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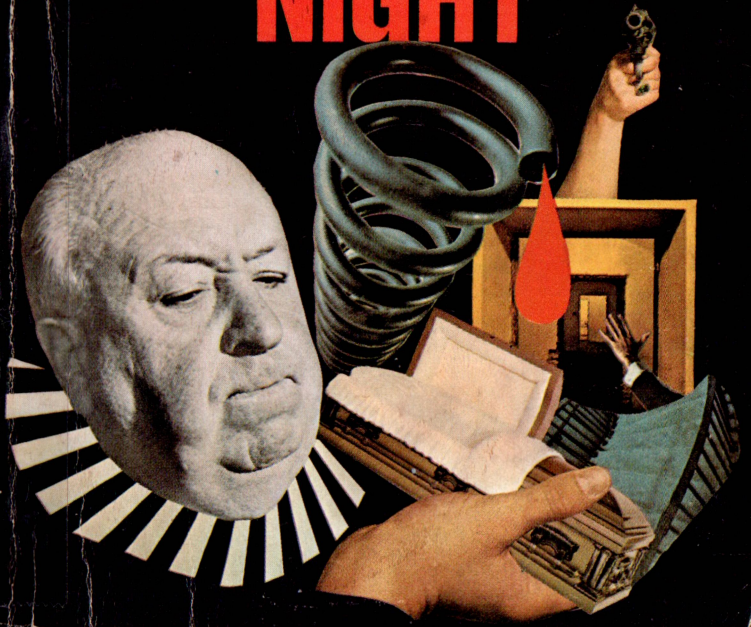

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stories for late at night

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DEATH IS A DREAM

ROBERT ARTHUR

You're asleep now, David.

Yes, I'm asleep.

I want you to rest for a minute while I talk to your wife.

All right, Doctor, I'll rest.

Your husband is under light hypnosis now, Mrs. Carpenter. We can talk without disturbing him.

I understand, Dr. Manson.

Now tell me about these nightmares he's been having. You say they started the night you were married?

Yes, Doctor, a week ago. We came directly here to our new house after the ceremony. We had a small wedding supper here and didn't retire until midnight. It was just dawn when David woke me by crying out in his sleep. He was twisting and struggling and saying something unintelligible. I woke him. He was pale and trembling and said he'd been having a nightmare.

But he couldn't remember any of the details?

No, nothing. He took a seconal and went back to sleep. But the next night the same thing happened—and the next. It's happened every night.

A recurrent nightmare. I see. But you mustn't be alarmed. I've known David since he was a boy, and I think we can rid him of this nightmare without difficulty.

Oh, Doctor, I hope so!

Possibly Richard is trying to break through into his consciousness again.

Richard? Who's Richard?

Richard is David's other self, his other personality.

I don't think I understand.

When David was twelve, he was in an automobile accident. This gave him a severe nervous shock and resulted in a form of schizophrenia in which he developed two distinct personalities. One personality was David's normal self. The other, the second personality, was reckless and mischievous, completely uninhibited. David called this personality Richard and said it was his twin brother, who lived in his mind.

How strange!

There are many such cases in medical history. When David was tired or worried, Richard was able to take over control of his actions. Then Richard did things like making David walk in his sleep and setting fire to the bedclothes. David couldn't help himself when Richard was in control. Sometimes he couldn't remember what happened. Other times he thought it had been only a nightmare.

How upsetting!

I handled David's case at the time and I thought we had made a complete cure and banished Richard for good. But it's possible that— Well, I'll question David now about this recurrent dream. The details will probably tell us what we need to know . . . David!

Yes, Doctor?

I want you to tell me about the dream that's been bothering you. You can remember it now, can't you?

The dream! Yes, yes, I can remember it now!

You mustn't get excited. Just be perfectly calm and tell me all about the dream.

All right, I'll be calm. I'll be quite calm.

That's fine. Now tell me about the first time you had this dream.

The first time—that was the night Ann and I were married. No, no, that's wrong. It was the night before we were married.

You're sure of that?

Yes. I'd spent the whole day arranging my law practice so I could take a few days off. In the evening I came out to this new house we'd bought here in Riverdale, to make sure everything was ready. I wanted everything to be perfect for Ann. It was nearly eleven before I got back downtown to my bachelor apartment. I was terribly tired.

I went to bed, but I was too tired. I couldn't sleep. I took a seconal tablet. But I'd hardly fallen asleep before the dream began.

How did it begin, David?

I dreamed the telephone rang. The telephone actually was on the table beside my bed, and in my dream I sat up and answered it. For the moment, it seemed real to me—I thought I actually had answered the phone. Then I realized I was dreaming.

What made you realize that, David?

Because it was Louise who spoke to me, and even in my sleep I knew that Louise was dead.

When did Louise die, David?

A year ago. She was driving through the mountains of West Virginia to visit her parents when her car went off the road. She was burned to death.

So of course, when you heard her voice, you knew you were dreaming.

Yes, of course. She said, "David, this is Louise . . . David, what's the matter, why don't you answer?"

For a moment I couldn't speak. Then in my dream I answered, "It can't be Louise. Louise is dead."

"I know, David." Louise's voice had the same mocking note I learned to know so well when she was alive. "Why, of course."

"This is just a dream," I told her. "In a minute I'm going to wake up."

"Oh yes, indeed, darling," Louise answered me. "I want you to be awake when I call on you. I'm leaving the cemetery now. I'll be there soon."

Then I suppose she hung up, I don't know. Suddenly it changed the way dreams do and I was sitting up, fully dressed, smoking a cigarette, waiting. Waiting for Louise to leave the cemetery and come to my apartment. I knew she couldn't, but as one accepts the impossible in a dream I sat waiting for her.

I had smoked two cigarettes when the apartment doorbell rang. Mechanically I crossed the room and opened the door. But it wasn't Louise who stood there. It was Richard.

"Your twin brother, Richard?"

Yes, my twin brother, but taller than I, stronger, handsomer. He stood looking at me, smiling, self-assured, the old recklessness in his eyes.

"Well, David," he asked, "aren't you going to invite me in? And after we haven't seen each other for fifteen years?"

"No, Richard!" I cried. "You can't come back!"

"But I am back," he said, and pushed past me into the room. "I've been planning to visit you for a long time, and tonight seemed like a good occasion."

"Why have you come?" I demanded. "You're dead. Dr. Manson and I killed you."

"Louise is dead too," Richard said. "But she's coming back tonight. Why shouldn't I?"

"What do you want?"

"Only to help you, David. You need somebody to stand by you tonight. You're much too nervous to face a dead wife by yourself."

"Go away, Richard," I begged him.

"There's someone at the door," he answered. "It must be Louise. I'll leave you alone to talk to her. But remember, I'm here if you need me."

He strolled into the next room. The doorbell sounded again, impatiently, and I opened the door. Louise stood there. She was dressed all in white, just as I had buried her, and the veil, that had hidden the terribly burned face, made a little swirling move-

ment about her head as she brushed past me silently into the room and settled, ever so slowly, into a chair.

For a long moment Louise said nothing. Then she said, "Why, David, you seem quite stricken dumb. Do shut the door. It's causing a draft and I'm not used to drafts. I've been shut up in a stuffy coffin for almost a year, you know."

I closed the door and words burst from me.

"What do you want here? Why have you come? You're dead."

She burst into laughter. "Why, David, you really believe that, don't you? I'm not dead. I've been having a little fun with you."

"Fun with me?' I repeated, and she laughed until I thought she was having hysterics.

"Yes, David," she gibed. "You've always reacted to a crisis by getting jumpy, so I couldn't resist playing the role of a ghost to see what you'd do."

"You're lying!" I shouted at her. "You are dead. I saw you buried."

"For heaven's sake, David." She was annoyed now. "Do I look dead?"

She flung back her veil and showed me her face. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright, her teeth showing in a small, feline smile. "The body you buried was a girl I picked up and was giving a ride to. After the accident I saw she was dead, and on an impulse I put my rings on her fingers and slipped my handbag under her body. Then I set fire to the wreckage."

"But why?" I groaned, sinking into another chair. "Why did you do it?"

"Because it amused me. I was more tired of you than you of me, and I liked the idea of living as another person. Besides, I knew that when I got tired of the game I could always come back. And now that I've run out of money, I'm back."

"But I'm getting married tomorrow. To Ann."

"I know, I read the papers. It occurred to me you

might not want me to stay around. All right, David darling, I'll go away and play dead some more. You can go ahead and marry the daughter of your best client. But of course I'll need money."

"No! I won't give you any money. You're dead."

"I can just see the headlines tomorrow night," Louise said. "Prominent Young Lawyer's Wife Returns From Grave—Supposedly Dead Wife Interrupts Wedding."

"No!" I shouted. "I won't let you!"

"Really, all I need is ten thousand dollars. I'll get a very quiet divorce and your new marriage can be legalized again later. You see, it'll work out very simply."

I could not answer. My mind was whirling. I felt weak, confused, uncertain. Only the deep-seated realization I was having a nightmare saved me from collapsing. Louise rose.

"Think it over. I'll go powder my nose. I'll give you five minutes—then I'll expect a check."

She walked out of the room. I covered my face in an agony of indecision, wishing I could wake up. When I looked up again, Richard, my twin brother, was standing before me.

"I must say you handled that rather badly, David. You let her scare you with her ridiculous joke about being dead. Now she knows she has you beaten."

"But she *is* dead!" I cried. "This is all just a dream."

"Who can say what's a dream and what's real? My advice to you is, don't take any chances. If you give her the money, she'll just come back for more."

"But there's nothing I can do," I said in despair.

"Of course there is. Louise died once. She must die again."

"No! I won't listen to you."

"Then I see I shall have to take matters into my own hands, as I did when we were boys... Look at me, David."

"No!" I tried to turn my eyes away, but his gaze held me, brilliant, mesmeric.

"Look into my eyes, David."

"I won't. I won't."

But I could not turn away. I felt as I had, years ago when we were boys. Richard's eyes grew bigger and bigger until they were pools of dark water in which I was about to be swallowed up.

"Now, David, I'm going to take charge of your body as I used to. And you'll have to go where I've been all this time—deep down in our brain."

I struggled for an instant longer. But his eyes, like enormous pools into which I was falling, came closer and closer. Then there was a wrenching feeling and Richard vanished. I knew he had won. *He* was real now—he controlled our body. And I was helpless. I could look and listen with our eyes and ears, but I could not interfere with anything he chose to do.

Louise reëntered the room. Her eyes were bright and self-assured.

"Well, David," she asked, "have you made up your mind yet?"

"Yes, Louise, I have."

Richard spoke in a voice deeper than mine, stronger, more confident. Louise seemed puzzled by the change.

"Make the check to cash," she said in a moment. "I'll get the divorce in Las Vegas. No one will associate my name with yours. Carpenter is a fairly common name."

"There will be no check and no divorce," Richard told her.

"Then there will be publicity. Rather lurid and unpleasant. It will hardly do your career any good."

"There will be no publicity either. And just for your information, I'm not David. I'm Richard."

"Richard?" Louise's face mirrored uncertainty. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"I'm David's twin brother. The one who does the things David doesn't dare do for himself."

"You're being ridiculous! Now I'm going. I'll give you until nine tomorrow to change your mind about that check."

"There will be no check. You have no intention of keeping any agreement, and I know it."

Richard took a step forward. For the first time Louise seemed alarmed. She turned, as if to run. He caught her arm, spun her around, then with both hands seized her around the throat.

I had to watch, helpless, as his hands pressed more and more tightly into her throat, while her face changed color and her eyes became enormous. She struggled for perhaps thirty seconds, trying to kick and scratch. Then her struggles ceased. That was unconsciousness. Her face became livid. Saliva streamed from the corners of her slack mouth. Her eyes seemed to be forced from their sockets, glaring and open. Calmly Richard continued the pressure on her throat until she was unmistakably dead. Then he let her fall in a heap on my floor.

"All right, David," he said, "you may speak now."

"You've killed her!"

Richard wiped his lips with my handkerchief.

"An interesting point. Have I or haven't I killed her? Was she alive, or was she really dead all the time?"

"You're confusing me!" I complained. "Of course she was dead. This is only a dream. But—"

"But even in a dream we can't leave a body lying on your apartment rug, can we? It seems we must take her back where she belongs. To Fairfield Cemetery."

"But that's impossible!"

"It would be impossible for you. Not for me. I'm simply going to carry Louise down in the elevator, get into a taxi, and drive to the cemetery. And now you are to be silent until I permit you to speak."

Calmly he proceeded to carry out his insane scheme. First he put on my hat and gloves. Then he took

Louise's veil from her purse and he pinned it to her hat. He brushed her coat and smoothed back her hair, which had become disarranged in the struggle. Then he picked up her body in his arms, carrying her as if she were a sleepy child, and strode to the elevator.

He rang the bell and stood there, Louise's dead body cradled in his arms, humming to himself. The elevator came after a moment and Jimmy, the night attendant, opened the door.

"A little trouble, Jimmy," Richard said as he stepped in. He had to turn sideways to get Louise through the elevator door and the movement made her purse slip from her lap, where he had placed it. Jimmy stooped for it and put it back.

"The young lady"—Richard's tone was man-to-man —"apparently started drinking before she got here. I gave her one cocktail and she was out like a light. Now I've got to get her back home. Can you get me a taxi at the side entrance?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Carpenter." It was apparent that Jimmy understood perfectly.

I had expected detection, exposure, arrest. Instead Jimmy brought a taxi, Richard stepped into it with Louise, and we started off as if it were perfectly natural for a man to carry a dead woman about New York at midnight. But clever though Richard was, such a mad scheme could not go without a hitch. The hitch occurred when the taxi driver turned and asked the address.

"Fairfield Cemetery," Richard answered.

"Fairfield Cemetery?" the driver said. "At this time of night? You're kidding, mister."

"Not at all." Richard always became annoyed when anyone wouldn't take him seriously. "This lady is dead and I'm going to bury her."

"Listen, mister!" The driver turned all the way around—a small, truculent little man whose face was

red with anger. "I don't like you society mugs and your funny stuff. Now tell me where you want to go or get out of my cab."

Richard hesitated, then shrugged. "Sorry," he said. "It wasn't a very good joke, was it? Take us to Riverdale—937 West 235th Street."

"Okay, that's better." A moment later we were threading our way through New York's busy after-theatre traffic. Richard, still cradling Louise's body in his arms as if she were a child, leaned back and hummed "Waltz me around again, Willie."

The ride that followed could only have happened in a dream. Through Times Square we went, and the bright lights danced and flickered on Louise's face beneath her veil. Sometimes we stopped for traffic lights and pedestrians surged about us, peering in and snickering. Traffic policemen stared briefly and were not interested. Through the busy heart of the world's greatest city, Richard carried a corpse, and no flicker of suspicion passed through the mind of a single individual.

Presently we swung off onto the Henry Hudson Highway and sped along it to Riverdale, where we drew up at the address Richard had given—this house, the house I bought for Ann and me to live in. Cautiously Richard eased Louise out of the cab, managed to get his hand into his pocket and pull out a bill, paid off the driver and sent him away. The night was dark, the street was still. No one saw Richard as he unceremoniously dumped Louise on the cold stone steps, found the key and carried her inside.

He did not turn on the lights. Instead he dropped Louise onto a couch in the living room, then sat down opposite her and lit a cigarette.

"All right, David, you may speak now," he said.

"Richard," I said in anguish, "are you mad? Bringing Louise here is no better than leaving her in my apartment. Now what are we going to do?"

"I'm considering that point now." Richard sounded

petulant. He hated for obstacles to arise to balk his plans. "Too bad that silly driver wouldn't go to the cemetery."

And then Louise sat up.

She sat up, swaying like one who is ill. Her hand went to her throat and when she spoke, her voice was hoarse, her words thick.

"David," she said, "you—you tried to kill me."

Richard turned to look at her. In the darkness she was a blur, ghostly, remote.

"It seems I didn't do a very complete job," he remarked, and sounded annoyed.

"You tried to kill me," she repeated, as if finding the fact impossible to believe. "You'll go to jail for this, I promise you you will."

"Nothing of the sort." He rose to his feet and towered dangerously over her. "I merely have to do the job over again, that's all."

Louise shrank away from him.

"No, for God's sake!" she cried out. "I'm sorry, David, I didn't mean it. I shouldn't have come back. I'll go away again, really I will. I'll never bother you again, David."

"I'm Richard, not David," he told her, his voice sulky. "You're very hard to kill, aren't you, Louise? You've died twice now and still you aren't dead. Perhaps the third time will make it final."

"Richard, stop!" I shouted at him. "Let her go. She means it. She'll go away and never—"

"You don't know much about women like Louise," Richard sneered. "Anyway, this is between her and me now. You're becoming a nuisance. Go to sleep, David . . . to sleep . . ."

I felt myself becoming faint. Darkness overwhelmed me. In my dream it happened as it happened those times when I was a boy—Richard banished me completely and was free to do just as he pleased. I knew nothing more until I found myself in my pajamas in

my own bed. Richard stood in the center of the room, smiling at me.

"Well, David, here you are, safe and sound again," he said. "And I'm off. I'll be back, though. You can count on that."

"Louise!" I exclaimed. "What have you done with her?"

Richard yawned. "Forget Louise," he said. "She won't trouble you again. I persuaded her to see your point of view in the matter, David."

"How? What did you do to her?"

Richard merely smiled. "Good night, David," he said. "Oh, in the morning, I don't want you to be distressed by anything. So remember, this has just been a dream. Just an interesting dream."

With that he was gone. An instant later I opened my eyes to find it was nine in the morning and the alarm clock was ringing. And that's what my dream was, Doctor.

Thank you, David. I understand now. I'm going to explain your dream to you and then you'll never have it again.

Yes, Doctor.

Before your first wife, Louise, died, you wished her dead, didn't you?

Yes. I wanted her to die.

Exactly. Then when she did die, you felt an unconscious sense of guilt as if you'd murdered her. On the eve of your marriage to Ann, that sense of guilt manifested itself as a nightmare in which Louise was alive again. Probably the ringing of your alarm clock made you think of a telephone and that started off the whole dream—Louise, Richard, everything. Do you understand?

Yes, Doctor. I understand.

Now you're going to rest for a moment. When I next say wake up, you will do so. You'll have forgotten the dream utterly. It'll never trouble you again. Now rest,

David.

Yes, Doctor.

Oh, Dr. Manson—

Yes, Mrs. Carpenter?

You're sure he won't ever have the dream again?

Quite sure. His unconscious guilt feeling has been brought to the surface, if I may put it that way, and so removed.

I'm so glad. Poor David was on the point of a breakdown. Oh, excuse me, there's the doorbell.

Of course.

... It was the man with our blankets. A wedding present from David's sister. I sent them to be monogrammed. Aren't they lovely?

Very beautiful indeed.

I'll put them right away. David had a cedar chest built in beneath this window seat. It's airtight and completely moth-proof, the builder said. I certainly hope it is—I'd hate to have any moths get into blankets like these.

David, you may wake up now... Good. How do you feel?

I feel fine, Doctor. Only I'm Richard, not David. I'm surprised at you for thinking David was just telling you about a dream. You should know that's only David's way of hiding the truth from himself. That first time there really was a phone call and—Ann! Stay away from that cedar chest! I warn you, don't open it! ... All right, I warned you. But you had to go ahead and open it. Now, there's no use in your standing there screaming, you know.

THE WHOLE TOWN'S SLEEPING

RAY BRADBURY

It was a warm summer night in the middle of Illinois country. The little town was deep far away from everything, kept to itself by a river and a forest and a ravine. In the town the sidewalks were still scorched. The stores were closing and the streets were turning dark. There were two moons: a clock moon with four faces in four night directions above the solemn black courthouse, and the real moon that was slowly rising in vanilla whiteness from the dark east.

In the downtown drugstore, fans whispered in the high ceiling air. In the rococo shade of porches, invisible people sat. On the purple bricks of the summer twilight streets, children ran. Screen doors whined their springs and banged. The heat was breathing from the dry lawns and trees.

On her solitary porch, Lavinia Nebbs, aged thirty-seven, very straight and slim, sat with a tinkling lemonade in her white fingers, tapping it to her lips, waiting.

"Here I am, Lavinia."

Lavinia turned. There was Francine, at the bottom porch step, in the smell of zinnias and hibiscus. Francine was all in snow white and didn't look thirty-five.

Miss Lavinia Nebbs rose and locked her front door, leaving her lemonade glass standing empty on the porch rail. "It's a fine night for the movie."

"Where you going, ladies?" cried Grandma Hanlon from her shadowy porch across the street.

They called back through the soft ocean of darkness: "To the Elite Theater to see Harold Lloyd in *Welcome, Danger!*"

"Won't catch *me* out on no night like this," wailed Grandma Hanlon. "Not with the Lonely One strangling women. Lock myself in with my *gun!*"

Grandma's door slammed and locked.

The two maiden ladies drifted on. Lavinia felt the warm breath of the summer night shimmering off the oven-baked sidewalk. It was like walking on a hard crust of freshly warmed bread. The heat pulsed under your dress and along your legs with a stealthy sense of invasion.

"Lavinia, you don't believe all that gossip about the Lonely One, do you?"

"Those women like to see their tongues dance."

"Just the same, Hattie McDollis was killed a month ago. And Roberta Ferry the month before. And now Eliza Ramsell has disappeared . . ."

"Hattie McDollis walked off with a traveling man, I bet."

"But the others—strangled—four of them, their tongues sticking out their mouths, they say."

They stood upon the edge of the ravine that cut the town in two. Behind them were the lighted houses and faint radio music; ahead was deepness, moistness, fireflies and dark.

"Maybe we shouldn't go to the movie," said Francine. "The Lonely One might follow and kill us. I don't like that ravine. Look how black, smell it, and *listen.*"

The ravine was a dynamo that never stopped running, night or day: there was a great moving hum among the secret mists and washed shales and the odors of a rank greenhouse. Always the black dynamo was humming, with green electric sparkles where fireflies hovered.

"And it won't be *me,*" said Francine, "coming back through this terrible dark ravine tonight, late. It'll be you, Lavinia, you down the steps and over that rickety bridge and maybe the Lonely One standing behind a tree. I'd never have gone over to church this afternoon if I had to walk through here all alone, even in daylight."

"Bosh," said Lavinia Nebbs.

"It'll be you alone on the path, listening to your shoes, not me. And shadows. You *all alone* on the way back home. Lavinia, don't you get lonely living by yourself in that house?"

"Old maids love to live alone," said Lavinia. She pointed to a hot shadowy path. "Let's walk the short cut."

"I'm afraid."

"It's early. The Lonely One won't be out till late." Lavinia, as cool as mint ice cream, took the other woman's arm and led her down the dark winding path into cricket-warmth and frog-sound, and mosquito-delicate silence.

"Let's run," gasped Francine.

"No."

If Lavinia hadn't turned her head just then, she wouldn't have seen it. But she did turn her head, and it was there. And then Francine looked over and she saw it too, and they stood there on the path, not believing what they saw.

In the singing deep night, back among a clump of bushes—half hidden, but laid out as if she had put herself down there to enjoy the soft stars—lay Eliza Ramsell.

Francine screamed.

The woman lay as if she were floating there, her face moon-freckled, her eyes like white marble, her tongue clamped in her lips.

Lavinia felt the ravine turning like a gigantic

black merry-go-round underfoot. Francine was gasping and choking, and a long while later Lavinia heard herself say, "We'd better get the police."

"Hold me, Lavinia, please hold me, I'm cold. Oh, I've never been so cold since winter."

Lavinia held Francine and the policemen were all around in the ravine grass. Flashlights darted about, voices mingled, and the night grew toward eight-thirty.

"It's like December, I need a sweater," said Francine, eyes shut against Lavinia's shoulder.

The policeman said, "I guess you can go now, ladies. You might drop by the station tomorrow for a little more questioning."

Lavinia and Francine walked away from the police and the delicate sheet-covered thing upon the ravine grass.

Lavinia felt her heart going loudly within her and she was cold, too, with a February cold. There were bits of sudden snow all over her flesh and the moon washed her brittle fingers whiter, and she remembered doing all the talking while Francine just sobbed.

A police voice called, "You want an escort, ladies?"

"No, we'll make it," said Lavinia, and they walked on. I can't remember anything now, she thought. I can't remember how she looked lying there, or anything. I don't believe it happened. Already I'm forgetting, I'm making myself forget.

"I've never *seen* a dead person before," said Francine.

Lavinia looked at her wristwatch, which seemed impossibly far away. "It's only eight-thirty. We'll pick up Helen and get on to the show."

"The show!"

"It's what we *need.*"

"Lavinia, you don't *mean* it!"

"We've got to forget this. It's not good to remember."

"But Eliza's back there now and—"

"We need to laugh. We'll go to the show as if nothing happened."

"But Eliza was once your friend, *my* friend—"

"We can't help her; we can only help ourselves forget. I insist. I won't go home and brood over it. I won't *think* of it. I'll fill my mind with everything else *but.*"

They started up the side of the ravine on a stony path in the dark. They heard voices and stopped.

Below, near the creek waters, a voice was murmuring, "I am the Lonely One. I am the Lonely One. I *kill* people."

