for "More Spinned Against . . ."

To Mr. Dennis Wheatley and Messrs. Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd. for "The Snake" from *Gunmen, Gallants and Ghosts.*

To Miss Gertrude Louise Schlich and Messrs. Curtis Brown Ltd. for "Couching at the Door" by D. K. Broster.

To Messrs. Laurence Pollinger Ltd. for "A Way of Thinking" by Theodore Sturgeon, from the Abelard Press (New York) edition of *E Pluribus Unicorn* (and a personal note of thanks is due here too from the editor to Mr. John Carnell for his help in obtaining this elusive tale).

To Mrs. H. I. Roberts for "The Hill" by R. Ellis Roberts.

To the Fortune Press Ltd. for the excerpt from *Là-Bas* by J.-K. Huysmans, from their own translation of that book.

To the author and Messrs. Faber & Faber Ltd. for the lines from W. H. Auden quoted in the Introduction.

SOME FABER PAPER COVERED EDITIONS

THE ASCENT OF F6 *and* ON THE FRONTIER	W. H. Auden & Christopher Isherwood	6*s*
HISTORY IN ENGLISH WORDS	Owen Barfield	8*s* 6*d*
NIGHTWOOD	Djuna Barnes	8*s* 6*d*
YOUR PUPPY AND HOW TO TRAIN HIM	Huldine V. Beamish	6*s*
WAITING FOR GODOT	Samuel Beckett	4*s* 6*d*
THE POETICAL WORKS OF RUPERT BROOKE	Rupert Brooke (ed. by Sir Geoffrey Keynes)	5*s*
CHAUCER	G. K. Chesterton	9*s* 6*d*
CORTÉS AND MONTEZUMA	Maurice Collis	7*s* 6*d*
MARCO POLO	Maurice Collis	5*s*
BEST DETECTIVE STORIES	ed. by Edmund Crispin	5*s*
BEST SF: SCIENCE FICTION STORIES	ed. by Edmund Crispin	7*s* 6*d*
BEST SF TWO	ed. by Edmund Crispin	6*s*
BEST SF THREE	ed. by Edmund Crispin	6*s*
BEST HORROR STORIES	ed. by John Keir Cross	6*s*
BEST BLACK MAGIC STORIES	ed. by John Keir Cross	6*s* 6*d*
SHAKESPEARE'S DOCTRINE OF NATURE	John F. Danby	10*s* 6*d*
GHOSTLY TALES TO BE TOLD	ed. by Basil Davenport	7*s* 6*d*
PEACOCK PIE	Water de la Mare	6*s*
SOME STORIES	Walter de la Mare	6*s*
A CHOICE OF DE LA MARE'S VERSE	Walter de la Mare (selected by W. H. Auden)	6*s* 6*d*
LEOPARDS AND LILIES	Alfred Duggan	6*s*
CONSCIENCE OF THE KING	Alfred Duggan	6*s* 6*d*
GOD AND MY RIGHT	Alfred Duggan	8*s* 6*d*
THE OVERLOADED ARK	Gerald Durrell	6*s*
JUSTINE	Lawrence Durrell	5*s*
BALTHAZAR	Lawrence Durrell	6*s*
MOUNTOLIVE	Lawrence Durrell	5*s*
CLEA	Lawrence Durrell	5*s*
BITTER LEMONS	Lawrence Durrell	6*s* 6*d*
REFLECTIONS ON A MARINE VENUS	Lawrence Durrell	7*s* 6*d*
PROSPERO'S CELL	Lawrence Durrell	6*s*
ESPRIT DE CORPS	Lawrence Durrell	5*s*
SELECTED POEMS	T. S. Eliot	4*s* 6*d*
FOUR QUARTETS	T. S. Eliot	3*s*
THE FAMILY REUNION	T. S. Eliot	6*s*
THE COCKTAIL PARTY	T. S. Eliot	6*s*
NOTES TOWARDS THE DEFINITION OF CULTURE	T. S. Eliot	5*s*
ELIZABETHAN DRAMATISTS	T. S. Eliot	7*s* 6*d*
OLD POSSUM'S BOOK OF PRACTICAL CATS	T. S. Eliot	4*s* 6*d*
INTRODUCING JAMES JOYCE	T. S. Eliot	5*s*
MAGIC AS A HOBBY	Bruce Elliott	6*s* 6*d*

continued overleaf

FABER paper covered EDITIONS

continued from overleaf

THE MAIDS	Jean Genet	4*s* 6*d*
LORD OF THE FLIES (Film Edition)	William Golding	6*s*
THE INHERITORS	William Golding	6*s*
PINCHER MARTIN	William Golding	6*s*
FREE FALL	William Golding	6*s*
THE WHITE GODDESS	Robert Graves	15*s*
SELECTED POEMS	Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes	5*s*
EVERYONE'S BOOK ABOUT THE ENGLISH CHURCH	F. C. Happold	5*s*
THE SHRIMP AND THE ANEMONE	L. P. Hartley	6*s*
IN PARENTHESIS	David Jones	9*s* 6*d*
ZORBA THE GREEK	Nikos Kazantzakis	8*s* 6*d*
CHRIST RECRUCIFIED	Nikos Kazantzakis	10*s* 6*d*
A CHOICE OF KIPLING'S VERSE	Rudyard Kipling (made by T. S. Eliot)	6*s* 6*d*
ARCHY AND MEHITABEL	Don Marquis	5*s*
ARCHY'S LIFE OF MEHITABEL	Don Marquis	5*s*
WHO MOVED THE STONE?	Frank Morison	5*s*
COAST TO COAST	James Morris	9*s* 6*d*
VENICE	James Morris	9*s* 6*d*
APPOINTMENT IN SAMARRA	John O'Hara	6*s*
THE ENTERTAINER	John Osborne	4*s* 6*d*
LOOK BACK IN ANGER	John Osborne	4*s* 6*d*
ABC OF READING	Ezra Pound	6*s*
LITERARY ESSAYS OF EZRA POUND	Ezra Pound	15*s*
SELECTED POEMS	Ezra Pound	6*s*
PERIOD PIECE	Gwen Raverat	6*s* 6*d*
ART NOW	Herbert Read	10*s* 6*d*
BEST GHOST STORIES	ed. by Anne Ridler	6*s* 6*d*
THE FABER BOOK OF MODERN VERSE	ed. by Michael Roberts & Anne Ridler	7*s* 6*d*
THE HUMAN COMEDY	William Saroyan	6*s* 6*d*
MY NAME IS ARAM	William Saroyan	6*s* 6*d*
MEMOIRS OF A FOX-HUNTING MAN	Siegfried Sassoon	6*s*
THE LIVING LANDSCAPE OF BRITAIN	Walter Shepherd	13*s* 6*d*
VERSE AND WORSE	ed. by Arnold Silcock	6*s*
THE FABER BOOK OF CHILDREN'S VERSE	compiled by Janet Adam Smith	8*s* 6*d*
THE DEATH OF TRAGEDY	George Steiner	12*s* 6*d*
THE PALM-WINE DRINKARD	Amos Tutuola	6*s*
A TRAVELLER IN TIME	Alison Uttley	7*s* 6*d*
THREE RIVERS OF FRANCE	Freda White	10*s* 6*d*
WAR IN HEAVEN	Charles Williams	6*s*
MANY DIMENSIONS	Charles Williams	6*s* 6*d*
SALAR THE SALMON	Henry Williamson	6*s* 6*d*

Please write to *All prices are net*

Faber & Faber Ltd., 24 Russell Square, London, W.C.1

for a complete list of Faber Paper Covered Editions