"And I'm Eliza Ramsell. Look. And I'm dead, see my tongue out my mouth, see!"

Francine shrieked. "You, there! Children, you nasty children! Get home, get out of the ravine, you hear me? Get home, get home, get home!"

The children fled from their game. The night swallowed their laughter away up the distant hills into the warm darkness.

Francine sobbed again and walked on.

"I thought you ladies'd never come!" Helen Greer tapped her foot atop her porch steps. "You're only an hour late, that's all."

"We—" started Francine.

Lavinia clutched her arm. "There was a commotion. Someone found Eliza Ramsell dead in the ravine."

Helen gasped. "Who found her?"

"We don't know."

The three maiden ladies stood in the summer night looking at one another. "I've a notion to lock myself in my house," said Helen at last.

But finally she went to fetch a sweater, and while she was gone Francine whispered frantically, "Why didn't you *tell* her?"

"Why upset her? Time enough tomorrow," replied Lavinia.

The three women moved along the street under the black trees through a town that was slamming and locking doors, pulling down windows and shades and turning on blazing lights. They saw eyes peering out at them from curtained windows.

How strange, thought Lavinia Nebbs, the Popsicle night, the ice-cream night with the children thrown like jackstones on the streets, now turned in behind wood and glass, the Popsicles dropped in puddles of lime and chocolate where they fell when the children were scooped indoors. Baseballs and bats lie on the unfootprinted lawns. A half-drawn white chalk hopscotch line is there on the steamed sidewalk.

"We're crazy out on a night like this," said Helen.

"Lonely One can't kill three ladies," said Lavinia. "There's safety in numbers. Besides, it's too soon. The murders come a month separated."

A shadow fell across their faces. A figure loomed. As if someone had struck an organ a terrible blow, the three women shrieked.

"*Got* you!" The man jumped from behind a tree. Rearing into the moonlight, he laughed. Leaning on the tree, he laughed again.

"Hey, I'm the Lonely One!"

"Tom Dillon!"

"Tom!"

"Tom," said Lavinia. "If you ever do a childish thing like that again, may you be riddled with bullets by mistake!"

Francine began to cry.

Tom Dillon stopped smiling. "Hey, I'm sorry."

"Haven't you heard about Eliza Ramsell?" snapped Lavinia. "She's dead, and you scaring women. You should be ashamed. Don't speak to us again."

"Aw—"

He moved to follow them.

"Stay right there, Mr. Lonely One, and scare yourself," said Lavinia. "Go see Eliza Ramsell's face and

see if its funny!" She pushed the other two on along the street of trees and stars, Francine holding a handkerchief to her face.

"Francine," pleaded Helen, "it was only a joke. Why's she crying so hard?"

"I guess we better tell you, Helen. *We* found Eliza. And it wasn't pretty. And we're trying to forget. We're going to the show to help and let's not talk about it. Enough's enough. Get your ticket money ready, we're almost downtown."

The drugstore was a small pool of sluggish air which the great wooden fans stirred in tides of arnica and tonic and soda-smell out into the brick streets.

"A nickel's worth of green mint chews," said Lavinia to the druggist. His face was set and pale, like all the faces they had seen on the half-empty streets. "For eating in the show," she explained, as the druggist dropped the mints into a sack with a silver shovel.

"Sure look pretty tonight," said the druggist. "You looked cool this noon, Miss Lavinia, when you was in here for chocolates. So cool and nice that someone asked after you."

"Oh?"

"You're getting popular. Man sitting at the counter—" he rustled a few more mints in the sack—"watched you walk out and he said to me, 'Say, who's *that?*' Man in a dark suit, thin pale face. 'Why, that's Lavinia Nebbs, prettiest maiden lady in town,' *I* said. 'Beautiful,' *he* said. 'Where's she live?' " Here the druggist paused and looked away.

"You *didn't*" wailed Francine. "You didn't give him her address, I hope? You *didn't!*"

"Sorry, guess I didn't think. I said, 'Oh, over on Park Street, you know, near the ravine.' Casual remark. But now, tonight, them finding the body. I heard a minute ago, I suddenly thought, what've I *done!*" He handed over the package, much too full.

"You fool!" cried Francine, and tears were in her eyes.

"I'm sorry. 'Course maybe it was nothing."

"Nothing, nothing!" said Francine.

Lavinia stood with the three people looking at her, staring at her. She didn't know what or how to feel. She felt nothing—except perhaps the slightest prickle of excitement in her throat. She held out her money automatically.

"No charge for those pepperiments." The druggist turned down his eyes and shuffled some papers.

"Well, I know what we're going to do right *now!*" Helen stalked out of the drug shop. "We're going right straight home. I'm not going to be part of any hunting party for you, Lavinia. That man asking for you. You're *next!* You want to be dead in that ravine?"

"It was just a man," said Lavinia slowly, eyes on the streets.

"So's Tom Dillon a man, but maybe he's the Lonely One!"

"We're all overwrought," said Lavinia reasonably. "I won't miss the movie now. If I'm the next victim, let me *be* the next victim. A lady has all too little excitement in her life, especially an old maid, a lady thirty-seven like me, so don't you mind if I enjoy it. And I'm being sensible. Stands to reason he won't be out tonight, so soon after a murder. A month from now, yes, when the police've relaxed and when he *feels* like another murder. You've got to *feel* like murdering people, you know. At least that kind of murderer does. And he's just resting up now. And anyway I'm not going home to stew in my juices."

"But Eliza's face, there in the ravine!"

"After the first look I never looked again. I didn't *drink* it in, if that's what you mean. I can see a thing and tell myself I never saw it, that's how strong *I* am. And the whole argument's silly anyhow, because I'm not beautiful."

"Oh, but you are, Lavinia. You're the loveliest maiden lady in town, now that Eliza's—" Francine stopped. "If you'd only relaxed, you'd been married years ago—"

"Stop sniveling, Francine. Here's the box office. You and Helen go on home. I'll sit alone and go home alone."

"Lavinia, you're crazy. We can't leave you here—"

They argued for five minutes. Helen started to walk away but came back when she saw Lavinia thump down her money for a solitary movie ticket. Helen and Francine followed her silently into the theater.

The first show was over. In the dim auditorium, as they sat in the odor of ancient brass polish, the manager appeared before the worn red velvet curtains for an announcement:

"The police have asked for an early closing tonight. So everyone can be home at a decent hour. So we're cutting our short subjects and putting on our feature film again now. The show will be over at eleven. Everyone's advised to go straight home and not linger on the streets. Our police force is pretty small and will be spread around pretty thin."

"That means us, Lavinia. *Us!*" Lavinia felt the hands tugging at her elbows on either side.

Harold Lloyd in Welcome, Danger! said the screen in the dark.

"Lavinia," Helen whispered.

"What?"

"As we came in, a man in a dark suit, across the street, crossed over. He just came in. He just sat in the row behind us."

"Oh, Helen."

"He's right behind us *now*."

Lavinia looked at the screen.

Helen turned slowly and glanced back. "I'm calling the manager!" she cried and leaped up. "Stop the film! Lights!"

"Helen, come back!" said Lavinia, eyes shut.

When they set down their empty soda glasses, each of the ladies had a chocolate moustache on her upper lip. They removed them with their tongues, laughing.

"You see how *silly* it was?" said Lavinia. "All that riot for nothing. How embarrassing!"

The drugstore clock said eleven twenty-five. They had come out of the theater and the laughter and the enjoyment feeling new. And now they were laughing at Helen and Helen was laughing at herself.

Lavinia said, "When you ran up that aisle crying 'Lights!' I thought I'd die!"

"That poor man!"

"The theater manager's brother from Racine!"

"I apologized," said Helen.

"You *see* what a panic can do?"

The great fans still whirled and whirled in the warm night air, stirring and restirring the smells of vanilla, raspberry, peppermint and disinfectant in the drugstore.

"We shouldn't have stopped for these sodas. The police said—"

"Oh, bosh the police." Lavinia laughed. "I'm not afraid of anything. The Lonely One is a million miles away now. He won't be back for weeks, and the police'll get him then, just wait. Wasn't the film *funny!*"

The streets were clean and empty. Not a car or a truck or a person was in sight. The bright lights were still lit in the small store windows where the hot wax dummies stood. Their blank blue eyes watched as the ladies walked past them, down the night street.

"Do you suppose if we screamed they'd do anything?"

"Who?"

"The dummies, the window-people."

"Oh, Fran*cine.*"

"Well . . ."

There were a thousand people in the windows, stiff and silent, and three people on the street, the echoes following like gunshots when they tapped their heels on the baked pavement.

A red neon sign flickered dimly, buzzing like a dying insect. They walked past it.

Baked and white, the long avenue lay ahead. Blowing and tall in a wind that touched only their leafy summits, the trees stood on either side of the three small women.

"First we'll walk you home, Francine."

"No, I'll walk *you* home."

"Don't be silly. You live the nearest. If you walked me home, you'd have to come back across the ravine alone yourself. And if so much as a leaf fell on you, you'd drop dead."

Francine said, "I can stay the night at your house. You're the *pretty* one!"

"No."

So they drifted like three prim clothes-forms over a moonlit sea of lawn and concrete and tree. To Lavinia, watching the black trees flit by, listening to the voices of her friends, the night seemed to quicken. They seemed to be running while walking slowly. Everything seemed fast, and the color of hot snow.

"Let's sing," said Lavinia.

They sang sweetly and quietly, arm in arm, not looking back. They felt the hot sidewalk cooling underfoot, moving, moving.

"Listen," said Lavinia.

They listened to the summer night, to the crickets and the far-off tone of the courthouse clock making it fifteen minutes to twelve.

"Listen."

A porch swing creaked in the dark. And there was Mr. Terle, silent, alone on his porch as they passed,

having a last cigar. They could see the pink cigar fire idling to and fro.

Now the lights were going, going, gone. The little house lights and big house lights, the yellow lights and green hurricane lights, the candles and oil lamps and porch lights, and everything felt locked up in brass and iron and steel. Everything, thought Lavinia, is boxed and wrapped and shaded. She imagined the people in their moonlit beds, and their breathing in the summer night rooms, safe and together. And here we are, she thought, listening to our solitary footsteps on the baked summer evening sidewalk. And above us the lonely street lights shining down, making a million wild shadows.

"Here's your house, Francine. Good night."

"Lavinia, Helen, stay here tonight. It's late, almost midnight now. Mrs. Murdock has an extra room. I'll make hot chocolate. It'd be ever such fun!" Francine was holding them both close to her.

"No thanks," said Lavinia.

And Francine began to cry.

"Oh, not *again,* Francine," said Lavinia.

"I don't want you dead," sobbed Francine, the tears running straight down her cheeks. "You're so fine and nice, I want you alive. Please, oh, please."

"Francine, I didn't realize how much this has affected you. But I promise you I'll phone when I get home, right away."

"Oh, *will* you?"

"And tell you I'm safe, yes. And tomorrow we'll have a picnic lunch at Electric Park, all right? With ham sandwiches I'll make myself. How's that? You'll see; I'm going to live forever!"

"You'll phone?"

"I promised, didn't I?"

"Good night, good night!" Francine was gone behind her door, locked tight in an instant.

"Now," said Lavinia to Helen, "I'll walk *you* home."

The courthouse clock struck the hour. The sounds went across a town that was empty, emptier than it had ever been before. Over empty streets and empty lots and empty lawns the sound went.

"Ten, eleven, *twelve,*" counted Lavinia, with Helen on her arm.

"Don't you feel *funny?*" asked Helen.

"How do you mean?"

"When you think of us being out here on the sidewalk, under the trees, and all those people safe behind locked doors lying in their beds. We're practically the only walking people out in the open in a thousand miles, I bet." The sound of the deep warm dark ravine came near.

In a minute they stood before Helen's house, looking at each other for a long time. The wind blew the odor of cut grass and wet lilacs between them. The moon was high in a sky that was beginning to cloud over. "I don't suppose it's any use asking you to stay, Lavinia?"

"I'll be going on."

"Sometimes . . ."

"Sometimes what?"

"Sometimes I think people *want* to die. You've certainly acted odd all evening."

"I'm just not afraid," said Lavinia. "And I'm curious, I suppose. And I'm using my head. Logically, the Lonely One can't be around. The police and all."

"*Our* police? *Our* little old force? They're home in bed too, the covers up over their ears."

"Let's just say I'm enjoying myself, precariously but safely. If there were any *real* chance of anything happening to me, I'd stay here with you, you can be sure of that."

"Maybe your subconscious doesn't want you to live any more."

"You and Francine, honestly."

"I feel so guilty. I'll be drinking hot coffee just as

you reach the ravine bottom and walk on the bridge in the dark."

"Drink a cup for me. Good night."

Lavinia Nebbs walked down the midnight street, down the late summer night silence. She saw the houses with their dark windows and far away she heard a dog barking. In five minutes, she thought, I'll be safe home. In five minutes I'll be phoning silly little Francine. I'll—

She heard a man's voice singing far away among the trees.

She walked a little faster.

Coming down the street toward her in the dimming moonlight was a man. He was walking casually.

I can run and knock on one of these doors, thought Lavinia. If necessary.

The man was singing, "Shine On, Harvest Moon," and he carried a long club in his hand. "Well, look who's here! What a time of night for you to be out, Miss Nebbs!"

"Officer Kennedy!"

And that's who it was, of course—Officer Kennedy on his beat.

"I'd better see you home."

"Never mind, I'll make it."

"But you live across the ravine."

Yes, she thought, but I won't walk the ravine with *any* man. How do I know *who* the Lonely One is? "No, thanks," she said.

"I'll wait right here then," he said. "If you need help give a yell. I'll come running."

She went on, leaving him under a light humming to himself, alone.

Here I am, she thought.

The ravine.

She stood on the top of the one hundred and thirteen steps down the steep, brambled bank that led

across the creaking bridge one hundred yards and up through the black hills to Park Street. And only one lantern to see by. Three minutes from now, she thought, I'll be putting my key in my house door. Nothing can happen in just one hundred and eighty seconds.

She started down the dark green steps into the deep ravine night.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine steps," she whispered.

She felt she was running but she was not running.

"Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen steps," she counted aloud.

"One fifth of the way!" she announced to herself.

The ravine was deep, deep and black, black. And the world was gone, the world of safe people in bed. The locked doors, the town, the drugstore, the theater, the lights, everything was gone. Only the ravine existed and lived, black and huge about her.

"Nothing's happened, has it? No one around, *is* there? Twenty-four, twenty-five steps. Remember that old ghost story you told each other when you were children?"

She listened to her feet on the steps.

"The story about the dark man coming in your house and you upstairs in bed. And now he's at the *first* step coming up to your room. Now he's at the second step. Now he's at the third and the fourth and the *fifth* step! Oh, how you laughed and screamed at that story! And now the horrid dark man is at the twelfth step, opening your door, and now he's standing by your bed. I *got you!*"

She screamed. It was like nothing she had ever heard, that scream. She had never screamed that loud in her life. She stopped, she froze, she clung to the wooden banister. Her heart exploded in her. The sound of its terrified beating filled the universe.

"There, there!" she screamed to herself. "At the bot-

tom of the steps. A man, under the light! No, now he's gone! He was *waiting* there!"

She listened.

Silence. The bridge was empty.

Nothing, she thought, holding her heart. Nothing. Fool. That story I told myself. How silly. What shall I do?

Her heartbeats faded.

Shall I call the officer, did he hear my scream? Or was it only loud to *me*. Was it really just a small scream after all?

She listened. Nothing. Nothing.

"I'll go back to Helen's and sleep the night. But even while she thought this she moved down again. No, it's nearer home now. Thirty-eight, thirty-nine steps, careful, don't fall. Oh, I *am* a fool. Forty steps. Forty-one. Almost half way now. She froze again.

"Wait," she told herself. She took a step.

There was an echo.

She took another step. Another echo—just a fraction of a moment later.

"Someone's following me," she whispered to the ravine, to the black crickets and dark green frogs and the black steam. "Someone's on the steps behind me. I don't dare turn around."

Another step, another echo.

Every time I take a step, *they* take one.

A step and an echo.

Weakly she asked of the ravine, "Officer Kennedy? Is that *you*?"

The crickets were suddenly still. The crickets were listening. The night was listening to *her*. For a moment, all of the far summer night meadows and close summer night trees were suspending motion. Leaf, shrub, star and meadowgrass had ceased their particular tremors and were listening to Lavinia Nebbs's heart. And perhaps a thousand miles away, across locomotive-lonely country, in an empty way station a lonely night

traveler reading a dim newspaper under a naked light-bulb might raise his head, listen, and think, What's that! and decide, Only a woodchuck, surely, beating a hollow log. But it was Lavinia Nebbs, it was most surely the heart of Lavinia Nebbs.

Faster. Faster. She went down the steps.

Run!

She heard music. In a mad way, a silly way, she heard the huge surge of music that pounded at her, and she realized as she ran—as she ran in panic and terror—that some part of her mind was dramatizing, borrowing from the turbulent score of some private film. The music was rushing and plunging her faster, faster, plummeting and scurrying, down and down into the pit of the ravine!

"Only a little way," she prayed. "One hundred ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen steps! The bottom! Now, run! Across the bridge!"

She spoke to her legs, her arms, her body, her terror; she advised all parts of herself in this white and terrible instant. Over the roaring creek waters, on the hollow, swaying, almost-alive bridge planks she ran, followed by the wild footsteps behind, with the music following too, the music shrieking and babbling!

He's following. Don't turn, don't look—if you see him, you'll not be able to move! You'll be frightened, you'll freeze! Just run, run, *run!*

She ran across the bridge.

Oh, God! God, please, please let me get up the hill! Now up, up the path, now between the hills. Oh, God, it's dark, and everything so far away! If I screamed now it wouldn't help; I can't scream anyway! Here's the top of the path, here's the street. Thank God I wore my low-heeled shoes. I can run, I can run! Oh, God, please let me be safe! If I get home safe I'll never go out alone, I was a fool, let me admit it, a fool! I didn't know what terror was, I wouldn't let myself think, but

if you let me get home from this I'll never go out without Helen or Francine again! Across the street now!

She crossed the street and rushed up the sidewalk.

Oh, God, the porch! My house!

In the middle of her running, she saw the empty lemonade glass where she had left it hours before, in the good, easy, lazy time, left it on the railing. She wished she were back in that time now, drinking from it, the night still young and not begun.

"Oh, please, please, give me time to get inside and lock the door and I'll be safe!"

She heard her clumsy feet on the porch, felt her hands scrabbling and ripping at the lock with the key. She heard her heart. She heard her inner voice shrieking.

The key fitted.

"Unlock the door, quick, quick!"

The door opened.

"Now inside. *Slam* it!"

She slammed the door.

"Now lock it, bar it, lock it!" she cried wretchedly. "Lock it *tight!*"

The door was locked and barred and bolted.

The music stopped.

She listened to her heart again and the sound of it diminishing into silence.

Home. Oh, safe at home. Safe, safe and safe at home! She slumped against the door. Safe, safe. Listen. Not a sound. Safe, safe, oh, thank God, safe at home. I'll never go out at night again. Safe, oh safe, safe, home, so good, so good, safe. Safe inside, the door locked. *Wait.* Look out the window.

She looked. She gazed out the window for a full half-minute.

"Why there's no one there at all! Nobody! There was no one following me at all. Nobody running after

me." She caught her breath and almost laughed at herself. "It stands to reason. If a man *had* been following me, he'd have *caught* me. I'm not a fast runner. There's no one on the porch or in the yard. How silly of me. I wasn't running from anything except *me*. That ravine was safer than safe. Just the same, though, it's nice to be home. Home's the really good warm safe place, the *only* place to be."

She put her hand out to the light switch and stopped.

"What?" she asked. "What? *What?*"

Behind her, in the black living room, someone cleared his throat . . .

EVENING PRIMROSE

JOHN COLLIER

MARCH 21 Today I made my decision. I would turn my back for good and all upon the *bourgeois* world that hates a poet. I would leave, get out, break away—

And I have done it. I am free! Free as the mote that dances in the sunbeam! Free as a house-fly crossing first-class in the largest of luxury liners! Free as my verse! Free as the food I shall eat, the paper I write upon, the lamb's-wool-lined softly slithering slippers I shall wear.

This morning I had not so much as a car-fare. Now I am here, on velvet. You are itching to learn of this haven; you would like to organize trips here, spoil it, send your relations-in-law, perhaps even come yourself. After all, this journal will hardly fall into your hands till I am dead. I'll tell you.

I am at Bracey's Giant Emporium, as happy as a mouse in the middle of an immense cheese, and the world shall know me no more.

Merrily, merrily shall I live now secure behind a towering pile of carpets, in a corner-nook which I propose to line with eiderdowns, angora vestments, and the Cleopatrean tops in pillows. I shall be cosy.

I nipped into this sanctuary late this afternoon, and soon heard the dying footfalls of closing time. From now on, my only effort will be to dodge the night-watchman. Poets can dodge.

I have already made my first mouse-like exploration.

I tiptoed as far as the stationery department, and, timid, darted back with only these writing materials, the poet's first need. Now I shall lay them aside, and seek other necessities: food, wine, the soft furniture of my couch, and a natty smoking-jacket. This place stimulates me. I shall write here.

DAWN, NEXT DAY I suppose no one in the world was ever more astonished and overwhelmed than I have been tonight. It is unbelievable. Yet I believe it. How interesting life is when things get like that!

I crept out, as I said I would, and found the great shop in mingled light and gloom. The central well was half illuminated; the circling galleries towered in a pansy Piranesi of toppling light and shade. The spidery stairways and flying bridges had passed from purpose into fantasy. Silks and velvets glimmered like ghosts, a hundred pantie-clad models offered simpers and embraces to the desert air. Rings, clips, and bracelets glittered frostily in a desolate absence of Honey and Daddy.

Creeping along the transverse aisles, which were in deeper darkness, I felt like a wandering thought in the dreaming brain of a chorus girl down on her luck. Only, of course, their brains are not as big as Bracey's Giant Emporium. And there was no man there.

None, that is, except the night-watchman. I had forgotten him. As I crossed an open space on the mezzanine floor, hugging the lee of a display of sultry shawls, I became aware of a regular thudding, which might almost have been that of my own heart. Suddenly it burst upon me that it came from outside. It was footsteps, and they were only a few paces away. Quick as a flash I seized a flamboyant mantilla, whirled it about me and stood with one arm outflung, like a Carmen petrified in a gesture of disdain.

I was successful. He passed me, jingling his little machine on its chain, humming his little tune, his eyes

scaled with refractions of the blaring day. "Go, worldling!" I whispered, and permitted myself a soundless laugh.

It froze on my lips. My heart faltered. A new fear seized me.

I was afraid to move. I was afraid to look around. I felt I was being watched, by something that could see right through me. This was a very different feeling from the ordinary emergency caused by the very ordinary night-watchman. My conscious impulse was the obvious one: to glance behind me. But my eyes knew better. I remained absolutely petrified, staring straight ahead.

My eyes were trying to tell me something that my brain refused to believe. They made their point. I was looking straight into another pair of eyes, human eyes, but large, flat, luminous. I have seen such eyes among the nocturnal creatures, which creep out under the artificial blue moonlight in the zoo.

The owner was only a dozen feet away from me. The watchman had passed between us, nearer him than me. Yet he had not seen him. I must have been looking straight at him for several minutes at a stretch. I had not seen him either.

He was half reclining against a low dais where, on a floor of russet leaves, and flanked by billows of glowing home-spun, the fresh-faced waxen girls modeled spectator sports suits in herringbones, checks, and plaids. He leaned against the skirt of one of these Dianas; its folds concealed perhaps his ear, his shoulder, and a little of his right side. He, himself, was clad in dim but large-patterned Shetland tweeds of the latest cut, suède shoes, a shirt of a rather broad *motif* in olive, pink, and grey. He was as pale as a creature found under a stone. His long thin arms ended in hands that hung floatingly, more like trailing, transparent fins, or wisps of chiffon, than ordinary hands.

He spoke. His voice was not a voice; it was a mere

whistling under the tongue. "Not bad, for a beginner!"

I grasped that he was complimenting me, rather satirically, on my own, more amateurish, feat of camouflage. I stuttered. I said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know anyone else lived here." I noticed, even as I spoke, that I was imitating his own whistling sibilant utterance.

"Oh, yes," he said. "*We* live here. It's delightful."

"We?"

"Yes, all of us. Look!"

We were near the edge of the first gallery. He swept his long hand round, indicating the whole well of the shop. I looked. I saw nothing. I could hear nothing, except the watchman's thudding step receding infinitely far along some basement aisle.

"Don't you see?"

You know the sensation one has, peering into the half-light of a vivarium? One sees bark, pebbles, a few leaves, nothing more. And then, suddenly, a stone breathes—it is a toad; there is a chameleon, another, a coiled adder, a mantis among the leaves. The whole case seems crepitant with life. Perhaps the whole world is. One glances at one's sleeve, one's feet.

So it was with the shop. I looked, and it was empty. I looked, and there was an old lady, clambering out from behind the monstrous clock. There were three girls, elderly *ingénues,* incredibly emaciated, simpering at the entrance of the perfumery. Their hair was a fine floss, pale as gossamer. Equally brittle and colourless was a man with the appearance of a colonel of southern extraction, who stood regarding me while he caressed mustachios that would have done credit to a crystal shrimp. A chintzy woman, possibly of literary tastes, swam forward from the curtains and drapes.

They came thick about me, fluttering, whistling, like a waving of gauze in the wind. Their eyes were wide and flatly bright. I saw there was no colour to the iris.

"How raw he looks!"

"A detective! Send for the Dark Men!"

"I'm not a detective. I am a poet. I have renounced the world."

"He is a poet. He has come over to us. Mr. Roscoe found him."

"He admires us."

"He must meet Mrs. Vanderpant."

I was taken to meet Mrs. Vanderpant. She proved to be the Grand Old Lady of the store, almost entirely transparent.

"So you are a poet, Mr. Snell? You will find inspiration here. I am quite the oldest inhabitant. Three mergers and a complete rebuilding, but they didn't get rid of me!"

"Tell how you went out by daylight, dear Mrs. Vanderpant, and nearly got bought for Whistler's *Mother!*"

"That was in pre-war days. I was more robust then. But at the cash desk they suddenly remembered there was no frame. And when they came back to look at me—"

"—She was gone."

Their laughter was like the stridulation of the ghosts of grasshoppers.

"Where is Ella? Where is my broth?"

"She is bringing it, Mrs. Vanderpant. It will come."

"Tiresome little creature! She is our foundling, Mr. Snell. She is not quite our sort."

"Is that so, Mrs. Vanderpant? Dear, dear!"

"I lived alone here, Mr. Snell, for many years. I took refuge here in the terrible times in the eighties. I was a young girl then, a beauty, people were kind enough to say, but poor Papa lost his money. Bracey's meant a lot to a young girl, in the New York of those days, Mr. Snell. It seemed to me terrible that I should not be able to come here in the ordinary way. So I came here for good. I was quite alarmed when others began to come in, after the crash of 1907. But it was the dear Judge, the Colonel, Mrs. Bilbee—"

I bowed. I was being introduced.

"Mrs. Bilbee writes plays. *And* of a very old Philadelphia family. You will find us quite *nice* here, Mr. Snell."

"I feel it a great privilege, Mrs. Vanderpant."

"And of course, all our dear *young* people came in '29. *Their* poor papas jumped from skyscrapers."

I did a great deal of bowing and whistling. The introductions took a long time. Who would have thought so many people lived in Bracey's?

"And here at last is Ella with my broth."

It was then I noticed that the young people were not so young after all, in spite of their smiles, their little ways, their *ingénue* dress. Ella was in her teens. Clad only in something from the shop-soiled counter, she nevertheless had the appearance of a living flower in a French cemetery, or a mermaid among polyps.

"Come, you stupid thing!"

"Mrs. Vanderpant is waiting."

Her pallor was not like theirs; not like the pallor of something that glistens or scuttles when you turn over a stone. Hers was that of a pearl.

Ella! Pearl of this remotest, most fantastic cave! Little mermaid, brushed over, pressed down by objects of a deadlier white—tentacles—! I can write no more.

MARCH 28 Well, I am rapidly becoming used to my new and half-lit world, to my strange company. I am learning the intricate laws of silence and camouflage which dominate the apparently casual strollings and gatherings of the midnight clan. How they detest the night-watchman, whose existence imposes these laws on their idle festivals!

"Odious, vulgar creature! He reeks of the coarse sun!"

Actually, he is quite a personable young man, very young for a night-watchman, so young that I think he

must have been wounded in the war. But they would like to tear him to pieces.

They are very pleasant to me, though. They are pleased that a poet should have come among them. Yet I cannot like them entirely. My blood is a little chilled by the uncanny ease with which even the old ladies can clamber spider-like from balcony to balcony. Or is it because they are unkind to Ella?

Yesterday we had a bridge party. Tonight, Mrs. Bilbee's little play, *Love in Shadowland,* is going to be presented. Would you believe it?—another colony, from Wanamaker's, is coming over *en masse* to attend. Apparently people live in all the great stores. This visit is considered a great honour, for there is an intense snobbery in these creatures. They speak with horror of a social outcast who left a highclass Madison Avenue establishment, and now leads a wallowing, beachcomberish life in a delicatessen. And they relate with tragic emotion the story of the man in Altman's, who conceived such a passion for a model plaid dressing jacket that he emerged and wrested it from the hands of a purchaser. It seems that all the Altman colony, dreading an investigation, were forced to remove beyond the social pale, into a five-and-dime. Well, I must get ready to attend the play.

APRIL 14 I have found an opportunity to speak to Ella, I dared not before; here one has a sense always of pale eyes secretly watching. But last night, at the play, I developed a fit of hiccups. I was somewhat sternly told to go and secrete myself in the basement, among the garbage cans, where the watchman never comes.

There, in the rat-haunted darkness, I heard a stifled sob. "What's that? Is it you? Is it Ella? What ails you, child? Why do you cry?"

"They wouldn't even let me see the play."

"Is that all? Let me console you."

"I am so unhappy."

She told me her tragic little story. What do you think? When she was a child, a little tiny child of only six, she strayed away and fell asleep behind a counter, while her mother tried on a new hat. When she awoke, the store was in darkness.

"And I cried, and they all came around, and took hold of me. 'She will tell, if we let her go,' they said. Some said, 'Call in the Dark Men.' 'Let her stay here,' said Mrs. Vanderpant. 'She will make me a nice little maid.' "

"Who are these Dark Men, Ella? They spoke of them when I came here."

"Don't you know? Oh, it's horrible! It's horrible!"

"Tell me, Ella. Let me share it."

She trembled. "You know the morticians, 'Journey's End,' who go to houses when people die?"

"Yes, Ella."

"Well, in that shop, just like here, and at Gimbel's, and at Bloomingdale's, there are people living, people like these."

"How disgusting! But what can they live upon, Ella, in a funeral home?"

"Don't ask me! Dead people are sent there, to be embalmed. Oh, they are terrible creatures! Even the people here are terrified of them. But if anyone dies, or if some poor burglar breaks in, and sees these people, and might tell—"

"Yes? Go on."

"Then they send for the others, the Dark Men."

"Good heavens!"

"Yes, and they put the body in Surgical Supplies—or the burglar, all tied up, if it's a burglar—and they send for these others, and then they all hide, and in they come, the others—Oh! they're like pieces of blackness. I saw them once. It was terrible."

"And then?"

"They go in, to where the dead person is, or the poor

burglar. And they have wax there—and all sorts of things. And when they're gone there's just one of these wax models left, on the table. And then our people put a dress on it, or a bathing suit, and they mix it up with all the others, and nobody never knows."

"But aren't they heavier than the others, these wax models? You would think they'd be heavier."

"No. They're not heavier. I think there's a lot of them—gone."

"Oh, dear! So they were going to do that to you, when you were a little child?"

"Yes, only Mrs. Vanderpant said I was to be her maid."

"I don't like these people, Ella."

"Nor do I. I wish I could see a bird."

"Why don't you go into the pet shop?"

"It wouldn't be the same. I want to see it on a twig, with leaves."

"Ella, let us meet often. Let us creep away down here and meet. I will tell you about birds, and twigs and leaves."

MAY 1 For the last few nights the store has been feverish with the shivering whisper of a huge crush at Bloomingdale's. Tonight was the night.

"Not changed yet? We leave on the stroke of two." Roscoe has appointed himself, or been appointed, my guide or my guard.

"Roscoe, I am still a greenhorn. I dread the streets."

"Nonsense! There's nothing to it. We slip out by two's and three's, stand on the sidewalk, pick up a taxi. Were you never out late in the old days? If so, you must have seen us, many a time."

"Good heavens, I believe I have! And often wondered where you came from. And it was from here! But, Roscoe, my brow is burning. I find it hard to breathe. I fear a cold."

"In that case you must certainly remain behind. Our

whole party would be disgraced in the unfortunate event of a sneeze."

I had relied on their rigid etiquette, so largely based on fear of discovery, and I was right. Soon they were gone, drifting out like leaves aslant on the wind. At once I dressed in flannel slacks, canvas shoes, and a tasteful sport shirt, all new in stock today. I found a quiet spot, safely off the track beaten by the night-watchman. There in a model's lifted hand, I set a wide fern frond culled from the florist's shop, and at once had a young, spring tree. The carpet was sandy, sandy as a lake-side beach. A snowy napkin; two cakes, each with a cherry on it; I had only to imagine the lake and to find Ella.

"Why, Charles, what's this?"

"I'm a poet, Ella, and when a poet meets a girl like you he thinks of a day in the country. Do you see this tree? Let's call it *our* tree. There's the lake—the prettiest lake imaginable. Here is grass, and there are flowers. There are birds, too, Ella. You told me you like birds."

"Oh, Charles, you're so sweet. I feel I hear them singing."

"And here's our lunch. But before we eat, go behind the rock there, and see what you find."

I heard her cry out in delight when she saw the summer dress I had put there for her. When she came back the spring day smiled to see her, and the lake shone brighter than before. "Ella, let us have lunch. Let us have fun. Let us have a swim. I can just imagine you in one of those new bathing suits."

"Let's just sit there, Charles, and talk."

So we sat and talked, and the time was gone like a dream. We might have stayed there, forgetful of everything, had it not been for the spider.

"Charles, what are you doing?"

"Nothing, my dear. Just a naughty little spider, crawling over your knee. Purely imaginary, of course,

but that sort are sometimes the worst. I had to try to catch him."

"Don't, Charles! It's late. It's terribly late. They'll be back any minute. I'd better go home."

I took her home to the kitchenware on the subground floor, and kissed her good-day. She offered me her cheek. This troubles me.

MAY 10 "Ella, I love you."

I said it to her just like that. We have met many times. I have dreamt of her by day. I have not even kept up my journal. Verse has been out of the question.

"Ella, I love you. Let us move into the trousseau department. Don't look so dismayed, darling. If you like, we will go right away from here. We will live in that little restaurant in Central Park. There are thousands of birds there."

"Please—please don't talk like that!"

"But I love you with all my heart."

"You mustn't."

"But I find I must. I can't help it. Ella, you don't love another?"

She wept a little. "Oh, Charles, I do."

"Love another, Ella? One of these? I thought you dreaded them all. It must be Roscoe. He is the only one that's any way human. We talk of art, life, and such things. And he has stolen your heart!"

"No, Charles, no. He's just like the rest, really. I hate them all. They make me shudder."

"Who is it, then?"

"It's him."

"Who?"

"The night-watchman."

"Impossible!"

"No. He smells of the sun."

"Oh, Ella, you have broken my heart."

"Be my friend, though."

"I will. I'll be your brother. How did you fall in love with him."

"Oh, Charles, it was so wonderful. I was thinking of birds, and I was careless. Don't tell on me, Charles. They'll punish me."

"No. No. Go on."

"I was careless, and there he was, coming round the corner. And there was no place for me; I had this blue dress on. There were only some wax models in their underthings."

"Please go on."

"I couldn't help it. I slipped off my dress, and stood still."

"I see."

"And he stopped just by me, Charles. And he looked at me. And he touched my cheek."

"Did he notice nothing?"

"No. It was cold. But Charles, he said—he said—'Say, honey, I wish they made 'em like you on Eighth Avenue.' Charles, wasn't that a lovely thing to say?"

"Personally, I should have said Park Avenue."

"Oh, Charles, don't get like these people here. Sometimes I think you're getting like them. It doesn't matter what street, Charles; it was a lovely thing to say."

"Yes, but my heart's broken. And what can you do about him? Ella, he belongs to another world."

"Yes, Charles, Eighth Avenue. I want to go there. Charles, are you truly my friend?"

"I'm your brother, only my heart's broken."

"I'll tell you. I will. I'm going to stand there again. So he'll see me."

"And then?"

"Perhaps he'll speak to me again."

"My dearest Ella, you are torturing yourself. You are making it worse."

"No, Charles. Because I shall answer him. He will take me away."

"Ella, I can't bear it."

"Ssh! There is someone coming. I shall see the birds —real birds, Charles—and flowers growing. They're coming. You must go."

MAY 13 The last three days have been torture. This evening I broke. Roscoe had joined me. He sat eying me for a long time. He put his hand on my shoulder.

He said, "You're looking seedy, old fellow. Why don't you go over to Wanamaker's for some skiing?"

His kindness compelled a frank response. "It's deeper than that, Roscoe. I'm done for. I can't eat, I can't sleep. I can't write, man, I can't even write."

"What is it? Day starvation?"

"Roscoe—it's love."

"Not one of the staff, Charles, or the customers? That's absolutely forbidden."

"No, it's not that, Roscoe. But just as hopeless."

"My dear fellow, I can't bear to see you like this. Let me help you. Let me share your trouble."

Then it all came out. It burst out. I trusted him. I think I trusted him. I really think I had no intention of betraying Ella, of spoiling her escape, of keeping her here till her heart turned towards me. If I had, it was subconscious, I swear it.

But I told him all. All! He was sympathetic, but I detected a sly reserve in his sympathy. "You will respect my confidence, Roscoe? This is to be a secret between us."

"As secret as the grave, old chap."

And he must have gone straight to Mrs. Vanderpant. This evening the atmosphere has changed. People flicker to and fro, smiling nervously, horribly, with a sort of frightened sadistic exaltation. When I speak to them they answer evasively, fidget, and disappear. An informal dance has been called off. I cannot find Ella. I will creep out. I will look for her again.

LATER Heaven! It has happened. I went in desperation to the manager's office, whose glass front overlooks the whole shop. I watched till midnight. Then I saw a little group of them, like ants bearing a victim. They were carrying Ella. They took her to the surgical department. They took other things.

And, coming back here, I was passed by a flittering, whispering horde of them, glancing over their shoulders in a thrilled ecstacy of panic, making for their hiding places. I, too, hid myself. How can I describe the dark inhuman creatures that passed me, silent as shadows? They went there—where Ella is.

What can I do? There is only one thing. I will find the watchman. I will tell him. He and I will have her. And if we are overpowered— Well, I will leave this on a counter. Tomorrow, if we live, I can recover it.

If not, look in the windows. Look for three new figures: two men, one rather sensitive-looking, and a girl. She has blue eyes, like periwinkle flowers, and her upper lip is lifted a little.

Look for us.

Smoke them out! Obliterate them! Avenge us!

THE COCOON

JOHN B. L. GOODWIN

Whereas downstairs his father had a room the walls of which were studded with trophies of his aggressive quests: heads of ibex, chamois, eland, keitloa, peccary, and ounce, upstairs Denny had pinned upon his playroom walls the fragile bodies of Swallowtails, Nymphs, Fritillaries, Meadow Browns and Anglewings.

Although his father had maneuvered expeditions, experienced privation, waded through jungles, climbed upon crags for his specimens, Denny had blithely gathered his within the fields and gardens close to home. It was likely that his father's day as a collector was over; Denny's had just begun.

Denny was eleven and his father forty-six and the house in which they lived was a hundred or more years old though no one could be exact about it. Mr. Peatybog, the postmaster in the shriveled village, said as how he could recall when the circular window on the second-story landing hadn't been there and Mrs. Bliss said she knew that at one time what was now the kitchen had been a taproom because her father had told her about it. The heart of the house, as Denny's father put it, was very old but people had altered it and added on and covered up. Denny's father had added the room where his heads were hung, but Denny's playroom must have been the original attic because where the rafters of its high, abrupt ceiling were visible the nails in them were square-headed and here and there the timbers were still held together with wooden pegs.

But the playroom, where Denny also slept, appeared to the casual glance anything but old. The floor was carpeted in blue, and curtains were yellow and the bedspread blue and white. The wallpaper, which his mother had chosen for him before she left, was yellow willow trees on a pale blue ground and to an alien eye the butterflies pinned on the walls seemed part of the design. It had been a long time since Denny's father had been up in the room and although he knew that his son's collection of Lepidoptera, as he called them, was pinned upon the walls he did not know and therefore could not reprimand his son for the damage they had done the pretty wallpaper. Under each specimen a putty-colored blot was spreading over the blue paper. It was the oil exuding from the drying bodies of the dead insects.

In one corner of the room was a chintz-covered chest in which lay the remains of Denny's earlier loves: battered trains and sections of track, an old transformer, batteries covered with cavernlike crystals of zinc salts, trucks, and windmills no longer recognizable as much more than haphazard, wooden arrangements of fitted blocks and sticks, books crumpled and torn with Denny's name or current dream scrawled aggressively in crayon across the print and pictures, a gyroscope, a rubber ball, its cracked paint making a mosaic of antique red and gold around its sphere, and somewhere at the bottom weighed down with tin and lead and wood more than any corpse with earth and grass, lay a bear, a monkey, and a boy doll with a scar across one cheek where Denny had kicked it with a skate. In another corner the symbols of his present were proudly displayed. The butterfly net leaned against the wall, and close to the floor on a wooden box turned upside down stood Denny's cyanide bottle, tweezers, and pins, the last shining as dangerously bright as minute surgical instruments in their packet of black paper.

After almost a year of collecting butterflies, Denny

had found that a certain equivocal quality could be added to his pursuit if he were to collect not only the butterflies but also the earlier stages of their mutations. By cramming milk bottles, shoe boxes, and whatever other receptable the house might offer with caterpillars and pupae he was, in the case of those that survived, able to participate in a sort of alchemy. Intently he would squat on his haunches and gaze into the receptacles, studying the laborious transformations, the caterpillar shedding skin, the exudation that is used to hitch its shroudlike chrysalid to twigs or undersides of leaves, and then the final unpredictable attainment of the imago. It was like opening a surprise package, for as yet Denny had not learned to tell what color, size, or shape worm would turn into a Dog's Head Sulphur, Mourning Cloak, or Tiger Swallowtail.

As late summer approached, Denny insisted that the servant girl refrain from opening the windows wide in order to air out his room. The sudden change in temperature, he said, would disturb the caterpillars and pupae. Even though the girl reported to his father that Denny's room smelled unhealthily from all the bugs and things, the man did no more than mention it to Denny in an offhand manner. Denny grunted to show that he had heard and did no more about it, and as his father was writing a book on his jungles and crags and beasts, he had really very little concern about what went on upstairs.

So it was that an acrid smell of decaying vegetable matter resolving itself into insect flesh pervaded Denny's bright attic room and the oily blotches on the walls beneath his specimens spread ever so slightly, discoloring the paper more and more.

In a book, *Butterflies You Ought to Know Better,* which an aunt had sent him for Christmas, Denny read that a suitable "castle" for a caterpillar could be made by placing a lamp chimney, closed at the top, upon a flowerpot filled with earth. He prepared this

enclosure, purchasing the lamp chimney from the village store with his own money. It was such an elegant contrivance and yet so magical that he decided to save it for an especially unusual specimen. It was not until a late afternoon in October that Denny found one worthy of the "castle."

He was exploring a copse between two fields. Because of the stoniness of its ground it had never been cultivated and lay like a sword between the fertility of the fields on either side. Denny had never trespassed on it before and dared to now only because of his growing self-confidence in his power over nature. A month ago he would have shied away from the area entirely, even taking the precaution to circumvent the two fields enclosing it. But he felt a little now the way he thought God must feel when, abject within its glass and cardboard world, the life he watched took form, changed, and ceased. Protected from unpleasant touch or any unpredictable action, Denny watched the metamorphosis from worm to chrysalid to miraculously vibrant petal. It lay within his power to sever abruptly the magical chain of their evolution at any point he chose. In a little way he *was* a little like God. It was this conceit that now gave him the courage to climb over the stones of the old wall and enter the half acre of dense woodland.

The autumn sun, already low, ogled the brittle landscape like some improbable jack-o'-lantern hanging in the west. What birds were still in that country spoke in the rasping tone of the herd; the more mellifluous and prosperous had already gone south. Although the leaves on the trees displayed the incautious yellows of senility and ochres of decay, the underbrush such as cat briar and wild grape were mostly green. Armed with his forceps and his omnipotence, Denny explored each living leaf and twig.

Brambles tore his stockings and scratched his knees but, except for vulgar tent caterpillars in the wild

cherry trees, Denny's efforts went unrewarded. It was dusk when, searching among the speculatively shaped leaves of a sassafras, Denny found a specimen beyond his most arrogant expectations. At first sight, due in part to the twilight, it looked more like some shriveled dragon than a caterpillar. Between it and the twig a filament stretched and this, added to the fact that when Denny touched it gingerly he could feel its puffy flesh contract the way caterpillars do, convinced him that it was no freak of nature or if it was it was a caterpillar freak and therefore nothing to fear. Tearing it cautiously with his tweezers from the twig, he put the monster in the Diamond Match box he always carried with him and, running breathlessly, blind to briar and brambles, Denny headed home.

It was suppertime when he got there and his father was already at the table, his left hand turning the pages of a book while with his right hand he ladled soup into his mouth. Denny had clattered up the stairs before his father was aware of his presence.

"You're late, son," he said in the moment between two printed sentences and two spoonfuls of soup.

"I know, Father," Denny replied without stopping, "but I got something."

Another sentence and another spoonful.

"How many times have I told you to be explicit? *Something* can be anything from a captive balloon to a case of mumps."

From the second landing Denny called down, "It's just *something*. I don't know what it is."

His father mumbled, and by the time he had finished a paragraph and scooped up the last nugget of meat out of his soup and had addressed his son with the words, "Whatever it is it will wait until you have your supper," Denny was peering at it through the glass of the lamp chimney.

Even in the bright electric glare it was reptilian. It was large for a caterpillar, between four and five inches

long Denny guessed, and was a muddy purple color, its underside a yellowish black. At either extremity it bore a series of three horny protuberances of a vermilion shade; they were curved sharply inward and stiff little hairs grew from them. From its mouth there protruded a set of small grasping claws like those of a crustacean. Its skin was wrinkled like that of a tortoise and the abdominal segments were sharply defined. The feet lacked the usual suction-like apparatuses caterpillars have but were scaly and shaped like tiny claws.

It was indeed worthy of its "castle." It was not to be found in any of the illustrated books Denny had. He would guard it and keep it a secret and finally, when he presented its metamorphosis into a winged thing to the world, his father's renown as the captor of extraordinary beasts would pale beside his own. The only thing he could guess at, and that because of its size, was that it was the larva of a moth rather than that of a butterfly.

He was still peering at it when the servant girl brought up a tray. "Here," she said, "if you're such a busy little gentleman that you can't spare time for supper like an ordinary boy. If I had my way you'd go hungry." She set the tray down on the table. "Pugh!" she added. "The smell of this room is something awful. What have you got there now?" And she was about to peer over Denny's shoulder.

"Get out!" he shrieked, turning on her. "Get out!"

"I'm not so sure I will if you speak like that."

He arose and in his fury pushed her hulk out the door, slamming it and locking it after her.

She started to say something on the other side, but what it was Denny never knew or cared, for his own voice screaming, "And stay out!" sent the young girl scurrying down the stairs to his father.

It was typical of the man that he merely commiserated with the girl, agreed with her on the urgency of

some sort of discipline for his son, and then, settling back to his pipe and his manuscript, dismissed the matter from his mind.

The following day Denny told the girl that henceforth she was not to enter his room, neither to make the bed nor to clean.

"We shall see about that," she said, "though it would be a pleasure such as I never hoped for this side of heaven were I never to enter that horrid smelling room again."

Again his father was approached and this time he reluctantly called his son to him.

"Ethel tells me something about you not wanting her to go into your room," he said, peering over his glasses.

"I'd rather she didn't, Father," Denny replied, humble as pie. "You see, she doesn't understand about caterpillars and cocoons and things and she messes everything up."

"But who will see to the making of your bed and dusting and such?"

"I will," asserted Denny. "There's no reason why if I don't want anyone to go into my room I shouldn't have to make up for it somehow, like making my own bed and clearing up."

"Spoken like a soldier, son," the father said. "I know the way you feel and if you're willing to pay the price in responsibility I see no reason why you shouldn't have your wish. But," and he pointed a paper knife of walrus tusk at the boy, "if it isn't kept neat and tidy we'll have to rescind the privilege; remember that."

His father, grateful that the interview had not been as tedious as he had anticipated, told his son he could go. From then on Denny always kept the key to his room in his pocket.

Because caterpillars cease to eat prior to their chrys-

alis stage and Denny's caterpillar refused to eat whatever assortment of leaves he tried to tempt it with, Denny knew that it had definitely been preparing its cocoon when he had plucked it from the sassafras branch. It was very restless, almost convulsive now, and within the lamp chimney it humped itself aimlessly from twig to twig, its scaly little claws searching for something to settle upon. After a day of such meanderings the caterpillar settled upon a particular crotch of the twig and commenced to spin its cocoon. By the end of twenty-four hours the silken alembic was complete.

Though there was now nothing for Denny to observe, he still squatted for hours on end staring at the cocoon that hung like some parasitic growth from the sassafras twig. His concentration upon the shape was so great as he sat hunched over it, that his eyes seemed to tear the silken shroud apart and to be intimately exploring the secret that was taking place within.

Now Denny spent less and less of the days out in the open searching for the more common types of chrysalid with which he was acquainted. Such were for him as garnets would be to a connoisseur of emeralds. His lean, tanned face became puffy and the palms of his hands were pale and moist.

The winter months dragged on and Denny was as listlessly impatient as what was inside the cocoon. His room was cold and airless, for a constant low temperature must be kept if the cocoon was to lie dormant until spring. His bed was seldom made and the floor was thick with dust and mud. Once a week the girl left the broom and dustpan along with the clean sheets outside his door, but Denny took only the sheets into his room where they would collect into a stack on the floor for weeks at a time. His father took no notice of his condition other than to write a postscript to what was otherwise a legal and splenetic letter to his wife that their son looked peaked and upon receiving an

apprehensive reply he casually asked Denny if he was feeling all right. The boy's affirmative though non-committal answer seemed to satisfy him and, dropping a card to his wife to the effect that their son professed to be in sound health, he considered himself released from any further responsibility.

When April was about gone Denny moved his treasure close to the window where the sun would induce the dormant thing within it into life. In a few days Denny was sure that it was struggling for release, for the cocoon seemed to dance up and down idiotically upon its thread. All that night he kept vigil, his red and swollen eyes focused on the cocoon as upon some hypnotic object. His father ate breakfast alone and by nine o'clock showed enough concern to send the servant girl up to see if everything was all right. She hurried back to report that his son was at least still alive enough to be rude to her. The father mumbled something in reply about the boy's mother having shirked her responsibilities. The girl said that if it pleased him, she would like to give notice. She was very willing to enumerate the reasons why, but the man dismissed her casually with the request that she stay until he found someone to take her place.

At ten Denny was positive that the cocoon was about to break; by ten-thirty there was no longer any doubt in his mind. Somewhat before eleven the eclosion took place. There was a convulsive movement inside and the cocoon opened at the top with the faint rustle of silk. The feathery antennae and the two forelegs issued forth, the legs clutching the cocoon in order to hoist the body through the narrow aperture. The furry and distended abdomen, upon which were hinged the crumpled wings, was drawn out with effort. Immediately the creature commenced awkwardly to climb the twig from which the cocoon was suspended. Denny watched the procedure in a trance. Having gained the tip of the branch and unable to proceed farther, the

insect rested, its wings hanging moist and heavy from its bloated body. The abdomen with each pulsation shrank visibly and gradually, very gradually, the antennae unfurled and the wings expanded with the juices pumped into them from the body.

Within an hour the metamorphosis of many months was complete. The beast, its wings still slightly damp though fully spread, fluttered gently before the eyes of the boy. Though escaped from its cocoon, it lay imprisoned still behind the glass.

Denny's pallor was suddenly flushed. He grasped the lamp chimney as if he would hold the insect to him. This was his miracle, his alone. He watched with a possessive awe as the creature flexed its wings, although it was still too weak to attempt flight. Surely this specimen before him was unique. The wings were easily ten inches across and their color was so subtly graduated that it was impossible to say where black turned to purple and purple to green and green back to black. The only definite delineations were a crab-like simulacrum centered on each hind wing and upon each fore wing, the imitation of an open mouth with teeth bared. Both the crabs and the mouths were chalked in white and vermilion.

By noon Denny was hungry, yet so overcome with nervous exhaustion that he almost decided to forego the midday meal. Aware, however, that an absence from two meals running would surely precipitate an intrusion by his father with the servant girl as proxy, he reluctantly left his room and went downstairs to face his father over luncheon.

Despite his compliance, the father was immediately aware of the transformation in his son.

"Spring seems to have put new life into the lad," he said, turning over the page of a book. "You're like your mother in that respect and in that respect only, thank God. She never did do well in cold weather."

It was the first time he had mentioned the mother

to the son since he had been forced to explain her departure obliquely some five years before. The boy was shocked. But as the opportunity had arisen, he hastily decided to follow up the mention of his mother. It was unseemly that he should disclose any sentiment, so he hesitated and calculated before putting his question. "Why doesn't she write or send me presents?" he asked.

His father's pause made him almost unbearably aware of the man's chagrin in having opened the subject. He didn't look up at the boy as he answered. "Because legally she is not allowed to."

The remainder of the meal was passed in silent and mutual embarrassment.

Denny returned to his room as soon as he could respectfully quit the table, and while unlocking the door for an awful moment the possibility that the moth might have escaped, might never really have been there, scorched Denny's mind. But it was there, almost as he had left it, only now it had changed its position; the spread of its wings being nearly horizontal and in this position Denny realized that the lamp chimney was too narrow to allow it free movement.

There was no receptacle in the room any larger and in Denny's mind there paraded the various jars, the vases, and other vessels in the house that had from time to time in the past served as enclosures for his specimens. None of them was large enough. Without sufficient room, the moth as soon as it attempted flight would in no time at all damage its wings. In a kind of frenzy Denny racked his brains for the memory of some container that would satisfy his need. Like a ferret his thoughts suddenly pounced on what had eluded them. In his father's room a huge crystal tobacco jar with a lid of repoussé silver stood on an ebony taboret beneath the smirking head of a tiger.

There was no time to lose; for within five hours after emerging from the cocoon a moth will try its wings in flight. Breathlessly Denny bounded down the

stairs and for a moment only hesitated before he knocked upon his father's door.

"Yes?" his father asked querulously, and Denny turned the knob and walked in.

"Father—" he began, but he had not as yet caught his breath.

"Speak up, boy, and stop shaking. Why, even confronted by a rogue elephant I never shook so."

"I want to b-b-borrow something," the boy managed to stammer.

"Be more explicit! Be more explicit! What do you want? A ticket to Fall River? A hundred-dollar bill? A dose of epicac? The last would seem the most logical to judge from your looks."

Hating his father as he had never hated him before, the boy spoke up. "I want to borrow your tobacco jar."

"Which one?" the father parried. "The elephant foot the President gave me? The Benares brass? The Dutch pottery one? The music box?"

The boy could bear this bantering no longer. "I want that one." And he pointed directly where it stood half full of tobacco.

"What for?" his father asked.

The boy's bravura was suddenly extinguished.

"Speak up. If you make an extraordinary request you must be ready to back it up with a motive."

"I want it for a specimen."

"What's wrong with all the containers you have already appropriated from kitchen, pantry, and parlor?"

Denny would not say they were not big enough. It might arouse sufficient interest within his father so that he would insist on seeing for himself what this monster was. Denny had a vision of his father grabbing the moth and hastening to impale it upon the study wall, adding it to his other conquests.

"They won't do," Denny said.

"Why won't they do?"

"They just won't."

"Be explicit!" his father thundered at him.

"I want to put some stuff in it that won't fit in the others."

"You will stand where you are without moving until you can tell me what you mean by 'stuff.' " His father laid down his glasses and settled back in his chair to underscore the fact that he was prepared to wait all day if need be.

"Chrysalids and dirt and sticks and food for them," the boy mumbled.

The man stared at Denny as if he were an animal he had at bay.

"You intend to put *that* filth into *that* jar?"

Denny made no answer. His father continued.

"Are you by any chance aware that that jar was a gift from the Maharana of Udaipur? Have you any faintest conception of its intrinsic value aside from the sentimental one? And can you see from where you stand that, besides any other objections I might have, the jar is being employed for what it was intended for? And if for one moment you think I am going to remove my best tobacco from my best jar so that you can use it for a worm bowl you are, my lad, very much mistaken."

The man waited for the effect of his speech and then added, "Go and ask Ethel for a crock."

It was useless for Denny to attempt to explain that he wouldn't be able to see through a crock. Without a word he turned and walked out of the room, leaving the door open behind him.

His father called him back, but he paid no mind. As he reached the second landing Denny heard the door slam downstairs.

A half hour had been wasted and, as he had been sure it would, the moth, having gained control over itself, was in the first struggles of flight.

There was only one thing to do. Denny went to the

corner where he kept his equipment. Returning, he lifted the lid from the lamp chimney and reaching inside with his forceps he clenched the moth with a certain brutality, though he took pains to avoid injury to its wings. Lifting it out, the beauty of so few hours, Denny once again felt his omnipotence. Without hesitation he plunged the moth into the cyanide jar and screwed down the lid.

The wings beat frantically with the effort that should have carried the moth on its first flight through the spring air. Breathless, Denny watched for fear the wings would be injured. The dusty abdomen throbbed faster and faster, the antennae twitched from side to side; with a spasm the abdomen formed a curve to meet the thorax. The eyes, still bearing the unenlightened glaze of birth, turned suddenly into the unknowing glaze of death. But in the moment that they turned Denny thought he saw his distorted image gleaming on their black, china surfaces as if in that instant the moth had stored his image in its memory.

Denny unscrewed the cap, plucked out the moth and, piercing its body with a pin from the black paper packet, he pinned the moth to the wall at the foot of his bed. He gave it a place of honor, centering it upon a yellow willow tree. From his bed he would see it first thing in the morning and last thing at night.

A few days and nights passed, and Denny, though still on edge, felt somewhat as a hero must returning from a labor. The untimely death of the moth had perhaps been fortuitous, because now in its death the creature was irrevocably his.

The meadows were already filled with cabbage butterflies, and Denny would go out with his net and catch them, but they were too common to preserve and so, having captured them, he would reach his hand into the net and squash them, wiping the mess in his palm off on the grass.

It was less than a week after the death of the moth when Denny was awakened in the night by a persistent beating on his windowpane. He jumped from bed, switched on the light, and peered outside. With the light on he could see nothing, and whatever it had been was gone. Realizing that though the light made anything outside invisible to him it would also act as a lure to whatever had tried to come in, he went back to bed leaving the light on and the window open. He tried to stay awake but soon fell back into sleep.

In the morning he looked about the room, but there was no sign of anything having entered. It must have been a June bug or possibly a lunar moth though it had sounded too heavy for one, thought Denny. He went over to look at the moth on the wall, a morning ritual with him. Although he could not be sure, the dust of one wing seemed to be smudged and the oily stain from the body had soaked into the wallpaper considerably since the day before. He put his face close to the insect to inspect it more fully. Instinctively he drew back; the odor was unbearable.

The following night Denny left his window wide open and shortly before midnight he was awakened by a beating of wings upon his face. Terrified and not fully conscious, he hit out with his open hands. He touched something and it wasn't pleasant. It was yielding and at the same time viscid. And something scratched against the palm of his hand like a tiny spur or horn.

Leaping from bed, Denny switched on the light. There was nothing in the room. It must have been a bat and the distasteful thought made him shudder. Whatever it had been, it left a stench behind not unlike the stench of the spot on the wall. Denny slammed the window shut and went back to bed and tried to sleep.

In the morning his red-rimmed eyes inspecting the

moth plainly saw that not only were the wings smudged but that the simulacra of crabs and mouths upon the wings seemed to have grown more definite. The oily spot had spread still farther and the smell was stronger.

That night Denny slept with his window closed, but in his dreams he was beset by horned and squashy things that pounded his flesh with their fragile wings, and awakening in fright he heard the same sound as he had heard the previous night; something beating against the windowpane. All night it beat against the closed window and Denny lay rigid and sleepless in his bed and the smell within the room grew into something almost tangible.

At dawn Denny arose and forced himself to look at the moth. He held his nose as he did so and with horror he saw the stain on the paper and the crabs and the mouths which now not only seemed more definite but also considerably enlarged.

For the first time in months Denny left his room and did not return to it until it was his bedtime. Even that hour he contrived to postpone a little by asking his father to read to him. It was the lesser of two evils.

The stench in the room was such that although Denny dared not leave the window open he was forced to leave the door from the landing into his room ajar. What was left of the light in the hall below, after it had wormed its way up and around the stairs, crawled exhaustedly into the room. For some perverse reason it shone most brightly upon the wall where the moth was transfixed. From his bed Denny could not take his eyes off it. Though they made no progress, the two crabs on the hind wings appeared to be attempting to climb up into the two mouths on the fore wings. The mouths seemed to be very open and ready for them.

That night no sooner had the beating of wings upon the window awakened Denny than it abruptly ceased. The light downstairs was out and the room was now

in darkness. Curling himself up into a ball and pulling the sheet over his head, Denny at length went off to sleep.

Sometime shortly afterward something came through the door and half crawled and half fluttered to the bed. Denny awoke with a scream, but it was too muffled for either his father or Ethel to hear because what caused him to scream had wormed its way beneath the sheet and was resting like a sticky pulp upon Denny's mouth.

Floundering like a drowning person, the boy threw back the covers and managed to dislodge whatever had been upon his mouth. When he dared to, he reached out and turned on the light. There was nothing in the room, but upon his sheets there were smudges of glistening dust almost black, almost purple, almost green, but not quite any of them.

Denny went down to breakfast without looking at the moth.

"No wonder you look ghastly," his father said to him, "if the smell in this house is half of what it must be in your room, it's a wonder you're not suffocated. What are you running up there? A Potters' Field for Lepidoptera? I'll give you until noon to get them out."

All day Denny left the window of his room wide open. It was the first of May and the sun was bright. As a sop to his father he brought down a box of duplicate specimens. He showed them to his father before disposing of them.

"Pugh!" said his father. "Dump them far away from the house."

That night Denny went to bed with both the door and window locked tight in spite of the smell. The moon was bright and shone all night unimpaired upon the wall. Denny could not keep his eyes off the moth.

By now both crabs and mouths were nearly as large as the wings themselves and the crabs were moving,

Denny could swear. They appeared in relief, perhaps through some trick of chiaroscuro induced by the moonlight upon the dusty white and red markings. The claws seemed upon the verge of attacking the mouths, or were the so terribly white teeth of the mouths waiting to clamp down upon the crabs? Denny shuddered and closed his eyes.

Sleep came eventually, only to be broken in upon by the beating of wings against the windowpane. And no sooner had that ceased and Denny become less rigid than the thing was at the door beating urgently as though it must be let in. The only relief from the tap-tapping was an occasional, more solid thud against the panel of the door. It was, Denny guessed, caused by the soft and fleshy body of the thing.

If he survived the night Denny vowed he would destroy the thing upon the wall or, better than losing it entirely, he would give it to his father and he in turn would present it to some museum in Denny's name. Denny for a moment was able to forget the persistent rapping which had now returned to the window, for in his mind he saw a glass case with the moth in it and a little card below upon which was printed

Unique specimen Lepidoptera. Gift of Mr. Denny Longwood, Aged 12.

All through the night, first at the window, then at the door, the beating of the wings continued, relieved only by the occasional plop of the soft, heavy body.

Though having dozed for only an hour or two, with the bright light of day Denny felt his decision of the night before indefensible. The moth smelled; that was undeniable. The matter of the crab and mouthlike markings seeming to expand and become more intense in their color could probably be explained by somebody who knew about such things. As for the beating

against the window and the door, it was probably as he had at first surmised, a bat or, if need be, two bats. The moth on the wall was dead, was his. He had hatched it and he knew the limitations of a moth dead or alive. He looked at it. The stain had spread so that now its diameter was as great as the spread of the wings. It was no longer exactly a stain, either. It looked as if a spoonful of dirty cereal had adhered to the wall; it was just about the color of mush. It will stop in time like the others; just as soon as the abdomen dries up, thought Denny.

At breakfast his father remarked that the smell as yet hadn't left the house, that it was in fact stronger if anything. Denny admitted it might take a day or two more before it was completely gone.

Before the meal was over his father told Denny that he was looking so badly that he had better see Dr. Phipps.

"How much do you weigh?" he asked.

Denny didn't know.

"You look," his father said, "all dried up like one of those pupae you had upstairs."

The moon shone bright again that night. In spite of his logic of the morning Denny felt sure that the movement of the white and vermilion crabs up to the white teeth and vermilion lips was more than just hallucination. And the beating of wings started at the window again. Then at the door. Then back to the window. And, in a way, worse than that the plop now and then of the body against the barrier. Though he tried to rise and look out when it was at the window, his limbs would not obey him. Hopelessly his eyes turned to the wall again. The crablike spots clicked their tiny claws together each time the wings struck against the windowpane. And each time the plump, squashy body went plop, the teeth snapped together between the thin-lipped mouths.

All at once the stench within the room became nau-

seating. There was nothing for Denny to do but make for the door while whatever it was still pounded at the window. As much as he feared and hated him, his father's cynical disbelief was to be preferred to this terror.

Denny refrained from switching on the light for fear that it would reveal his movements to the thing outside. Halfway across the room and shivering, he involuntarily turned his head and for a moment his feverish eyes saw what was outside before it disappeared.

Denny rushed for the door and unlocked it, but as he twisted the knob something beat against the other side of the door, pushing it open before Denny could shut the door against it.

When luncheon was over Ethel was sent upstairs to see what had happened. She was so hysterical when she came down that Denny's father went up to see for himself.

Denny lay in his pajamas on the floor just inside the door. The skin of his lonely and somewhat arrogant face was marred by the marks of something pincerlike and from his nose, eyes, ears, and mouth a network of viscid filaments stretched across his face and to the floor as though something had tried to bind his head up in them. His father had some trouble in lifting him up because the threads adhered so stubbornly to the nap of the blue carpet.

The body was feather light in the father's arms. The thought that the boy had certainly been underweight passed inanely through his father's mind.

As he carried his son out his eyes fell upon a spot on the wall at the foot of the bed. The pattern of a willow tree was completely obliterated by a creeping growth that looked like fungus. Still carrying his son, the man crossed over to it. A pin protruded from its center and it was from this spot, Mr. Longwood could tell, that the terrible smell came.

VINTAGE SEASON

C. L. MOORE

Three people came up the walk to the old mansion just at dawn on a perfect May morning. Oliver Wilson in his pajamas watched them from an upper window through a haze of conflicting emotions, resentment predominant. He didn't want them there.

They were foreigners. He knew only that much about them. They had the curious name of Sancisco, and their first names, scrawled in loops on the lease, appeared to be Omerie, Kleph and Klia, though it was impossible as he looked down upon them now to sort them out by signature. He hadn't even been sure whether they would be men or women, and he had expected something a little less cosmopolitan.

Oliver's heart sank a little as he watched them follow the taxi driver up the walk. He had hoped for less self-assurance in his unwelcomed tenants, because he meant to force them out of the house if he could. It didn't look very promising from here.

The man went first. He was tall and dark, and he wore his clothes and carried his body with that peculiar arrogant assurance that comes from perfect confidence in every phase of one's being. The two women were laughing as they followed him. Their voices were light and sweet, and their faces were beautiful, each in its own exotic way, but the first thing Oliver thought of when he looked at them was, Expensive!

It was not only that patina of perfection that seemed to dwell in every line of their incredibly flawless gar-

ments. There are degrees of wealth beyond which wealth itself ceases to have significance. Oliver had seen before, on rare occasions, something like this assurance that the earth turning beneath their well-shod feet turned only to their whim.

It puzzled him a little in this case, because he had the feeling as the three came up the walk that the beautiful clothing they wore so confidently was not clothing they were accustomed to. There was a curious air of condescension in the way they moved. Like women in costume. They minced a little on their delicate high heels, held out an arm to stare at the cut of a sleeve, twisted now and then inside their garments as if the clothing sat strangely on them, as if they were accustomed to something entirely different.

And there was an elegance about the way the garments fitted them which even to Oliver looked strikingly unusual. Only an actress on the screen, who can stop time and the film to adjust every disarrayed fold so that she looks perpetually perfect, might appear thus elegantly clad. But let these women move as they liked, and each fold of their clothing followed perfectly with the movement and fell perfectly into place again. One might almost suspect the garments were not cut of ordinary cloth, or that they were cut according to some unknown, subtle scheme, with many artful hidden seams placed by a tailor incredibly skilled at his trade.

They seemed excited. They talked in high, clear, very sweet voices, looking up at the perfect blue and transparent sky in which dawn was still frankly pink. They looked at the trees on the lawn, the leaves translucently green with an undercolor of golden newness, the edges crimped from constriction in the recent bud.

Happily and with excitement in their voices they called to the man, and when he answered, his own voice blended so perfectly in cadence with theirs that it sounded like three people singing together. Their

voices, like their clothing, seemed to have an elegance far beyond the ordinary, to be under a control such as Oliver Wilson had never dreamed of before this morning.

The taxi driver brought up the luggage, which was of a beautiful pale stuff that did not look quite like leather, and had curves in it so subtle it seemed square until you saw how two or three pieces of it fitted together when carried, into a perfectly balanced block. It was scuffed, as if from much use. And though there was a great deal of it, the taxi-man did not seem to find his burden heavy. Oliver saw him look down at it now and then and heft the weight incredulously.

One of the women had very black hair and skin like cream, and smoke-blue eyes heavy-lidded with the weight of her lashes. It was the other woman Oliver's gaze followed as she came up the walk. Her hair was a clear, pale red, and her face had a softness that he thought would be like velvet to touch. She was tanned to a warm amber darker than her hair.

Just as they reached the porch steps the fair woman lifted her head and looked up. She gazed straight into Oliver's eyes and he saw that hers were very blue, and just a little amused, as if she had known he was there all along. Also they were frankly admiring.

Feeling a bit dizzy, Oliver hurried back to his room to dress.

"We are here on a vacation," the dark man said, accepting the keys. "We will not wish to be disturbed, as I made clear in our correspondence. You have engaged a cook and housemaid for us, I understand? We will expect you to move your own belongings out of the house, then, and—"

"Wait," Oliver said uncomfortably. "Something's come up. I—" He hesitated, not sure just how to present it. These were such increasingly odd people. Even their speech was odd. They spoke so distinctly, not slur-

ring any of the words into contractions. English seemed as familiar to them as a native tongue, but they all spoke as trained singers sing, with perfect breath control and voice placement.

And there was a coldness in the man's voice, as if some gulf lay between him and Oliver, so deep no feeling of human contact could bridge it.

"I wonder," Oliver said, "if I could find you better living quarters somewhere else in town. There's a place across the street that—"

The dark woman said, "Oh, no!" in a lightly horrified voice, and all three of them laughed. It was cool, distant laughter that did not include Oliver.

The dark man said, "We chose this house carefully, Mr. Wilson. We would not be interested in living anywhere else."

Oliver said desperately, "I don't see why. It isn't even a modern house. I have two others in much better condition. Even across the street you'd have a fine view of the city. Here there isn't anything. The other houses cut off the view, and—"

"We engaged rooms here, Mr. Wilson," the man said with finality. "We expect to use them. Now will you make arrangements to leave as soon as possible?"

Oliver said, "No," and looked stubborn. "That isn't in the lease. You can live here until next month, since you paid for it, but you can't put me out. I'm staying."

The man opened his mouth to say something. He looked coldly at Oliver and closed it again. The feeling of aloofness was chill between them. There was a moment's silence. Then the man said, "Very well. Be kind enough to stay out of our way."

It was a little odd that he didn't inquire into Oliver's motives. Oliver was not yet sure enough of the man to explain. He couldn't very well say, "Since the lease was signed, I've been offered three times what the house is worth if I'll sell it before the end of May." He couldn't say, "I want the money, and I'm going to use

my own nuisance-value to annoy you until you're willing to move out." After all, there seemed no reason why they shouldn't. After seeing them, there seemed doubly no reason, for it was clear they must be accustomed to surroundings infinitely better than this timeworn old house.

It was very strange, the value this house had so suddenly acquired. There was no reason at all why two groups of semi-anonymous people should be so eager to possess it for the month of May.

In silence Oliver showed his tenants upstairs to the three big bedrooms across the front of the house. He was intensely conscious of the red-haired woman and the way she watched him with a sort of obviously covert interest, quite warmly, and with a curious undertone to her interest that he could not quite place. It was familiar, but elusive. He thought how pleasant it would be to talk to her alone, if only to try to capture that elusive attitude and put a name to it.

Afterward he went down to the telephone and called his fiancée.

Sue's voice squeaked a little with excitement over the wire.

"Oliver, so early? Why, it's hardly six yet. Did you tell them what I said? Are they going to go?"

"Can't tell yet. I doubt it. After all, Sue, I did take their money, you know."

"Oliver, they've got to go! You've got to do something!"

"I'm trying, Sue. But I don't like it."

"Well, there isn't any reason why they shouldn't stay somewhere else. And we're going to need that money. You'll just have to think of something, Oliver."

Oliver met his own worried eyes in the mirror above the telephone and scowled at himself. His straw-colored hair was tangled and there was a shining stubble on his pleasant, tanned face. He was sorry the red-haired woman had first seen him in his untidy condi-

tion. Then his conscience smote him at the sound of Sue's determined voice and he said:

"I'll try, darling. I'll try. But I did take their money."

They had, in fact, paid a great deal of money, considerably more than the rooms were worth even in that year of high prices and high wages. The country was just moving into one of those fabulous eras which are later referred to as the Gay Forties or the Golden Sixties—a pleasant period of national euphoria. It was a stimulating time to be alive—while it lasted.

"All right," Oliver said resignedly. "I'll do my best."

But he was conscious, as the next few days went by, that he was not doing his best. There were several reasons for that. From the beginning the idea of making himself a nuisance to his tenants had been Sue's, not Oliver's. And if Oliver had been a little less determined the whole project would never have got under way. Reason was on Sue's side, but—

For one thing, the tenants were so fascinating. All they said and did had a queer sort of inversion to it, as if a mirror had been held up to ordinary living and in the reflection showed strange variations from the norm. Their minds worked on a different basic premise, Oliver thought, from his own. They seemed to derive covert amusement from the most unamusing things; they patronized, they were aloof with a quality of cold detachment which did not prevent them from laughing inexplicably far too often for Oliver's comfort.

He saw them occasionally, on their way to and from their rooms. They were polite and distant, not, he suspected, from anger at his presence but from sheer indifference.

Most of the day they spent out of the house. The perfect May weather held unbroken and they seemed to give themselves up wholeheartedly to admiration of it, entirely confident that the warm, pale-gold sunshine and the scented air would not be interrupted by

rain or cold. They were so sure of it that Oliver felt uneasy.

They took only one meal a day in the house, a late dinner. And their reactions to the meal were unpredictable. Laughter greeted some of the dishes, and a sort of delicate digust others. No one would touch the salad, for instance. And the fish seemed to cause a wave of queer embarrassment around the table.

They dressed elaborately for each dinner. The man —his name was Omerie—looked extremely handsome in his dinner clothes, but he seemed a little sulky and Oliver twice heard the women laughing because he had to wear black. Oliver entertained a sudden vision, for no reason, of the man in garments as bright and as subtly cut as the women's, and it seemed somehow very right for him. He wore even the dark clothing with a certain flamboyance, as if cloth-of-gold would be more normal for him.

When they were in the house at other mealtimes, they ate in their rooms. They must have brought a great deal of food with them, from whatever mysterious place they had come. Oliver wondered with increasing curiosity where it might be. Delicious odors drifted into the hall sometimes, at odd hours, from their closed doors. Oliver could not identify them, but almost always they smelled irresistible. A few times the food smell was rather shockingly unpleasant, almost nauseating. It takes a connoisseur, Oliver reflected, to appreciate the decadent. And these people, most certainly, were connoisseurs.

Why they lived so contentedly in this huge ramshackle old house was a question that disturbed his dreams at night. Or why they refused to move. He caught some fascinating glimpses into their rooms, which appeared to have been changed almost completely by additions he could not have defined very clearly from the brief sights he had of them. The feel-

ing of luxury which his first glance at them had evoked was confirmed by the richness of the hangings they had apparently brought with them, the half-glimpsed ornaments, the pictures on the walls, even the whiffs of exotic perfume that floated from half-open doors.

He saw the women go by him in the halls, moving softly through the brown dimness in their gowns so uncannily perfect in fit, so lushly rich, so glowingly colored they seemed unreal. That poise born of confidence in the subservience of the world gave them an imperious aloofness, but more than once Oliver, meeting the blue gaze of the woman with the red hair and the soft, tanned skin, thought he saw quickened interest there. She smiled at him in the dimness and went by in a haze of fragrance and a halo of incredible richness, and the warmth of the smile lingered after she had gone.

He knew she did not mean this aloofness to last between them. From the very first he was sure of that. When the time came she would make the opportunity to be alone with him. The thought was confusing and tremendously exciting. There was nothing he could do but wait, knowing she would see him when it suited her.

On the third day he lunched with Sue in a little downtown restaurant overlooking the great sweep of the metropolis across the river far below. Sue had shining brown curls and brown eyes, and her chin was a bit more prominent than is strictly accordant with beauty. From childhood Sue had known what she wanted and how to get it, and it seemed to Oliver just now that she had never wanted anything quite so much as the sale of this house.

"It's such a marvelous offer for the old mausoleum," she said, breaking into a roll with a gesture of violence. "We'll never have a chance like that again, and prices

are so high we'll need the money to start housekeeping. Surely you can do *something*, Oliver!"

"I'm trying," Oliver assured her uncomfortably.

"Have you heard anything more from that madwoman who wants to buy it?"

Oliver shook his head. "Her attorney phoned again yesterday. Nothing new. I wonder who she is."

"I don't think even the attorney knows. All this mystery—I don't like it, Oliver. Even those Sancisco people—What did they do today?"

Oliver laughed. "They spent about an hour this morning telephoning movie theaters in the city, checking up on a lot of third-rate films they want to see parts of."

"Parts of? But why?"

"I don't know. I think . . . oh, nothing. More coffee?"

The trouble was, he thought he did know. It was too unlikely a guess to tell Sue about, and without familiarity with the Sancisco oddities she would only think Oliver was losing his mind. But he had from their talk, a definite impression that there was an actor in bit parts in all these films whose performances they mentioned with something very near to awe. They referred to him as Golconda, which didn't appear to be his name, so that Oliver had no way of guessing which obscure bit-player it was they admired so deeply. Golconda might have been the name of a character he had once played—and with superlative skill, judging by the comments of the Sanciscos—but to Oliver it meant nothing at all.

"They do funny things," he said, stirring his coffee reflectively. "Yesterday Omerie—that's the man—came in with a book of poems published about five years ago, and all of them handled it like a first edition of Shakespeare. I never even heard of the author, but he seems to be a tin god in their country, wherever that is."

"You still don't know? Haven't they even dropped any hints?"

"We don't do much talking," Oliver reminded her with some irony.

"I know, but—Oh, well, I guess it doesn't matter. Go on, what else do they do?"

"Well, this morning they were going to spend studying 'Golconda' and his great art, and this afternoon I think they're taking a trip up the river to some sort of shrine I never heard of. It isn't very far, wherever it is, because I know they're coming back for dinner. Some great man's birthplace, I think—they promised to take home souvenirs of the place if they could get any. They're typical tourists, all right—if I could only figure out what's behind the whole thing. It doesn't make sense."

"Nothing about that house makes sense any more. I do wish—"

She went on in a petulant voice, but Oliver ceased suddenly to hear her, because just outside the door, walking with imperial elegance on her high heels, a familiar figure passed. He did not see her face, but he thought he would know that poise, that richness of line and motion, anywhere on earth.

"Excuse me a minute," he muttered to Sue, and was out of his chair before she could speak. He made the door in half a dozen long strides, and the beautifully elegant passerby was only a few steps away when he got there. Then, with the words he had meant to speak already half-uttered, he fell silent and stood there staring.

It was not the red-haired woman. It was not her dark companion. It was a stranger. He watched, speechless, while the lovely, imperious creature moved on through the crowd and vanished, moving with familiar poise and assurance and an equally familiar strangeness as if the beautiful and exquisitely fitted garments she wore were an exotic costume to her, as they had always seemed to the Sancisco women. Every other woman on the street looked untidy and ill at ease beside her.

Walking like a queen, she melted into the crowd and was gone.

She came from *their* country, Oliver told himself dizzily. So someone else nearby had mysterious tenants in this month of perfect May weather. Someone else was puzzling in vain today over the strangeness of the people from the nameless land.

In silence he went back to Sue.

The door stood invitingly ajar in the brown dimness of the upper hall. Oliver's steps slowed as he drew near it, and his heart began to quicken correspondingly. It was the red-haired woman's room, and he thought the door was not open by accident. Her name, he knew now, was Kleph.

The door creaked a little on its hinges and from within a very sweet voice said lazily, "Won't you come in?"

The room looked very different indeed. The big bed had been pushed back against the wall, and a cover thrown over it that brushed the floor all around looked like soft-haired fur except that it was a pale blue-green and sparkled as if every hair were tipped with invisible crystals. Three books lay open on the fur, and a very curious-looking magazine with faintly luminous printing and a page of pictures that at first glance appeared three-dimensional. Also a tiny porcelain pipe encrusted with porcelain flowers, and a thin wisp of smoke floating from the bowl.

Above the bed a broad picture hung, framing a square of blue water so real Oliver had to look twice to be sure it was not rippling gently from left to right. From the ceiling swung a crystal globe on a glass cord. It turned gently, the light from the windows making curved rectangles in its sides.

Under the center window a sort of chaise longue stood which Oliver had not seen before. He could only assume it was at least partly pneumatic and had

been brought in the luggage. There was a very rich-looking quilted cloth covering and hiding it, embossed all over in shining metallic patterns.

Kleph moved slowly from the door and sank upon the chaise longue with a little sigh of content. The couch accommodated itself to her body with what looked like delightful comfort. Kleph wriggled a little and then smiled up at Oliver.

"Do come on in. Sit over there, where you can see out the window. I love your beautiful spring weather. You know, there never was a May like it in civilized times." She said that quite seriously, her blue eyes on Oliver's, and there was a hint of patronage in her voice, as if the weather had been arranged especially for her.

Oliver started across the room and then paused and looked down in amazement at the floor, which felt unstable. He had not noticed before that the carpet was pure white, unspotted, and sank about an inch under the pressure of the feet. He saw then that Kleph's feet were bare, or almost bare. She wore something like gossamer buskins of filmy net, fitting her feet exactly. The bare soles were pink as if they had been rouged, and the nails had a liquid gleam like tiny mirrors. He moved closer, and was not as surprised as he should have been to see that they really were tiny mirrors, painted with some lacquer that gave them reflecting surfaces.

"Do sit down," Kleph said again, waving a white-sleeved arm toward a chair by the window. She wore a garment that looked like short, soft down, loosely cut but following perfectly every motion she made. And there was something curiously different about her very shape today. When Oliver saw her in street clothes, she had the square-shouldered, slim-flanked figure that all women strove for, but here in her lounging robe she looked—well, different. There was an almost swanlike slope to her shoulders today, a roundness and softness

to her body that looked unfamiliar and very appealing.

"Will you have some tea?" Kleph asked, and smiled charmingly.

A low table beside her held a tray and several small covered cups, lovely things with an inner glow like rose quartz, the color shining deeply as if from within layer upon layer of translucence. She took up one of the cups—there were no saucers—and offered it to Oliver.

It felt fragile and thin as paper in his hand. He could not see the contents because of the cup's cover, which seemed to be one with the cup itself and left only a thin open crescent at the rim. Steam rose from the opening.

Kleph took up a cup of her own and tilted it to her lips, smiling at Oliver over the rim. She was very beautiful. The pale red hair lay in shining loops against her head and the corona of curls like a halo above her forehead might have been pressed down like a wreath. Every hair kept order as perfectly as if it had been painted on, though the breeze from the window stirred now and then among the softly shining strands.

Oliver tried the tea. It's flavor was exquisite, very hot, and the taste that lingered upon his tongue was like the scent of flowers. It was an extremely feminine drink. He sipped again, surprised to find how much he liked it.

The scent of flowers seemed to increase as he drank, swirling through his head like smoke. After the third sip there was a faint buzzing in his ears. The bees among the flowers, perhaps, he thought incoherently —and sipped again.

Kleph watched him, smiling.

"The others will be out all afternoon," she told Oliver comfortably. "I thought it would give us a pleasant time to be acquainted." Oliver was rather horrified to hear himself saying, "What makes you talk

like that?" He had had no idea of asking the question; something seemed to have loosened his control over his own tongue.

Kleph's smile deepened. She tipped the cup to her lips and there was indulgence in her voice when she said, "What do you mean 'like that?' "

He waved his hand vaguely, noting with some surprise that at a glance it seemed to have six or seven fingers as it moved past his face.

"I don't know—precision, I guess. Why don't you say 'don't,' for instance?"

"In our country we are trained to speak with precision," Kleph explained. "Just as we are trained to move and dress and think with precision. Any slovenliness is trained out of us in childhood. With you, of course—" She was polite. "With you, this does not happen to be a national fetish. With us, we have time for the amenities. We like them."

Her voice had grown sweeter and sweeter as she spoke, until by now it was almost indistinguishable from the sweetness of the flower-scent in Oliver's head, and the delicate flavor of the tea.

"What country do you come from?" he asked, and tilted the cup again to drink, mildly surprised to notice that it seemed inexhaustible.

Kleph's smile was definitely patronizing this time. It didn't irritate him. Nothing could irritate him just now. The whole room swam in a beautiful rosy glow as fragrant as the flowers.

"We must not speak of that, Mr. Wilson."

"But—" Oliver paused. After all, it was, of course, none of his business. "This is a vacation?" he asked vaguely.

"Call it a pilgrimage, perhaps."

"Pilgrimage?" Oliver was so interested that for an instant his mind came back into sharp focus. "To—what?"

"I should not have said that, Mr. Wilson. Please forget it. Do you like the tea?"

"Very much."

"You will have guessed by now that it is not only tea, but an euphoriac."

Oliver stared. "Euphoriac?"

Kleph made a descriptive circle in the air with one graceful hand, and laughed. "You do not feel the effects yet? Surely you do?"

"I feel," Oliver said, "the way I'd feel after four whiskeys."

Kleph shuddered delicately. "We get our euphoria less painfully. And without the aftereffects your barbarous alcohols used to have." She bit her lip. "Sorry. I must be euphoric myself to speak so freely. Please forgive me. Shall we have some music?"

Kleph leaned backward on the chaise longue and reached toward the wall beside her. The sleeve, falling away from her round tanned arm, left bare the inside of the wrist, and Oliver was startled to see there a long, rosy streak of fading scar. His inhibitions had dissolved in the fumes of the fragrant tea; he caught his breath and leaned forward to stare.

Kleph shook the sleeve back over the scar with a quick gesture. Color came into her face beneath the softly tinted tan and she would not meet Oliver's eyes. A queer shame seemed to have fallen upon her.

Oliver said tactlessly, "What is it? What's the matter?"

Still she would not look at him. Much later he understood that shame and knew she had reason for it. Now he listened blankly as she said:

"Nothing . . . nothing at all. A . . . an inoculation. All of us . . . oh, never mind. Listen to the music."

This time she reached out with the other arm. She touched nothing, but when she had held her hand near

the wall a sound breathed through the room. It was the sound of water, the sighing of waves receding upon long, sloped beaches. Oliver followed Kleph's gaze toward the picture of the blue water above the bed.

The waves there were moving. More than that, the point of vision moved. Slowly the seascape drifted past, moving with the waves, following them toward shore. Oliver watched, half-hypnotized by a motion that seemed at the time quite acceptable and not in the least surprising.

The waves lifted and broke in creaming foam and ran seething up a sandy beach. Then through the sound of the water music began to breathe, and through the water itself a man's face dawned in the frame, smiling intimately into the room. He held an oddly archaic musical instrument, lute-shaped, its body striped light and dark like a melon and its long neck bent back over his shoulder. He was singing, and Oliver felt mildly astonished at the song. It was very familiar and very odd indeed. He groped through the unfamiliar rhythms and found at last a thread to catch the tune by—it was "Make-Believe," from *Showboat,* but certainly a showboat that had never steamed up the Mississippi.

"What's he doing to it?" he demanded after a few moments of outraged listening. "I never heard anything like it!"

Kleph laughed and stretched out her arm again. Enigmatically she said, "We call it kyling. Never mind. How do you like this?"

It was a comedian, a man in semi-clown make-up, his eyes exaggerated so that they seemed to cover half his face. He stood by a broad glass pillar before a dark curtain and sang a gay, staccato song interspersed with patter that sounded impromptu, and all the while his left hand did an intricate, musical tattoo of the nail-tips on the glass of the column. He strolled around and around it as he sang. The rhythms of his fingernails

blended with the song and swung widely away into patterns of their own, and blended again without a break.

It was confusing to follow. The song made even less sense than the monologue, which had something to do with a lost slipper and was full of allusions which made Kleph smile, but were utterly unintelligible to Oliver. The man had a dry, brittle style that was not very amusing, though Kleph seemed fascinated. Oliver was interested to see in him an extension and a variation of that extreme smooth confidence which marked all three of the Sanciscos. Clearly a racial trait, he thought.

Other performances followed, some of them fragmentary as if lifted out of a completer version. One he knew. The obvious, stirring melody struck his recognition before the figures—marching men against a haze, a great banner rolling backward above them in the smoke, foreground figures striding gigantically and shouting in rhythm, "Forward, forward the lily banners go!"

The music was tinny, the images blurred and poorly colored, but there was a gusto about the performance that caught at Oliver's imagination. He stared, remembering the old film from long ago. Dennis King and a ragged chorus, singing "The Song of the Vagabonds" from—was it "Vagabond King?"

"A very old one," Kleph said apologetically. "But I like it."

The steam of the intoxicating tea swirled between Oliver and the picture. Music swelled and sank through the room and the fragrant fumes and his own euphoric brain. Nothing seemed strange. He had discovered how to drink the tea. Like nitrous oxide, the effect was not cumulative. When you reached a peak of euphoria, you could not increase the peak. It was best to wait for a slight dip in the effect of the stimulant before taking more.

Otherwise it had most of the effects of alcohol—every-

thing after a while dissolved into a delightful fog through which all he saw was uniformly enchanting and partook of the qualities of a dream. He questioned nothing. Afterward he was not certain how much of it he really had dreamed.

There was the dancing doll, for instance. He remembered it quite clearly, in sharp focus—a tiny, slender woman with a long-nosed, dark-eyed face and a pointed chin. She moved delicately across the white rug—knee-high, exquisite. Her features were as mobile as her body, and she danced lightly, with resounding strokes of her toes, each echoing like a bell. It was a formalized sort of dance, and she sang breathlessly in accompaniment, making amusing little grimaces. Certainly it was a portrait-doll, animated to mimic the original perfectly in voice and motion. Afterward, Oliver knew he must have dreamed it.

What else happened he was quite unable to remember later. He knew Kleph had said some curious things, but they all made sense at the time, and afterward he couldn't remember a word. He knew he had been offered little glittering candies in a transparent dish, and that some of them had been delicious and one or two so bitter his tongue still curled the next day when he recalled them, and one—Kleph sucked luxuriantly on the same kind—of a taste that was actively nauseating.

As for Kleph herself—he was frantically uncertain the next day what had really happened. He thought he could remember the softness of her white-downed arms clasped at the back of his neck, while she laughed up at him and exhaled into his face the flowery fragrance of the tea. But beyond that he was totally unable to recall anything, for a while.

There was a brief interlude later, before the oblivion of sleep. He was almost sure he remembered a moment when the other two Sanciscos stood looking down at him, the man scowling, the smoky-eyed woman smiling a derisive smile.

The man said, from a vast distance, "Kleph, you know this is against every rule—" His voice began in a thin hum and soared in fantastic flight beyond the range of hearing. Oliver thought he remembered the dark woman's laughter, thin and distant too, and the hum of her voice like bees in flight.

"Kleph, Kleph, you silly little fool, can we never trust you out of sight?"

Kleph's voice then said something that seemed to make no sense. "What does it matter, *here?*"

The man answered in that buzzing, faraway hum. "The matter of giving your bond before you leave, not to interfere. You know you signed the rules—"

Kleph's voice, nearer and more intelligible: "But here the difference is . . . it does not matter *here!* You both know that. How could it matter?"

Oliver felt the downy brush of her sleeve against his cheek, but he saw nothing except the slow, smokelike ebb and flow of darkness past his eyes. He heard the voices wrangle musically from far away, and he heard them cease.

When he woke the next morning, alone in his own room, he woke with the memory of Kleph's eyes upon him very sorrowfully, her lovely tanned face looking down on him with the red hair falling fragrantly on each side of it and sadness and compassion in her eyes. He thought he had probably dreamed that. There was no reason why anyone should look at him with such sadness.

Sue telephoned that day.

"Oliver, the people who want to buy the house are here. That madwoman and her husband. Shall I bring them over?"

Oliver's mind all day had been hazy with the vague, bewildering memories of yesterday. Kleph's face kept floating before him, blotting out the room. He said,

"What? I... oh, well, bring them if you want to. I don't see what good it'll do."

"Oliver, what's wrong with you? We agreed we needed the money, didn't we? I don't see how you can think of passing up such a wonderful bargain without even a struggle. We could get married and buy our own house right away, and you know we'll never get such an offer again for that old trash-heap. Wake up, Oliver!"

Oliver made an effort. "I know, Sue—I know. But—"

"Oliver, you've got to think of something!" Her voice was imperious.

He knew she was right. Kleph or no Kleph, the bargain shouldn't be ignored if there was any way at all of getting the tenants out. He wondered again what made the place so suddenly priceless to so many people. And what the last week in May had to do with the value of the house.

A sudden sharp curiosity pierced even the vagueness of his mind today. May's last week was so important that the whole sale of the house stood or fell upon occupancy by then. Why? *Why?*

"What's going to happen next week?" he asked rhetorically of the telephone. "Why can't they wait till these people leave? I'd knock a couple of thousand off the price if they'd—"

"You would not, Oliver Wilson! I can buy all our refrigeration units with that extra money. You'll just have to work out some way to give possession by next week, and that's that. You hear me?"

"Keep your shirt on," Oliver said practically. "I'm only human, but I'll try."

"I'm bringing the people over right away," Sue told him. "While the Sanciscos are still out. Now you put your mind to work and think of something, Oliver." She paused, and her voice was reflective when she spoke again. "They're... awfully odd people, darling."

"Odd?"
"You'll see."

It was an elderly woman and a very young man who trailed Sue up the walk. Oliver knew immediately what had struck Sue about them. He was somehow not at all surprised to see that both wore their clothing with the familiar air of elegant self-consciousness he had come to know so well. They, too, looked around them at the beautiful, sunny afternoon with conscious enjoyment and an air of faint condescension. He knew before he heard them speak how musical their voices would be and how meticulously they would pronounce each word.

There was no doubt about it. The people of Kleph's mysterious country were arriving here in force—for something. For the last week of May? He shrugged mentally; there was no way of guessing—yet. One thing only was sure: all of them must come from that nameless land where people controlled their voices like singers and their garments like actors who could stop the reel of time itself to adjust every disordered fold.

The elderly woman took full charge of the conversation from the start. They stood together on the rickety, unpainted porch, and Sue had no chance even for introductions.

"Young man, I am Madame Hollia. This is my husband." Her voice had an underrunning current of harshness, which was perhaps age. And her face looked almost corsetted, the loose flesh coerced into something like firmness by some invisible method Oliver could not guess at. The make-up was so skillful he could not be certain it was make-up at all, but he had a definite feeling that she was much older than she looked. It would have taken a lifetime of command to put so much authority into the harsh, deep, musically controlled voice.

The young man said nothing. He was very handsome. His type, apparently, was one that does not change much no matter in what culture or country it may occur. He wore beautifully tailored garments and carried in one gloved hand a box of red leather, about the size and shape of a book.

Madame Hollia went on. "I understand your problem about the house. You wish to sell to me, but are legally bound by your lease with Omerie and his friends. Is that right?"

Oliver nodded. "But—"

"Let me finish. If Omerie can be forced to vacate before next week, you will accept our offer. Right? Very well. Hara!" She nodded to the young man beside her. He jumped to instant attention, bowed slightly, said, "Yes, Hollia," and slipped a gloved hand into his coat.

Madame Hollia took the little object offered on his palm, her gesture as she reached for it almost imperial, as if royal robes swept from her outstretched arm.

"Here," she said, "is something that may help us. My dear—" She held it out to Sue—"if you can hide this somewhere about the house, I believe your unwelcome tenants will not trouble you much longer."

Sue took the thing curiously. It looked like a tiny silver box, no more than an inch square, indented at the top and with no line to show it could be opened.

"Wait a minute," Oliver broke in uneasily. "What is it?"

"Nothing that will harm anyone, I assure you."

"Then what—"

Madame Hollia's imperious gesture at one sweep silenced him and commanded Sue forward. "Go on, my dear. Hurry, before Omerie comes back. I can assure you there is no danger to anyone."

Oliver broke in determinedly. "Madame Hollia, I'll have to know what your plans are. I—"

"Oh, Oliver, please!" Sue's fingers closed over the silver cube. "Don't worry about it. I'm sure Madame

Hollia knows best. Don't you *want* to get those people out?"

"Of course I do. But I don't want the house blown up or—"

Madame Hollia's deep laughter was indulgent. "Nothing so crude, I promise you, Mr. Wilson. Remember, we want the house! Hurry, my dear."

Sue nodded and slipped hastily past Oliver into the hall. Outnumbered, he subsided uneasily. The young man, Hara, tapped a negligent foot and admired the sunlight as they waited. It was an afternoon as perfect as all of May had been, translucent gold, balmy with an edge of chill lingering in the air to point up a perfect contrast with the summer to come. Hara looked around him confidently, like a man paying just tribute to a stage-set provided wholly for himself. He even glanced up at a drone from above and followed the course of a big transcontinental plane half dissolved in golden haze high in the sun. "Quaint," he murmured in a gratified voice.

Sue came back and slipped her hand through Oliver's arm, squeezing excitedly. "There," she said. "How long will it take, Madame Hollia?"

"That will depend, my dear. Not very long. Now, Mr. Wilson, one word with you. You live here also, I understand? For your own comfort, take my advice and—"

Somewhere within the house a door slammed and a clear high voice rang wordlessly up a rippling scale. Then there was the sound of feet on the stairs, and a single line of song, *"Come hider, love, to me—"*

Hara started, almost dropping the red leather box he held.

"Kleph!" he said in a whisper. "Or Klia. I know they both just came on from Canterbury. But I thought—"

"Hush." Madame Hollia's features composed themselves into an imperious blank. She breathed trium-

phantly through her nose, drew back upon herself and turned an imposing facade to the door.

Kleph wore the same downy robe Oliver had seen before, except that today it was not white, but a pale, clear blue that gave her tan an apricot flush. She was smiling.

"Why, Hollia!" Her tone was at its most musical. "I thought I recognized voices from home. How nice to see you. No one knew you were coming to the—" She broke off and glanced at Oliver and then away again. "Hara, too," she said. "What a pleasant surprise."

Sue said flatly, "When did *you* get back?"

Kleph smiled at her. "You must be the little Miss Johnson. Why, I did not go out at all. I was tired of sightseeing. I have been napping in my room."

Sue drew in her breath in something that just escaped being a disbelieving sniff. A look flashed between the two women, and for an instant held—and that instant was timeless. It was an extraordinary pause in which a great deal of wordless interplay took place in the space of a second.

Oliver saw the quality of Kleph's smile at Sue, that same look of quiet confidence he had noticed so often about all of these strange people. He saw Sue's quick inventory of the other woman, and he saw how Sue squared her shoulders and stood up straight, smoothing down her summer frock over her flat hips so that for an instant she stood posed consciously, looking down on Kleph. It was deliberate. Bewildered, he glanced again at Kleph.

Kleph's shoulders sloped softly, her robe was belted to a tiny waist and hung in deep folds over frankly rounded hips. Sue's was the fashionable figure—but Sue was the first to surrender.

Kleph's smile did not falter. But in the silence there was an abrupt reversal of values, based on no more than the measureless quality of Kleph's confidence in

herself, the quiet, assured smile. It was suddenly made very clear that fashion is not a constant. Kleph's curious, out-of-mode curves without warning became the norm, and Sue was a queer, angular, half-masculine creature beside her.

Oliver had no idea how it was done. Somehow the authority passed in a breath from one woman to the other. Beauty is almost wholly a matter of fashion; what is beautiful today would have been grotesque a couple of generations ago and will be grotesque a hundred years ahead. It will be worse than grotesque; it will be outmoded and therefore faintly ridiculous.

Sue was that. Kleph had only to exert her authority to make it clear to everyone on the porch. Kleph was a beauty, suddenly and very convincingly, beautiful in the accepted mode, and Sue was amusingly old-fashioned, an anachronism in her lithe, square-shouldered slimness. She did not belong. She was grotesque among these strangely immaculate people.

Sue's collapse was complete. But pride sustained her, and bewilderment. Probably she never did grasp entirely what was wrong. She gave Kleph one glance of burning resentment and when her eyes came back to Oliver there was suspicion in them, and mistrust.

Looking backward later, Oliver thought that in that moment, for the first time clearly, he began to suspect the truth. But he had no time to ponder it, for after the brief instant of enmity the three people from—elsewhere—began to speak all at once, as if in a belated attempt to cover something they did not want noticed.

Kleph said, "This beautiful weather—" and Madame Hollia said, "So fortunate to have this house—" and Hara, holding up the red leather box, said loudest of all, "Cenbe sent you this, Kleph. His latest."

Kleph put out both hands for it eagerly, the eiderdown sleeves falling back from her rounded arms. Oliver had a quick glimpse of that mysterious scar before the sleeve fell back, and it seemed to him that

there was the faintest trace of a similar scar vanishing into Hara's cuff as he let his own arm drop.

"Cenbe!" Kleph cried, her voice high and sweet and delighted. "How wonderful! What period?"

"From November, 1664," Hara said. "London, of course, though I think there may be some counterpoint from the 1347 November. He hasn't finished—of course." He glanced almost nervously at Oliver and Sue. "A wonderful example," he said quickly. "Marvelous. If you have the taste for it, of course."

Madame Hollia shuddered with ponderous delicacy. "That man!" she said. "Fascinating, of course—a great man. But—*so advanced!*"

"It takes a connoisseur to appreciate Cenbe's work fully," Kleph said in a slightly tart voice. "We all admit that."

"Oh yes, we all bow to Cenbe," Hollia conceded. "I confess the man terrifies me a little, my dear. Do we expect him to join us?"

"I suppose so." Kleph said. "If his—work—is not yet finished, then of course. You know Cenbe's tastes."

Hollia and Hara laughed together. "I know when to look for him, then," Hollia said. She glanced at the staring Oliver and the subdued but angry Sue, and with a commanding effort brought the subject back into line.

"So fortunate, my dear Kleph, to have this house," she declared heavily. "I saw a tridimensional of it—afterward—and it was still quite perfect. Such a fortunate coincidence. Would you consider parting with your lease, for a consideration? Say, a coronation seat at—"

"Nothing could buy us, Hollia," Kleph told her gaily, clasping the red box to her bosom.

Hollia gave her a cool stare. "You may change your mind, my dear Kleph," she said pontifically. "There is still time. You can always reach us through Mr. Wilson here. We have rooms up the street in the Montgomery

House—nothing like yours, of course, but they will do. For us, they will do."

Oliver blinked. The Montgomery House was the most expensive hotel in town. Compared to this collapsing old ruin, it was a palace. There was no understanding these people. Their values seemed to have suffered a complete reversal.

Madame Hollia moved majestically toward the steps.

"Very pleasant to see you, my dear," she said over one well-padded shoulder. "Enjoy your stay. My regards to Omerie and Klia. Mr. Wilson—" she nodded toward the walk. "A word with you."

Oliver followed her down toward the street. Madame Hollia paused halfway there and touched his arm.

"One word of advice," she said huskily. "You say you sleep here? Move out, young man. Move out before tonight."

Oliver was searching in a half-desultory fashion for the hiding place Sue had found for the mysterious silver cube, when the first sounds from above began to drift down the stairwell toward him. Kleph had closed her door, but the house was old, and strange qualities in the noise overhead seemed to seep through the woodwork like an almost visible stain.

It was music, in a way. But much more than music. And it was a terrible sound, the sounds of calamity and of all human reaction to calamity, everything from hysteria to heartbreak, from irrational joy to rationalized acceptance.

The calamity was—single. The music did not attempt to correlate all human sorrows; it focused sharply upon one and followed the ramifications out and out. Oliver recognized these basics to the sounds in a very brief moment. They were essentials, and they seemed to beat into his brain with the first strains of the music which was so much more than music.

But when he lifted his head to listen he lost all grasp

upon the meaning of the noise and it was sheer medley and confusion. To think of it was to blur it hopelessly in the mind, and he could not recapture that first instant of unreasoning acceptance.

He went upstairs almost in a daze, hardly knowing what he was doing. He pushed Kleph's door open. He looked inside—

What he saw there he could not afterward remember except in a blurring as vague as the blurred ideas the music roused in his brain. Half the room had vanished behind a mist, and the mist was a three-dimensional screen upon which were projected— He had no words for them. He was not even sure if the projections were visual. The mist was spinning with motion and sound, but essentially it was neither sound nor motion that Oliver saw.

This was a work of art. Oliver knew no name for it. It transcended all art-forms he knew, blended them, and out of the blend produced subtleties his mind could not begin to grasp. Basically, this was the attempt of a master composer to correlate every essential aspect of a vast human experience into something that could be conveyed in a few moments to every sense at once.

The shifting visions on the screen were not pictures in themselves, but hints of pictures, subtly selected outlines that plucked at the mind and with one deft touch set whole chords ringing through the memory. Perhaps each beholder reacted differently, since it was in the eye and the mind of the beholder that the truth of the picture lay. No two would be aware of the same symphonic panorama, but each would see essentially the same terrible story unfold.

Every sense was touched by that deft and merciless genius. Color and shape and motion flickered in the screen, hinting much, evoking unbearable memories deep in the mind; odors floated from the screen and touched the heart of the beholder more poignantly

than anything visual could do. The skin crawled sometimes as if to a tangible cold hand laid upon it. The tongue curled with remembered bitterness and remembered sweet.

It was outrageous. It violated the innermost privacies of a man's mind, called up secret things long ago walled off behind mental scar tissue, forced its terrible message upon the beholder relentlessly though the mind might threaten to crack beneath the stress of it.

And yet, in spite of all this vivid awareness, Oliver did not know what calamity the screen portrayed. That it was real, vast, overwhelmingly dreadful he could not doubt. That it had once happened was unmistakable. He caught flashing glimpses of human faces distorted with grief and disease and death—real faces, faces that had once lived and were seen now in the instant of dying. He saw men and women in rich clothing superimposed in panorama upon reeling thousands of ragged folk; great throngs of them swept past the sight in an instant, and he saw that death made no distinction among them.

He saw lovely women laugh and shake their curls, and the laughter shriek into hysteria and the hysteria into music. He saw one man's face, over and over—a long, dark, saturnine face, deeply lined, sorrowful, the face of a powerful man wise in worldliness, urbane—and helpless. That face was for a while a recurring motif, always more tortured, more helpless than before.

The music broke off in the midst of a rising glide. The mist vanished and the room reappeared before him. The anguished dark face for an instant seemed to Oliver printed everywhere he looked, like after-vision on the eyelids. He knew that face. He had seen it before, not often, but he should know its name—

"Oliver, Oliver—" Kleph's sweet voice came out of a fog at him. He was leaning dizzily against the doorpost looking down into her eyes. She, too, had that dazed

blankness he must show on his own face. The power of the dreadful symphony still held them both. But even in this confused moment Oliver saw that Kleph had been enjoying the experience.

He felt sickened to the depths of his mind, dizzy with sickness and revulsion because of the super-imposing of human miseries he had just beheld. But Kleph —only appreciation showed upon her face. To her it had been magnificence, and magnificence only.

Irrelevantly Oliver remembered the nauseating candies she had enjoyed, the nauseating odors of strange food that drifted sometimes through the hall from her room.

What was it she had said downstairs a little while ago? Connoisseur, that was it. Only a connoisseur could appreciate work as—as *advanced*—as the work of someone called Cenbe.

A whiff of intoxicating sweetness curled past Oliver's face. Something cool and smooth was pressed into his hand.

"Oh, Oliver, I am so sorry," Kleph's voice murmured contritely. "Here, drink the euphoriac and you will feel better. Please drink!"

The familiar fragrance of the hot sweet tea was on his tongue before he knew he had complied. Its relaxing fumes floated up through his brain and in a moment or two the world felt stable around him again. The room was as it had always been. And Kleph—

Her eyes were very bright. Sympathy showed in them for him, but for herself she was still brimmed with the high elation of what she had just been experiencing.

"Come and sit down," she said gently, tugging at his arm. "I am so sorry—I should not have played that over, where you could hear it. I have no excuse, really. It was only that I forgot what the effect might be on one who had never heard Cenbe's symphonies before. I was so impatient to see what he had done with . . . with his new subject. I am so very sorry, Oliver!"

"What was it?" His voice sounded steadier than he had expected. The tea was responsible for that. He sipped again, glad of the consoling euphoria its fragrance brought.

"A . . . a composite interpretation of . . . oh, Oliver, you know I must not answer questions!"

"But—"

"No—drink your tea and forget what it was you saw. Think of other things. Here, we will have music—another kind of music, something gay—"

She reached for the wall beside the window, and as before, Oliver saw the broad framed picture of blue water above the bed ripple and grow pale. Through it another scene began to dawn like shapes rising beneath the surface of the sea.

He had a glimpse of a dark-curtained stage upon which a man in a tight dark tunic and hose moved with a restless, sidelong pace, his hands and face startlingly pale against the black about him. He limped; he had a crooked back and he spoke familiar lines. Oliver had seen John Barrymore once as the crook-backed Richard, and it seemed vaguely outrageous to him that any other actor should essay that difficult part. This one he had never seen before, but the man had a fascinatingly smooth manner and his interpretation of the Plantagenet king was quite new and something Shakespeare probably never dreamed of.

"No," Kleph said, "not this. Nothing gloomy." And she put out her hand again. The nameless new Richard faded and there was a swirl of changing pictures and changing voices, all blurred together, before the scene steadied upon a stageful of dancers in pastel ballet skirts, drifting effortlessly through some complicated pattern of motion. The music that went with it was light and effortless too. The room filled up with the clear, floating melody.

Oliver set down his cup. He felt much surer of himself now, and he thought the euphoriac had done all it

could for him. He didn't want to blur again mentally. There were things he meant to learn about. Now. He considered how to begin.

Kleph was watching him. "That Hollia," she said suddenly. "She wants to buy the house?"

Oliver nodded. "She's offering a lot of money. Sue's going to be awfully disappointed if—" He hesitated. Perhaps, after all, Sue would not be disappointed. He remembered the little silver cube with the enigmatic function and he wondered if he should mention it to Kleph. But the euphoriac had not reached that level of his brain, and he remembered his duty to Sue and was silent.

Kleph shook her head, her eyes upon his warm with —was it sympathy?

"Believe me," she said, "you will not find that—important—after all. I promise you, Oliver."

He stared at her. "I wish you'd explain."

Kleph laughed on a note more sorrowful than amused. But it occurred to Oliver suddenly that there was no longer condescension in her voice. Imperceptibly that air of delicate amusement had vanished from her manner toward him. The cool detachment that still marked Omerie's attitude, and Klia's, was not in Kleph's any more. It was a subtlety he did not think she could assume. It had to come spontaneously or not at all. And for no reason he was willing to examine, it became suddenly very important to Oliver that Kleph should not condescend to him, that she should feel toward him as he felt toward her. He would not think of it.

He looked down at his cup, rose-quartz, exhaling a thin plume of steam from its crescent-slit opening. This time, he thought, maybe he could make the tea work for him. For he remembered how it loosened the tongue, and there was a great deal he needed to know. The idea that had come to him on the porch in the in-

stant of silent rivalry between Kleph and Sue seemed now too fantastic to entertain. But some answer there must be.

Kleph herself gave him the opening.

"I must not take too much euphoriac this afternoon," she said, smiling at him over her pink cup. "It will make me drowsy, and we are going out this evening with friends."

"More friends?" Oliver asked. "From your country?"

Kleph nodded. "Very dear friends we have expected all this week."

"I wish you'd tell me," Oliver said bluntly, "where it is you come from. It isn't from here. Your culture is too different from ours—even your names—" He broke off as Kleph shook her head.

"I wish I could tell you. But that is against all the rules. It is even against the rules for me to be here talking to you now."

"What rules?"

She made a helpless gesture. "You must not ask me, Oliver." She leaned back on the chaise longue, which adjusted itself luxuriously to the motion, and smiled very sweetly at him. "We must not talk about things like that. Forget it, listen to the music, enjoy yourself if you can—" She closed her eyes and laid her head back against the cushions. Oliver saw the round tanned throat swell as she began to hum a tune. Eyes still closed, she sang again the words she had sung upon the stairs, *"Come hider, love, to me—"*

A memory clicked over suddenly in Oliver's mind. He had never heard the queer, lagging tune before, but he thought he knew the words. He remembered what Hollia's husband had said when he heard that line of song, and he leaned forward. She would not answer a direct question, but perhaps—

"Was the weather this warm in Canterbury?" he

asked, and held his breath. Kleph hummed another line of the song and shook her head, eyes still closed.

"It was autumn there," she said. "But bright, wonderfully bright. Even their clothing, you know . . . everyone was singing that new song, and I can't get it out of my head." She sang another line, and the words were almost unintelligible—English, yet not an English Oliver could understand.

He stood up. "Wait," he said. "I want to find something. Back in a minute."

She opened her eyes and smiled mistily at him, still humming. He went downstairs as fast as he could—the stairway swayed a little, though his head was nearly clear now—and into the library. The book he wanted was old and battered, interlined with the penciled notes of his college days. He did not remember very clearly where the passage he wanted was, but he thumbed fast through the columns and by sheer luck found it within a few minutes. Then he went back upstairs, feeling a strange emptiness in his stomach because of what he almost believed now.

"Kleph," he said firmly, "I know that song. I know the year it was new."

Her lids rose slowly; she looked at him through a mist of euphoriac. He was not sure she had understood. For a long moment she held him with her gaze. Then she put out one downy-sleeved arm and spread her tanned fingers toward him. She laughed deep in her throat.

"Come hider, love, to me," she said.

He crossed the room slowly, took her hand. The fingers closed warmly about his. She pulled him down so that he had to kneel beside her. Her other arm lifted. Again she laughed, very softly, and closed her eyes, lifting her face to his.

The kiss was warm and long. He caught something of her own euphoria from the fragrance of the tea

breathed into his face. And he was startled at the end of the kiss, when the clasp of her arms loosened about his neck, to feel the sudden rush of her breath against his cheek. There were tears on her face, and the sound she made was a sob.

He held her off and looked down in amazement. She sobbed once more, caught a deep breath, and said, "Oh, Oliver, Oliver—" Then she shook her head and pulled free, turning away to hide her face. "I . . . I am sorry," she said unevenly. "Please forgive me. It does not matter . . . I *know* it does not matter . . . but—"

"What's wrong? What doesn't matter?"

"Nothing. Nothing . . . please forget it. Nothing at all." She got a handkerchief from the table and blew her nose, smiling at him with an effect of radiance through the tears.

Suddenly he was very angry. He had heard enough evasions and mystifying half-truths. He said roughly, "Do you think I'm crazy? I know enough now to—"

"Oliver, please!" She held up her own cup, steaming fragrantly. "Please, no more questions. Here, euphoria is what you need, Oliver. Euphoria, not answers."

"What year was it when you heard that song in Canterbury?" he demanded, pushing the cup aside.

She blinked at him, tears bright on her lashes. "Why . . . what year do you think?"

"I know," Oliver told her grimly. "I know the year that song was popular. I know you just came from Canterbury—Hollia's husband said so. It's May now, but it was autumn in Canterbury, and you just came from there, so lately the song you heard is still running through your head. Chaucer's Pardoner sang that song some time around the end of the fourteenth century. Did you see Chaucer, Kleph? What was it like in England that long ago?"

Kleph's eyes fixed his for a silent moment. Then her shoulders drooped and her whole body went limp with

resignation beneath the soft blue robe. "I am a fool," she said gently. "It must have been easy to trap me. You really believe—what you say?"

Oliver nodded.

She said in a low voice, "Few people do believe it. That is one of our maxims, when we travel. We are safe from much suspicion because people before The Travel began will not believe."

The emptiness in Oliver's stomach suddenly doubled in volume. For an instant the bottom dropped out of time itself and the universe was unsteady about him. He felt sick. He felt naked and helpless. There was a buzzing in his ears and the room dimmed before him.

He had not really believed—not until this instant. He had expected some rational explanation from her that would tidy all his wild half-thoughts and suspicions into something a man could accept as believable. Not this.

Kleph dabbed at her eyes with the pale-blue handkerchief and smiled tremulously.

"I know," she said. "It must be a terrible thing to accept. To have all your concepts turned upside down— We know from childhood, of course, but for you . . . Here, Oliver, the euphoriac will make it easier."

He took the cup, the faint stain of her lip rouge still on the crescent opening. He drank, feeling the dizzy sweetness spiral through his head, and his brain turned a little in his skull as the volatile fragrance took effect. With that turning, focus shifted and all his values with it.

He began to feel better. The flesh settled on his bones again, and the warm clothing of temporal assurance settled upon his flesh, and he was no longer naked and in the vortex of unstable time.

"The story is very simple, really," Kleph said. "We —travel. Our own time is not terribly far ahead of

yours. No. I must not say how far. But we still remember your songs and poets and some of your great actors. We are a people of much leisure, and we cultivate the art of enjoying ourselves.

"This is a tour we are making—a tour of a year's seasons. Vintage seasons. That autumn in Canterbury was the most magnificent autumn our researchers could discover anywhere. We rode in a pilgrimage to the shrine—it was a wonderful experience, though the clothing was a little hard to manage.

"Now this month of May is almost over—the loveliest May in recorded times. A perfect May in a wonderful period. You have no way of knowing what a good, gay period you live in, Oliver. The very feeling in the air of the cities—that wonderful national confidence and happiness—everything going as smoothly as a dream. There were other Mays with fine weather, but each of them had a war or a famine, or something else wrong." She hesitated, grimaced and went on rapidly. "In a few days we are to meet at a coronation in Rome," she said. "I think the year will be 800—Christmastime. We—"

"But why," Oliver interrupted, "did you insist on this house? Why do the others want to get it away from you?"

Kleph stared at him. He saw the tears rising again in small bright crescents that gathered above her lower lids. He saw the look of obstinacy that came upon her soft, tanned face. She shook her head.

"You must not ask me that." She held out the steaming cup. "Here, drink and forget what I have said. I can tell you no more. No more at all."

When he woke, for a little while he had no idea where he was. He did not remember leaving Kleph or coming to his own room. He didn't care, just then. For he woke to a sense of overwhelming terror.

The dark was full of it. His brain rocked on waves

of fear and pain. He lay motionless, too frightened to stir, some atavistic memory warning him to lie quiet until he knew from which direction the danger threatened. Reasonless panic broke over him in a tidal flow; his head ached with its violence and the dark throbbed to the same rhythms.

A knock sounded at the door. Omerie's deep voice said, "Wilson! Wilson, are you awake?"

Oliver tried twice before he had breath to answer. "Y-yes—what is it?"

The knob rattled. Omerie's dim figure groped for the light switch and the room sprang into visibility. Omerie's face was drawn with strain, and he held one hand to his head as if it ached in rhythm with Oliver's.

It was in that moment, before Omerie spoke again, that Oliver remembered Hollia's warning. "Move out, young man—move out before tonight." Wildly he wondered what threatened them all in this dark house that throbbed with the rhythms of pure terror.

Omerie in an angry voice answered the unspoken question.

"Someone has planted a subsonic in the house, Wilson. Kleph thinks you may know where it is."

"S-subsonic?"

"Call it a gadget," Omerie interpreted impatiently. "Probably a small metal box that—"

Oliver said, "Oh," in a tone that must have told Omerie everything.

"Where is it?" he demanded. "Quick. Let's get this over."

"I don't know." With an effort Oliver controlled the chattering of his teeth. "Y-you mean all this—all this is just from the little box?"

"Of course. Now tell me how to find it before we all go crazy."

Oliver got shakily out of bed, groping for his robe with nerveless hands. "I s-suppose she hid it somewhere downstairs," he said. "S-she wasn't gone long."

Omerie got the story out of him in a few brief questions. He clicked his teeth in exasperation when Oliver had finished it.

"That stupid Hollia—"

"Omerie!" Kleph's plaintive voice wailed from the hall. "Please hurry, Omerie! This is too much to stand! Oh, Omerie, please!"

Oliver stood up abruptly. Then a redoubled wave of the inexplicable pain seemed to explode in his skull at the motion, and he clutched the bedpost and reeled.

"Go find the thing yourself," he heard himself saying dizzily. "I can't even walk—"

Omerie's own temper was drawn wire-tight by the pressure in the room. He seized Oliver's shoulder and shook him, saying in a tight voice, "You let it in—now help us get it out, or—"

"It's a gadget out of your world, not mine!" Oliver said furiously.

And then it seemed to him there was a sudden coldness and silence in the room. Even the pain and the senseless terror paused for a moment. Omerie's pale, cold eyes fixed upon Oliver a stare so chill he could almost feel the ice in it.

"What do you know about our—world?" Omerie demanded.

Oliver did not speak a word. He did not need to; his face must have betrayed what he knew. He was beyond concealment in the stress of this night-time terror he still could not understand.

Omerie bared his white teeth and said three perfectly unintelligible words. Then he stepped to the door and snapped, "Kleph!"

Oliver could see the two women huddled together in the hall, shaking violently with involuntary waves of that strange, synthetic terror. Klia, in a luminous green gown, was rigid with control, but Kleph made no effort whatever at repression. Her downy robe had

turned soft gold tonight; she shivered in it and the tears ran down her face unchecked.

"Kleph," Omerie said in a dangerous voice, "you were euphoric again yesterday?"

Kleph darted a scared glance at Oliver and nodded guiltily.

"You talked too much." It was a complete indictment in one sentence. "You know the rules, Kleph. You will not be allowed to travel again if anyone reports this to the authorities."

Kleph's lovely creamy face creased suddenly into impenitent dimples.

"I know it was wrong. I am very sorry—but you will not stop me if Cenbe says no."

Klia flung out her arms in a gesture of helpless anger. Omerie shrugged. "In this case, as it happens, no great harm is done," he said, giving Oliver an unfathomable glance. "But it might have been serious. Next time perhaps it will be. I must have a talk with Cenbe."

"We must find the subsonic first of all," Klia reminded them, shivering. "If Kleph is afraid to help, she can go out for a while. I confess I am very sick of Kleph's company just now."

"We could give up the house!" Kleph cried wildly. "Let Hollia have it! How can you stand this long enough to hunt—"

"Give up the house?" Klia echoed. "You must be mad! With all our invitations out?"

"There will be no need for that," Omerie said. "We can find it if we all hunt. You feel able to help?" He looked at Oliver.

With an effort Oliver controlled his own senseless panic as the waves of it swept through the room. "Yes," he said. "But what about me? What are you going to do?"

"That should be obvious," Omerie said, his pale eyes in the dark face regarding Oliver impassively. "Keep you in the house until we go. We can certainly do no

less. You understand that. And there is no reason for us to do more, as it happens. Silence is all we promised when we signed our travel papers."

"But—" Oliver groped for the fallacy in that reasoning. It was no use. He could not think clearly. Panic surged insanely through his mind from the very air around him. "All right," he said. "Let's hunt."

It was dawn before they found the box, tucked inside the ripped seam of a sofa cushion. Omerie took it upstairs without a word. Five minutes later the pressure in the air abruptly dropped and peace fell blissfully upon the house.

"They will try again," Omerie said to Oliver at the door of the back bedroom. "We must watch for that. As for you, I must see that you remain in the house until Friday. For your own comfort, I advise you to let me know if Hollia offers any further tricks. I confess I am not quite sure how to enforce your staying indoors. I could use methods that would make you very uncomfortable. I would prefer to accept your word on it."

Oliver hesitated. The relaxing of pressure upon his brain had left him exhausted and stupid, and he was not at all sure what to say.

Omerie went on after a moment. "It was partly our fault for not insuring that we had the house to ourselves," he said. "Living here with us, you could scarcely help suspecting. Shall we say that in return for your promise, I reimburse you in part for losing the sale price on this house?"

Oliver thought that over. It would pacify Sue a little. And it meant only two days indoors. Besides, what good would escaping do? What could he say to outsiders that would not lead him straight to a padded cell?

"All right," he said wearily. "I promise."

By Friday morning there was still no sign from

Hollia. Sue telephoned at noon. Oliver knew the crackle of her voice over the wire when Kleph took the call. Even the crackle sounded hysterical; Sue saw her bargain slipping hopelessly through her grasping little fingers.

Kleph's voice was soothing. "I am sorry," she said many times, in the intervals when the voice paused. "I am truly sorry. Believe me, you will find it does not matter. I know . . . I am sorry—"

She turned from the phone at last. "The girl says Hollia has given up," she told the others.

"Not Hollia," Klia said firmly.

Omerie shrugged. "We have very little time left. If she intends anything more, it will be tonight. We must watch for it."

"Oh, not tonight!" Kleph's voice was horrified. "Not even Hollia would do that!"

"Hollia, my dear, in her own way is quite as unscrupulous as you are," Omerie told her with a smile.

"But—would she spoil things for us just because she can't be here?"

"What do you think?" Klia demanded.

Oliver ceased to listen. There was no making sense out of their talk, but he knew that by tonight whatever the secret was must surely come into the open at last. He was willing to wait and see.

For two days excitement had been building up in the house and the three who shared it with him. Even the servants felt it and were nervous and unsure of themselves. Oliver had given up asking questions—it only embarrassed his tenants—and watched.

All the chairs in the house were collected in the three front bedrooms. The furniture was rearranged to make room for them, and dozens of covered cups had been set out on trays. Oliver recognized Kleph's rose-quartz set among the rest. No steam rose from the thin crescent-openings, but the cups were full. Oliver

lifted one and felt a heavy liquid move within it, like something half-solid, sluggishly.

Guests were obviously expected, but the regular dinner hour of nine came and went, and no one had yet arrived. Dinner was finished; the servants went home. The Sanciscos went to their rooms to dress, amid a feeling of mounting tension.

Oliver stepped out on the porch after dinner, trying in vain to guess what it was that had wrought such a pitch of expectancy in the house. There was a quarter moon swimming in haze on the horizon, but the stars which had made every night of May thus far a dazzling translucency, were very dim tonight. Clouds had begun to gather at sundown, and the undimmed weather of the whole month seemed ready to break at last.

Behind Oliver the door opened a little, and closed. He caught Kleph's fragrance before he turned, and a faint whiff of the fragrance of the euphoriac she was much too fond of drinking. She came to his side and slipped a hand into his, looking up into his face in the darkness.

"Oliver," she said very softly. "Promise me one thing. Promise me not to leave the house tonight."

"I've already promised that," he said a little irritably.

"I know. But tonight—I have a very particular reason for wanting you indoors tonight." She leaned her head against his shoulder for a moment, and despite himself his irritation softened. He had not seen Kleph alone since that last night of her revelations; he supposed he never would be alone with her again for more than a few minutes at a time. But he knew he would not forget those two bewildering evenings. He knew too, now, that she was very weak and foolish —but she was still Kleph and he had held her in his arms, and was not likely ever to forget it.

"You might be—hurt—if you went out tonight," she

was saying in a muffled voice. "I know it will not matter, in the end, but—remember you promised, Oliver."

She was gone again, and the door had closed behind her before he could voice the futile questions in his mind.

The guests began to arrive just before midnight. From the head of the stairs Oliver saw them coming in by twos and threes, and was astonished at how many of these people from the future must have gathered here in the past weeks. He could see quite clearly now how they differed from the norm of his own period. Their physical elegance was what one noticed first—perfect grooming, meticulous manners, meticulously controlled voices. But because they were all idle, all, in a way, sensation-hunters, there was a certain shrillness underlying their voices, especially when heard all together. Petulance and self-indulgence showed beneath the good manners. And tonight, an all-pervasive excitement.

By one o'clock everyone had gathered in the front rooms. The teacups had begun to steam, apparently of themselves, around midnight, and the house was full of the faint, thin fragrance that induced a sort of euphoria all through the rooms, breathed in with the perfume of the tea.

It made Oliver feel light and drowsy. He was determined to sit up as long as the others did, but he must have dozed off in his own room, by the window, an unopened book in his lap.

For when it happened he was not sure for a few minutes whether or not it was a dream.

The vast, incredible crash was louder than sound. He felt the whole house shake under him, felt rather than heard the timbers grind upon one another like broken bones, while he was still in the borderland

of sleep. When he woke fully he was on the floor among the shattered fragments of the window.

How long or short a time he had lain there he did not know. The world was still stunned with that tremendous noise, or his ears still deaf from it, for there was no sound anywhere.

He was halfway down the hall toward the front rooms when sound began to return from outside. It was a low, indescribable rumble at first, prickled with countless tiny distant screams. Oliver's eardrums ached from the terrible impact of the vast unheard noise, but the numbness was wearing off and he heard before he saw it the first voices of the stricken city.

The door to Kleph's room resisted him for a moment. The house had settled a little from the violence of the—the explosion?—and the frame was out of line. When he got the door open he could only stand blinking stupidly into the darkness within. All the lights were out, but there was a breathless sort of whispering going on in many voices.

The chairs were drawn around the broad front windows so that everyone could see out; the air swam with the fragrance of euphoria. There was light enough here from outside for Oliver to see that a few onlookers still had their hands to their ears, but all were craning eagerly forward to see.

Through a dreamlike haze Oliver saw the city spread out with impossible distinctness below the window. He knew quite well that a row of houses across the street blocked the view—yet he was looking over the city now, and he could see it in a limitless panorama from here to the horizon. The houses between had vanished.

On the far skyline fire was already a solid mass, painting the low clouds crimson. That sulphurous light reflecting back from the sky upon the city made clear the rows upon rows of flattened houses with flame beginning to lick up among them, and farther

out the formless rubble of what had been houses a few minutes ago and was now nothing at all.

The city had begun to be vocal. The noise of the flames rose loudest, but you could hear a rumble of human voices like the beat of surf a long way off, and staccato noises of screaming made a sort of pattern that came and went continuously through the web of sound. Threading it in undulating waves the shrieks of sirens knit the web together into a terrible symphony that had, in its way, a strange, inhuman beauty.

Briefly through Oliver's stunned incredulity went the memory of that other symphony Kleph had played here one day, another catastrophe retold in terms of music and moving shapes.

He said hoarsely, "Kleph—"

The tableau by the window broke. Every head turned, and Oliver saw the faces of strangers staring at him, some few in embarrassment avoiding his eyes, but most seeking them out with that avid, inhuman curiosity which is common to a type in all crowds at accident scenes. But these people were here by design, audience at a vast disaster timed almost for their coming.

Kleph got up unsteadily, her velvet dinner gown tripping her as she rose. She set down a cup and swayed a little as she came toward the door, saying, "Oliver . . . Oliver—" in a sweet, uncertain voice. She was drunk, he saw, and wrought up by the catastrophe to a pitch of stimulation in which she was not very sure what she was doing.

Oliver heard himself saying in a thin voice not his own, "W-what was it, Kleph? What happened? What—" But *happened* seemed so inadequate a word for the incredible panorama below that he had to choke back hysterical laughter upon the struggling questions, and broke off entirely, trying to control the shaking that had seized his body.

Kleph made an unsteady stoop and seized a steaming

cup. She came to him, swaying, holding it out—her panacea for all ills.

"Here, drink it, Oliver—we are all quite safe here, quite safe." She thrust the cup to his lips and he gulped automatically, grateful for the fumes that began their slow, coiling surcease in his brain with the first swallow.

"It was a meteor," Kleph was saying. "Quite a small meteor, really. We are perfectly safe here. This house was never touched."

Out of some cell of the unconscious Oliver heard himself saying incoherently, "Sue? Is Sue—" he could not finish.

Kleph thrust the cup at him again. "I think she may be safe—for a while. Please, Oliver—forget about all that and drink."

"But you *knew!*" Realization of that came belatedly to his stunned brain. "You could have given warning, or—"

"How could we change the past?" Kleph asked. "We knew—but could we stop the meteor? Or warn the city? Before we come we must give our word never to interfere—"

Their voices had risen imperceptibly to be audible above the rising volume of sound from below. The city was roaring now, with flames and cries and the crash of falling buildings. Light in the room turned lurid and pulsed upon the walls and ceiling in red light and redder dark.

Downstairs, a door slammed. Someone laughed. It was high, hoarse, angry laughter. Then from the crowd in the room someone gasped and there was a chorus of dismayed cries. Oliver tried to focus upon the window and the terrible panorama beyond, and found he could not.

It took several seconds of determined blinking to prove that more than his own vision was at fault.

Kleph whimpered softly and moved against him. His arms closed about her automatically, and he was grateful for the warm, solid flesh against him. This much at least he could touch and be sure of, though everything else that was happening might be a dream. Her perfume and the heady perfume of the tea rose together in his head, and for an instant, holding her in this embrace that must certainly be the last time he ever held her, he did not care that something had gone terribly wrong with the very air of the room.

It was blindness—not continuous, but a series of swift, widening ripples between which he could catch glimpses of the other faces in the room, strained and astonished in the flickering light from the city.

The ripples came faster. There was only a blink of sight between them now, and the blinks grew briefer and briefer, the intervals of darkness more broad.

From downstairs the laughter rose again up the stairwell. Oliver thought he knew the voice. He opened his mouth to speak, but a door nearby slammed open before he could find his tongue, and Omerie shouted down the stairs.

"Hollia?" he roared above the roaring of the city. "Hollia, is that you?"

She laughed again, triumphantly. "I warned you!" her hoarse, harsh voice called. "Now come out in the street with the rest of us if you want to see any more!"

"Hollia!" Omerie shouted desperately. "Stop this or—"

The laughter was derisive. "What will you do, Omerie? This time I hid it too well—come down in the street if you want to watch the rest."

There was angry silence in the house. Oliver could feel Kleph's quick, excited breathing light upon his cheek, feel the soft motions of her body in his arms. He tried consciously to make the moment last, stretch it out to infinity. Everything had happened too swiftly to impress very clearly on his mind anything except

what he could touch and hold. He held her in an embrace made consciously light, though he wanted to clasp her in a tight, despairing grip, because he was sure this was the last embrace they would ever share.

The eye-straining blinks of light and blindness went on. From far away below, the roar of the burning city rolled on, threaded together by the long, looped cadences of the sirens that linked all sounds into one.

Then in the bewildering dark another voice sounded from the hall downstairs. A man's voice, very deep, very melodious, saying:

"What is this? What are you doing here? Hollia—is that you?"

Oliver felt Kleph stiffen in his arms. She caught her breath, but she said nothing in the instant while heavy feet began to mount the stairs, coming up with a solid, confident tread that shook the old house to each step.

Then Kleph thrust herself hard out of Oliver's arms. He heard her high, sweet, excited voice crying, "Cenbe! Cenbe!" and she ran to meet the newcomer through the waves of dark and light that swept the shaken house.

Oliver staggered a little and felt a chair seat catching the back of his legs. He sank into it and lifted to his lips the cup he still held. Its steam was warm and moist in his face, though he could scarcely make out the shape of the rim.

He lifted it with both hands and drank.

When he opened his eyes it was quite dark in the room. Also it was silent except for a thin, melodious humming almost below the threshold of sound. Oliver struggled with the memory of a monstrous nightmare. He put it resolutely out of his mind and sat up, feeling an unfamiliar bed creak and sway under him.

This was Kleph's room. But no—Kleph's no longer. Her shining hangings were gone from the walls, her

white resilient rug, her pictures. The room looked as it had looked before she came, except for one thing.

In the far corner was a table—a block of translucent stuff—out of which light poured softly. A man sat on a low stool before it, leaning forward, his heavy shoulders outlined against the glow. He wore earphones and he was making quick, erratic notes upon a pad on his knee, swaying a little as if to the tune of unheard music.

The curtains were drawn, but from beyond them came a distant, muffled roaring that Oliver remembered from his nightmare. He put a hand to his face, aware of a feverish warmth and a dipping of the room before his eyes. His head ached, and there was a deep malaise in every limb and nerve.

As the bed creaked, the man in the corner turned, sliding the earphones down like a collar. He had a strong, sensitive face above a dark beard, trimmed short. Oliver had never seen him before, but he had that air Oliver knew so well by now, of remoteness which was the knowledge of time itself lying like a gulf between them.

When he spoke his deep voice was impersonally kind.

"You had too much euphoriac, Wilson," he said, aloofly sympathetic. "You slept a long while."

"How long?" Oliver's throat felt sticky when he spoke.

The man did not answer. Oliver shook his head experimentally. He said, "I thought Kleph said you don't get hangovers from—" Then another thought interrupted the first, and he said quickly, "Where is Kleph?" He looked confusedly toward the door.

"They should be in Rome by now. Watching Charlemagne's coronation at St. Peter's on Christmas Day more than a thousand years from here."

That was not a thought Oliver could grasp clearly. His aching brain sheered away from it; he found

thinking at all was strangely difficult. Staring at the man, he traced an idea painfully to its conclusion.

"So they've gone on—but you stayed behind? Why? You . . . you're Cenbe? I heard your—symphonia, Kleph called it."

"You heard part of it. I have not finished yet. I needed—this." Cenbe inclined his head toward the curtains beyond which the subdued roaring still went on.

"You needed—the meteor?" The knowledge worked painfully through his dulled brain until it seemed to strike some area still untouched by the aching, an area still alive to implication. "The *meteor*? But—"

There was a power implicit in Cenbe's raised hand that seemed to push Oliver down upon the bed again. Cenbe said patiently, "The worst of it is past now, for a while. Forget if you can. That was days ago. I said you were asleep for some time. I let you rest. I knew this house would be safe—from the fire at least."

"Then—something more's to come?" Oliver only mumbled his question. He was not sure he wanted an answer. He had been curious so long, and now that knowledge lay almost within reach, something about his brain seemed to refuse to listen. Perhaps this weariness, this feverish, dizzy feeling would pass as the effect of the euphoriac wore off.

Cenbe's voice ran on smoothly, soothingly, almost as if Cenbe, too, did not want him to think. It was easiest to lie there and listen.

"I am a composer," Cenbe was saying. "I happen to be interested in interpreting certain forms of disaster into my own terms. That is why I stayed on. The others were dilettantes. They came for the May weather and the spectacle. The aftermath—well why should they wait for that? As for myself—I suppose I am a connoisseur. I find the aftermath rather fascinating. And I need it. I need to study it at first hand, for my own purposes."

His eyes dwelt upon Oliver for an instant very keenly, like a physician's eyes, impersonal and observing. Absently he reached for his stylus and the note pad. And as he moved, Oliver saw a familiar mark on the underside of the thick, tanned wrist.

"Kleph had that scar, too," he heard himself whisper. "And the others."

Cenbe nodded. "Inoculation. It was necessary, under the circumstances. We did not want disease to spread in our own time-world."

"Disease?"

Cenbe shrugged. "You would not recognize the name."

"But, if you can inoculate against disease—" Oliver thrust himself up on an aching arm. He had a half-grasp upon a thought now which he did not want to let go. Effort seemed to make the ideas come more clearly through his mounting confusion. With enormous effort he went on.

"I'm getting it now," he said. "Wait. I've been trying to work this out. You can change history? You can! I know you can. Kleph said she had to promise not to interfere. You all had to promise. Does that mean you really could change your own past—our time?"

Cenbe laid down his pad again. He looked at Oliver thoughtfully, a dark, intent look under heavy brows. "Yes," he said. "Yes, the past can be changed. But it is extremely difficult, and it has never been allowed." He shrugged. "A theoretical science. We do not change history, Wilson. If we changed our past, our present would be altered, too. And our time-world is entirely to our liking."

Oliver spoke louder against the roaring from beyond the windows. "But you've got the power! You could alter history, if you wanted to—wipe out all the pain and suffering and tragedy—"

"All of that passed away long ago," Cenbe said.

"Not—*now!* Not—*this!*"

Cenbe looked at him enigmatically for a while. Then—"This, too," he said.

And suddenly Oliver realized from across what distances Cenbe was watching him. A vast distance, as time is measured. The dying city outside, the whole world of *now* was not quite real to Cenbe. It was merely one of the building blocks that had gone to support the edifice on which Cenbe's culture stood in a misty, unknown, terrible future.

It seemed terrible to Oliver now. Even Kleph—all of them had been touched with a pettiness, the faculty that had enabled Hollia to concentrate on her malicious, small schemes to acquire a ringside seat while the meteor thundered in toward Earth's atmosphere. They were all dilettantes, Kleph and Omerie and the others. They toured time, but only as onlookers. Were they bored—sated—with their normal existence?

Not sated enough to wish change, basically. They dared not change the past—they could not risk flawing their own present.

Revulsion shook him. Remembering the touch of Kleph's lips, he felt a sour sickness on his tongue. Kleph—leaving him for the barbaric, splendid coronation at Rome a thousand years ago—*how had she seen him?* Not as a living, breathing man. He knew that, very certainly. Kleph's race were spectators.

He lay back on the bed letting the room swirl away into the darkness behind his closed and aching lids. The ache was implicit in every cell of his body, almost a second ego taking possession and driving him out of himself, a strong, sure ego taking over as he himself let go.

Why, he wondered dully, should Kleph have lied? She had said there was no aftermath to the drink she had given him. No aftermath—and yet this painful possession was strong enough to edge him out of his own body.

Kleph had not lied. It was no aftermath to drink. He knew that—but the knowledge no longer touched his brain or his body. He lay still, giving them up to the power of the illness which was aftermath to something far stronger than the strongest drink. The illness that had no name—yet.

He hardly noticed when Cenbe left. He lay motionless for a long while, thinking feverishly—

I've got to find some way to tell people. If I'd known in advance, maybe something could have been done. We'd have forced them to tell us how to change the probabilities. We could have evacuated the city.

If I could leave a message—

Maybe not for today's people. But later. They visit all through time. If they could be recognized and caught somewhere, sometime, and made to change destiny—

It wasn't easy to stand up. The room kept tilting. But he managed it. He found pencil and paper and through the swaying of the shadows he wrote down what he could. Enough. Enough to warn, enough to save.

He put the sheets on the table, in plain sight, and weighted them down before he stumbled back to bed through closing darkness.

The house was dynamited six days later, part of the futile attempt to halt the relentless spread of the Blue Death.

THE ASH TREE

M. R. JAMES

Everyone who has traveled over Eastern England knows the smaller country-houses with which it is studded—the rather dank little buildings, usually in the Italian style, surrounded with parks of some eighty to a hundred acres. For me they have always had a very strong attraction: with the gray paling of split oak, the noble trees, the meres with their reed-beds, and the line of distant woods. Then, I like the pillared portico —perhaps stuck on to a red-brick Queen Anne house which has been faced with stucco to bring it into line with the "Grecian" taste of the end of the eighteenth century; the hall inside, going up to the roof, which hall ought always to be provided with a gallery and a small organ. I like the library, too, where you may find anything from a Psalter of the thirteenth century to a Shakespeare quarto. I like the pictures, of course; and perhaps most of all I like fancying what life in such a house was when it was first built, and in the piping times of landlords' prosperity, and not least now, when, if money is not so plentiful, taste is more varied and life quite as interesting. I wish to have one of these houses, and enough money to keep it together and entertain my friends in it modestly.

But this is a digression. I have to tell you of a curious series of events which happened in such a house as I have tried to describe. It is Castringham Hall in Suffolk. I think a good deal has been done to the building since the period of my story, but the

essential features I have sketched are still there—Italian portico, square block of white house, older inside than out, park with fringe of woods, and mere. The one feature that marked out the house from a score of others is gone. As you looked at it from the park, you saw on the right a great old ash tree growing within half a dozen yards of the wall, and almost or quite touching the building with its branches. I suppose it had stood there ever since Castringham ceased to be a fortified place, and since the moat was filled in and the Elizabethan dwelling-house built. At any rate, it had well-nigh attained its full dimensions in the year 1690.

In that year the district in which the Hall is situated was the scene of a number of witch trials. It will be long, I think, before we arrive at a just estimate of the amount of solid reason—if there was any—which lay at the root of the universal fear of witches in old times. Whether the persons accused of this offense really did imagine that they were possessed of unusual powers of any kind; or whether they had the will at least, if not the power, of doing mischief to their neighbors; or whether all the confessions, of which there are so many, were extorted by the mere cruelty of the witch finders—these are questions which are not, I fancy, yet solved. And the present narrative gives me pause. I cannot altogether sweep it away as mere invention. The reader must judge for himself.

Castringham contributed a victim to the auto-da-fé. Mrs. Mothersole was her name, and she differed from the ordinary run of village witches only in being rather better off and in a more influential position. Efforts were made to save her by several reputable farmers of the parish. They did their best to testify to her character, and showed considerable anxiety as to the verdict of the jury.

But what seems to have been fatal to the woman was the evidence of the then proprietor of Castringham

Hall—Sir Matthew Fell. He deposed to having watched her on three different occasions from his window, at the full of the moon, gathering sprigs "from the ash tree near my house." She had climbed into the branches, clad only in her shift, and was cutting off small twigs with a peculiarly curved knife, and as she did so she seemed to be talking to herself. On each occasion Sir Matthew had done his best to capture the woman, but she had always taken alarm at some accidental noise he had made, and all he could see when he got down to the garden was a hare running across the park in the direction of the village.

On the third night he had been at pains to follow at his best speed, and had gone straight to Mrs. Mothersole's house; but he had had to wait a quarter of an hour battering at her door, and then she had come out very cross, and apparently very sleepy, as if just out of bed; and he had no good explanation to offer of his visit.

Mainly on this evidence, though there was much more of a less striking and unusual kind from other parishioners, Mrs. Mothersole was found guilty and condemned to die. She was hanged a week after the trial, with five or six more unhappy creatures, at Bury St. Edmunds.

Sir Matthew Fell, then deputy sheriff, was present at the execution. It was a damp, drizzly March morning when the cart made its way up the rough grass hill outside Northgate, where the gallows stood. The other victims were apathetic or broken down with misery; but Mrs. Mothersole was, as in life so in death, of a very different temper. Her "poysonous Rage," as a reporter of the time puts it, "did so work upon the Bystanders—yea, even upon the Hangman—that it was constantly affirmed of all that saw her that she presented the living Aspect of a mad Divell. Yet she offer'd no Resistance to the Officers of the Law; onely she looked upon those that laid Hands upon her with

so direfull and venomous an Aspect that—as one of them afterwards assured me—the meer Thought of it preyed inwardly upon his Mind for six Months after."

However, all that she is reported to have said was the seemingly meaningless words: "There will be guests at the Hall." Which she repeated more than once in an undertone.

Sir Matthew Fell was not unimpressed by the bearing of the woman. He had some talk upon the matter with the vicar of his parish, with whom he traveled home after the assize business was over. His evidence at the trial had not been very willingly given; he was not specially infected with the witch-finding mania, but he declared, then and afterwards, that he could not give any other account of the matter than that he had given, and that he could not possibly have been mistaken as to what he saw. The whole transaction had been repugnant to him, for he was a man who liked to be on pleasant terms with those about him; but he saw a duty to be done in this business, and he had done it. That seems to have been the gist of his sentiments, and the vicar applauded it, as any reasonable man must have done.

A few weeks after, when the moon of May was at the full, vicar and squire met again in the park, and walked to the Hall together. Lady Fell was with her mother, who was dangerously ill, and Sir Matthew was alone at home; so the vicar, Mr. Crome, was easily persuaded to take a late supper at the Hall.

Sir Matthew was not very good company this evening. The talk ran chiefly on family and parish matters, and, as luck would have it, Sir Matthew made a memorandum in writing of certain wishes or intentions of his regarding his estates, which afterwards proved exceedingly useful.

When Mr. Crome thought of starting for home, about half-past nine o'clock, Sir Matthew and he took a preliminary turn on the graveled walk at the back of

the house. The only incident that struck Mr. Crome was this: they were in sight of the ash tree which I described as growing near the windows of the building, when Sir Matthew stopped and said:

"What is that that runs up and down the stem of the ash? It is never a squirrel? They will all be in their nests by now."

The vicar looked and saw the moving creature, but he could make nothing of its color in the moonlight. The sharp outline, however, seen for an instant, was imprinted on his brain, and he could have sworn, he said, though it sounded foolish, that, squirrel or not, it had more than four legs.

Still, not much was to be made of the momentary vision, and the two men parted. They may have met since then, but it was not for a score of years.

Next day Sir Matthew Fell was not downstairs at six in the morning, as was his custom, nor at seven, nor yet at eight. Hereupon the servants went and knocked at his chamber door. I need not prolong the description of their anxious listenings and renewed batterings on the panels. The door was opened at last from the outside, and they found their master dead and black. So much you have guessed. That there were any marks of violence did not at the moment appear; but the window was open.

One of the men went to fetch the parson, and then by his directions rode on to give notice to the coroner. Mr. Crome himself went as quick as he might to the Hall, and was shown to the room where the dead man lay. He has left some notes among his papers which show how genuine a respect and sorrow was felt for Sir Matthew, and there is also this passage, which I transcribe for the sake of the light it throws upon the course of events, and also upon the common beliefs of the time:

"There was not any the least Trace of an Entrance having been forc'd to the Chamber: but the Casement

stood open, as my poor Friend would always have it in this Season. He had his Evening Drink of small Ale in a silver vessel of about a pint measure, and to-night had not drunk it out. This Drink was examined by the Physician from Bury, a Mr. Hodgkins, who could not, however, as he afterwards declar'd upon his Oath, before the Coroner's quest, discover that any matter of a venomous kind was present in it. For, as was natural, in the great Swelling and Blackness of the Corpse, there was talk made among the Neighbours of Poyson. The Body was very much Disorder'd as it laid in the Bed, being twisted after so extream a sort as gave too probable Conjecture that my worthy Friend and Patron had expir'd in great Pain and Agony. And what is yet unexplain'd, and to myself the Argument of some Horrid and Artful Designe in the Perpetrators of this Barbarous Murther, was this, that the Women which were entrusted with the laying-out of the Corpse and washing it, being both sad Persons and very well Respected in their Mournful Profession, came to me in a great Pain and Distress both of Mind and Body, saying, what was indeed confirmed upon the first View, that they had no sooner touch'd the Breast of the Corpse with their naked Hands than they were sensible of a more than ordinary violent Smart and Acheing in their Palms, which, with their whole Forearms, in no long time swell'd so immoderately, the Pain still continuing, that, as afterwards proved, during many weeks they were forc'd to lay by the exercise of their Calling; and yet no mark seen on the Skin.

"Upon hearing this, I sent for the Physician, who was still in the House, and we made as careful a Proof as we were able by the Help of a small Magnifying Lens of Crystal of the condition of the Skinn on this Part of the Body: but could not detect with the Instrument we had any Matter of Importance beyond a couple of small Punctures or Pricks, which we then

concluded were the Spotts by which the Poyson might be introduced, remembering that Ring of *Pope Borgia,* with other known Specimens of the Horrid Act of the Italian Poysoners of the last age.

"So much is to be said of the Symptoms seen on the Corpse. As to what I am to add, it is merely my own Experiment, and to be left to Posterity to judge whether there be anything of Value therein. There was on the Table by the Beddside a Bible of the small size, in which my Friend—punctuall as in Matters of less Moment, so in this more weighty one—used nightly, and upon his First Rising, to read a sett Portion. And I taking it up—not without a Tear duly paid to him which from the Study of this poorer Adumbration was now pass'd to the contemplation of its great Originall—it came into my Thoughts, as at such moments of Helplessness we are prone to catch at any the least Glimmer that makes promise of Light, to make trial of that old and by many accounted Superstitious Practice of drawing the *Sortes*: of which a Principall Instance, in the case of his late Sacred Majesty the Blessed Martyr King *Charles* and my Lord *Falkland,* was now much talked of. I must needs admit that by my Trial not much Assistance was afforded me: yet, as the Cause and Origin of these Dreadful Events may hereafter be search'd out, I set down the Results, in the case it may be found that they pointed the true Quarter of the Mischief to a quicker Intelligence than my own.

"I made, then, three trials, opening the Book and placing my Finger upon certain Words: which gave in the first these words, from Luke xiii. 7, *Cut it down;* in the second, Isaiah xiii. 20, *It shall never be inhabited;* and upon the third Experiment, Job xxxix. 30, *Her young ones also suck up blood.*"

This is all that need be quoted from Mr. Crome's papers. Sir Matthew Fell was duly coffined and laid into the earth, and his funeral sermon, preached by Mr.

Crome on the following Sunday, has been printed under the title of "The Unsearchable Way: or, England's Danger and the Malicious Dealings of Antichrist," it being the vicar's view, as well as that most commonly held in the neighborhood, that the squire was the victim of a recrudescence of the Popish Plot.

His son, Sir Matthew the second, succeeded to the title and estates. And so ends the first act of the Castringham tragedy. It is to be mentioned, though the fact is not surprising, that the new baronet did not occupy the room in which his father had died. Nor, indeed, was it slept in by anyone but an occasional visitor during the whole of his occupation. He died in 1735, and I do not find that anything particular marked his reign, save a curiously constant mortality among his cattle and live stock in general, which showed a tendency to increase slightly as time went on.

Those who are interested in the details will find a statistical account in a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1772, which draws the facts from the baronet's own papers. He put an end to it at last by a very simple expedient, that of shutting up all his beasts in sheds at night, and keeping no sheep in his park. For he had noticed that nothing was ever attacked that spent the night indoors. After that the disorder confined itself to wild birds, and beasts of chase. But as we have no good account of the symptoms, and as all-night watching was quite unproductive of any clue, I do not dwell on what the Suffolk farmers called the "Castringham sickness."

The second Sir Matthew died in 1735, as I said, and was duly succeeded by his son, Sir Richard. It was in his time that the great family pew was built out on the north side of the parish church. So large were the squire's ideas that several of the graves on that unhallowed side of the building had to be disturbed to satisfy his requirements. Among them was that of Mrs. Mothersole, the position of which was accurately

known, thanks to a note on a plan of the church and yard, both made by Mr. Crome.

A certain amount of interest was excited in the village when it was known that the famous witch, who was still remembered by a few, was to be exhumed. And the feeling of surprise, and indeed disquiet, was very strong when it was found that, though her coffin was fairly sound and unbroken, there was no trace whatever inside it of body, bones, or dust. Indeed, it is a curious phenomenon, for at the time of her burying no such things were dreamed of as resurrection men, and it is difficult to conceive any rational motive for stealing a body otherwise than for the uses of the dissecting room.

The incident revived for a time all the stories of witch trials and of the exploits of the witches, dormant for forty years, and Sir Richard's orders that the coffin should be burned were thought by a good many to be rather foolhardy, though they were duly carried out.

Sir Richard was a pestilent innovator, it is certain. Before his time the Hall had been a fine block of the mellowest red brick; but Sir Richard had traveled in Italy become infected with the Italian taste, and, having more money than his predecessors, he determined to leave an Italian palace where he had found an English house. So stucco and ashlar masked the brick; some indifferent Roman marbles were planted about in the entrance hall and gardens; a reproduction of the Sibyl's temple at Tivoli was erected on the opposite bank of the mere; and Castringham took on an entirely new, and, I must say, a less engaging, aspect. But it was much admired, and served as a model to a good many of the neighboring gentry in after-years.

One morning (it was in 1754) Sir Richard woke after a night of discomfort. It had been windy, and his chimney had smoked persistently, and yet it was so cold that he must keep up a fire. Also something had so

rattled about the window that no man could get a moment's peace. Further, there was the prospect of several guests of position arriving in the course of the day, who would expect sport of some kind, and the inroads of the distemper (which continued among his game) had been lately so serious that he was afraid for his reputation as a game preserver. But what really touched him most nearly was the other matter of his sleepless night. He could certainly not sleep in that room again.

That was the chief subject of his meditations at breakfast, and after it he began a systematic examination of the rooms to see which would suit his notions best. It was long before he found one. This had a window with an eastern aspect and that with a northern; this door the servants would be always passing, and he did not like the bedstead in that. No, he must have a room with a western lookout, so that the sun could not wake him early, and it must be out of the way of the business of the house. The housekeeper was at the end of her resources.

"Well, Sir Richard," she said, "you know that there is but one room like that in the house."

"Which may that be?" said Sir Richard.

"And that is Sir Matthew's—the west chamber."

"Well, put me in there, for there I'll lie tonight," said her master. "Which way is it? Here, to be sure," and he hurried off.

"Oh, Sir Richard, but no one has slept there these forty years. The air has hardly been changed since Sir Matthew died there."

Thus she spoke, and rustled after him.

"Come, open the door, Mrs. Chiddock. I'll see the chamber, at least."

So it was opened, and, indeed, the smell was very close and earthy. Sir Richard crossed to the window, and, impatiently, as was his wont, threw the shutters back, and flung open the casement. For this end of the

house was one which the alterations had barely touched, grown up as it was with the great ash tree, and being otherwise concealed from view.

"Air it, Mrs. Chiddock, all today, and move my bed-furniture in in the afternoon. Put the Bishop of Kilmore in my old room."

"Pray, Sir Richard," said a new voice, breaking in on this speech, "might I have the favor of a moment's interview?"

Sir Richard turned round and saw a man in black in the doorway, who bowed.

"I must ask your indulgence for this intrusion, Sir Richard. You will, perhaps, hardly remember me. My name is William Crome, and my grandfather was vicar here in your grandfather's time."

"Well, sir," said Sir Richard, "the name of Crome is always a passport to Castringham. I am glad to renew a friendship of two generations' standing. In what can I serve you? For your hour of calling—and, if I do not mistake you, your bearing—shows you to be in some haste."

"That is no more than the truth, sir. I am riding from Norwich to Bury St. Edmunds with what haste I can make, and I have called in on my way to leave with you some papers which we have but just come upon in looking over what my grandfather left at his death. It is thought you may find some matters of family interest in them."

"You are mighty obliging, Mr. Crome, and, if you will be so good as to follow me to the parlor, and drink a glass of wine, we will take a first look at these same papers together. And you, Mrs. Chiddock, as I said, be about airing this chamber. . . . Yes, it is here my grandfather died. . . . Yes, the tree, perhaps, does make the place a little dampish. . . . No; I do not wish to listen to any more. Make no difficulties, I beg. You have your orders—go. Will you follow me, sir?"

They went to the study. The packet which young

Mr. Crome had brought—he was then just become a Fellow of Clare Hall in Cambridge, I may say, and subsequently brought out a respectable edition of Polyænus—contained among other things the notes which the old vicar had made upon the occasion of Sir Matthew Fell's death. And for the first time Sir Richard was confronted with the enigmatical *Sortes Biblicæ* which you have heard. They amused him a good deal.

"Well," he said, "my grandfather's Bible gave one prudent piece of advice—*Cut it down.* If that stands for the ash tree, he may rest assured I shall not neglect it. Such a nest of catarrhs and agues was never seen."

The parlor contained the family books, which, pending the arrival of a collection which Sir Richard had made in Italy, and the building of a proper room to receive them, were not many in number.

Sir Richard looked up from the paper to the bookcase.

"I wonder," says he, "whether the old prophet is there yet? I fancy I see him."

Crossing the room, he took out a dumpy Bible, which, sure enough, bore on the flyleaf the inscription: "To Matthew Fell, from his Loving Godmother, Anne Aldous, 2 September, 1659."

"It would be no bad plan to test him again, Mr. Crome. I will wager we get a couple of names in the Chronicles. H'm! what have we here? 'Thou shalt seek me in the morning, and I shall not be.' Well, well! Your grandfather would have made a fine omen of that, hey? No more prophets for me! They are all in a tale. And now, Mr. Crome, I am infinitely obliged to you for your packet. You will, I fear, be impatient to get on. Pray allow me—another glass."

So with offers of hospitality, which were genuinely meant (for Sir Richard thought well of the young man's address and manner), they parted.

In the afternoon came the guests—the Bishop of Kilmore, Lady Mary Hervey, Sir William Kentfield,

etc. Dinner at five, wine, cards, supper, and dispersal to bed.

Next morning Sir Richard is disinclined to take his gun with the rest. He talks with the Bishop of Kilmore. This prelate, unlike a good many of the Irish bishops of his day, had visited his see, and, indeed, resided there for some considerable time. This morning, as the two were walking along the terrace and talking over the alterations and improvements in the house, the bishop said, pointing to the window of the west room:

"You could never get one of my Irish flock to occupy that room, Sir Richard."

"Why is that, my lord? It is, in fact, my own."

"Well, our Irish peasantry will always have it that it brings the worst of luck to sleep near an ash tree, and you have a fine growth of ash not two yards from your chamber window. Perhaps," the bishop went on, with a smile, "it has given you a touch of its quality already, for you do not seem, if I may say it, so much the fresher for your night's rest as your friends would like to see you."

"That, or something else, it is true, cost me my sleep from twelve to four, my lord. But the tree is to come down tomorrow, so I shall not hear much more from it."

"I applaud your determination. It can hardly be wholesome to have the air you breathe strained, as it were, through all that leafage."

"Your lordship is right there, I think. But I had not my window open last night. It was rather the noise that went on—no doubt from the twigs sweeping the glass—that kept me open-eyed."

"I think that can hardly be, Sir Richard. Here—you see it from this point. None of these nearest branches even can touch your casement unless there were a gale, and there was none of that last night. They miss the panes by a foot."

"No, sir, true. What, then, will it be, I wonder, that scratched and rustled so—ay, and covered the dust on my sill with lines and marks?"

At last they agreed that the rats must have come up through the ivy. That was the bishop's idea, and Sir Richard jumped at it.

So the day passed quietly, and night came, and the party wished Sir Richard a better night and dispersed to their rooms.

And now we are in his bedroom, with the light out and the squire in bed. The room is over the kitchen, and the night outside still and warm, so the window stands open.

There is very little light about the bedstead, but there is a strange movement there; it seems as if Sir Richard were moving his head rapidly to and fro with only the slightest possible sound. And now you would guess, so deceptive is the half-darkness, that he had several heads, round and brownish, which move back and forward, even as low as his chest. It is a horrible illusion. Is it nothing more? There! something drops off the bed with a soft plump, like a kitten, and is out of the window in a flash; another—four—and after that there is quiet again.

"Thou shalt seek me in the morning, and I shall not be."

As with Sir Matthew, so with Sir Richard—dead and black in his bed!

A pale and silent party of guests and servants gathered under the window when the news was known. Italian poisoners, popish emissaries, infected air—all these and more guesses were hazarded, and the Bishop of Kilmore looked at the tree, in the fork of whose lower boughs a white tomcat was crouching, looking down the hollow which years had gnawed in the

trunk. It was watching something inside the tree with great interest.

Suddenly it got up and craned over the hole. Then a bit of the edge on which it stood gave way, and it went slithering in. Everyone looked up at the noise of the fall.

It is known to most of us that a cat can cry; but few of us have heard, I hope, such a yell as came out of the trunk of the great ash. Two or three screams there were—the witnesses are not sure which—and then a slight and muffled noise of some commotion or struggling was all that came. But Lady Mary Hervey fainted outright, and the housekeeper stopped her ears and fled till she fell on the terrace.

The Bishop of Kilmore and Sir William Kentfield stayed. Yet even they were daunted, though it was only at the cry of a cat; and Sir William swallowed once or twice before he could say:

"There is something more than we know of in that tree, my lord. I am for an instant search."

And this was agreed upon. A ladder was brought, and one of the gardeners went up, and, looking down the hollow, could detect nothing but a few dim indications of something moving. They got a lantern, and let it down by a rope.

"We must get at the bottom of this. My life upon it, my lord, but the secret of these terrible deaths is there."

Up went the gardener again with the lantern, and let it down the hole cautiously. They saw the yellow light upon his face as he bent over, and saw his face struck with an incredulous terror and loathing before he cried out in a dreadful voice and fell back from the ladder—where, happily, he was caught by two of the men—letting the lantern fall inside the tree.

He was in a dead faint, and it was some time before any word could be got from him.

By then they had something else to look at. The lantern must have broken at the bottom, and the light in it caught upon dry leaves and rubbish that lay there, for in a few minutes a dense smoke began to come up, and then flame; and, to be short, the tree was in a blaze.

The bystanders made a ring at some yards' distance, and Sir William and the bishop sent men to get what weapons and tools they could; for, clearly, whatever might be using the tree as its lair would be forced out by the fire.

So it was. First, at the fork, they saw a round body covered with fire—the size of a man's head—appear very suddenly, then seem to collapse and fall back. This, five or six times; then a similar ball leaped into the air and fell on the grass, where after a moment it lay still. The bishop went as near as he dared to it, and saw—what but the remains of an enormous spider, veinous and seared! And, as the fire burned lower down, more terrible bodies like this began to break out from the trunk, and it was seen that these were covered with grayish hair.

All that day the ash burned, and until it fell to pieces the men stood about it, and from time to time killed the brutes as they darted out. At last there was a long interval when none appeared, and they cautiously closed in and examined the roots of the tree.

"They found," says the Bishop of Kilmore, "below it a rounded hollow place in the earth, wherein were two or three bodies of these creatures that had plainly been smothered by the smoke; and, what is to me more curious, at the side of this den, against the wall, was crouching the anatomy or skeleton of a human being, with the skin dried upon the bones, having some remains of black hair, which was pronounced by those that examined it to be undoubtedly the body of a woman, and clearly dead for a period of fifty years."

SIDE BET

WILL F. JENKINS

There was a vast blue bowl which was the sky. Across it, with agonizing slowness, there marched a brazen sun which poured down light to dazzle and burn out the man's eyes, and heat to broil the brains in his skull. At intervals the blue bowl grew dark and was dotted with stars, which ranged themselves in pairs like the eyes of snakes—unwinking and cold and maliciously amused—and watched through the night while the man recovered strength to endure the torture of another day. There was a sea of infinite blueness, which heaved slowly up and down and up and down and alternately reflected the blue bowl and the monstrous aggregation of star eyes. And there was the island, which was not more than fifty by fifteen yards in extent.

Also, there was the rat, with which the man played a game with rather high stakes, a game in which life was a side bet.

The man and the rat were not friends. No. When huge waves flung the man scornfully upon the island he thought himself the sole survivor of his ship, and for twenty-four hours he disregarded every other thought or observation in trying to salvage as much of the wreckage as he could. He could not do much. During all that day and night colossal combers beat upon the shore, overwhelming two thirds of its length in sputtering spume. There was then no sky or sea or

any other thing but hurtling masses of water and foam plunging upon and over and past the island. And the island was only rock. There was no vegetation. There was no shelter. There was barely more than a foothold behind a steep upcropping of wet and slippery stone. But now and again some fragment of the ship was pounded senselessly upon that upcrop by the sea, and the man tried desperately to salvage it.

He saved but little. A dozen crates of fruit broke open and all their contents went to waste upon rockery so continuously wave-swept as to be past clinging to. Four separate times he saw masses of cargo—some of which must have been edible—surge past the island, infuriatingly near yet impossibly distant. And a life raft, floating high in the water, was deliberately smashed and maliciously pounded before his eyes into splintered wood and crumpled metal—and then the sea took that away too.

Before the waves abated the man made sure of some bits of wood and some cordage, and from the life raft as it went to pieces he rescued a keg of water and a canvas bag of hard sea bread—biscuit. But there was nothing on which he could hope to leave the island, nor canvas to make a shelter, and he had not even a stick long enough to make a mast on which to fly his confession of helplessness and distress for the sea to look at.

But he did have a companion: the rat.

The rat was huge. It was a wise and resourceful ship rat and had all the cunning and ferocity of its race. Its body was almost a foot long. It had come ashore without help from the man; he never knew how. Perhaps clinging man-fashion to one of the two masses of spars and cordage now lodged securely on the island. Perhaps in some fashion only a rat could even imagine. But it had reached the island and it knew of the man's presence, and it knew exactly what the island offered of sustenance when the seas went down and the long,

agonizing procession of days began in which the sky was a vast blue bowl and a brazen sun marched slowly across it.

When that happened, the man took account of his prospects, which were not bright. He counted his stores. He had twenty-two biscuits, all tainted with salt water, and a small keg of fresh water. There was a fairly impressive mass of lumber, mostly splintered and none suitable even for the manufacture of a raft if the man had possessed tools, which he did not. There was some rope, attached to shattered spars. In a money belt, the man had sixty dollars. That was all.

He had no matches but he found that with a small spike extracted from the wreckage he could strike a spark from the rock of the island. He had nothing to cook, and therefore a fire was needless. But he picked cordage into oakum for tinder, and he arranged his stock of wood in a great pyre, the smaller splinters lowest, so that from a single spark he could send up a roaring beacon of flame and smoke to summon any ship he might sight from the island. His stock of food and water was so trivial that he rationed himself strictly. He could not actually live on such infinitesimal portions as he allotted himself for each day, but he would starve very slowly. He would live longer and suffer longer. The will to live is not a matter of reason. And then the days of waiting began as separate Gehennas of heat and thirst and hopelessness.

The sun by day was horrible. There was no shade. There was no shelter. There was no soil. There was only fissured, tumbled rock. The man scorched, panting in the baking heat, and gazed with smarting eyes at the horizon. He looked for a ship, though he could not really hope for one. In the morning he ate his strictly allotted ration and prepared to endure the day. In the evening he drank a little, a very little,

water, and during the night he gathered strength to suffer through another day. From the amount of food and drink he possessed, he had calculated exactly how long he could live upon the island. He did not ask himself why he should wish to.

It was probably the seventh or eighth day when he learned that the rat was also on the island.

He had picked up the canvas bag which held the sea biscuits. It should have been nearly full. His daily ration was small. But as he lifted the bag, something fell at his feet. There was a hole in the bag. A fine white powder sifted out of it, spreading in the air. At his feet was half a biscuit, irregularly gnawed. The tooth marks were clearly those of a rat.

The man's heart tried to stop. He regarded the hole and the gnawed biscuit with a sort of stupefied horror. Then he swiftly counted the contents of the bag. He should have had nineteen of the biscuits. Instead, he had sixteen and the fragment which was less than a half. More than a week of life had been taken from him.

He had no real hope of rescue, of course. The island was a speck in a waste of sea. It might or might not be on the charts. He did not know. If it was charted, ships would avoid it as a danger to navigation. But the instinct to cling to life is too strong for mere reason to controvert. The man's hands shook. He carefully unraveled a strand of rope. He tied up the hole in the bag. And he had apportioned his supplies to keep him alive for a certain number of days. He could not bring himself to surrender even one hour of that scheduled time. Since a part of his food had been taken from him, he desperately resolved to cut down his ration to make up for the theft. And he did.

He chewed the reduced fraction of a sea biscuit, which was his day's food, with exhaustive care. He made it last a very long time. He watched the horizon

with dazzled, reddened eyes. He was already hungry all the time. He had hunger cramps in the night. His knees felt oddly exhausted when he climbed about the wave-rounded mass which was the island, but he resolutely made the journey. He watched all day. He saw nothing. When night came he drank the few swallows he allowed himself. He tied the bag to a spliced stick and propped it up so that it hung in mid-air. He slept.

In the morning the bag was on the ground again. The rat had gnawed through the cord upholding it. There were only twelve biscuits left and the man saw a floury scraping on the rock, two yards from the bag, which told him that the rat had carried off one biscuit uneaten.

The man knew hatred, now. And he made a savage search of every square inch of the island. It was not difficult. One hundred and fifty feet in one direction. About forty-five in another. Nothing of any size could hide, but there were cracks and crevices and miniature caverns in which the rat could conceal itself during the search. The man found one tiny, crumby place where the rat had eaten, at leisure, food which was more than the man allowed himself for three days. And he came to have an inkling of how the rat drank. Even now, the small crevices in the rocks were cool. Undoubtedly moisture condensed upon their surfaces during the night and the rat licked it. It would serve a rat but no man could live that way.

But he did not find the rat. He did not even catch a glimpse of it, but by this time he hated it with an emotion far past any hatred men ordinarily know.

That night the man's rage kept him from sleeping. He had a section of splintered plank not too heavy to be a club. He put out the bag of biscuits as bait and sat on guard beside it. The sun sank. The vast blue bowl turned dark and very many pairs of malevolent stars shone out, to look down upon him and watch him

maliciously. His hands shook with his hatred. The sea soughed and gurgled among the irregular rocks about the shore line. The man waited, hating . . .

But he was very weak. He woke suddenly. His club, held ready, had fallen with a crash to the rock before him. The sound had roused him. He heard the scurrying of tiny feet. The rat, scuttling away.

The canvas bag was a good two feet from where it had been. The rat had been trying to drag it to its own hiding place.

The man made inarticulate noises of fury. He knew, now, that the rat would seek to prey upon him for food as long as the two of them lived upon the island. That is the instinct of rats. And in any case he would have tried to kill the rat if he saw it, because that is the instinct of men. But here the conflict of instincts became more than inevitable. It became deadly. Both the man and the rat could not live upon this island. If the man lived, the rat died. If the man died, the chance of the rat for survival would be directly and specifically increased.

But the man was too weak to think very clearly. He had found a rock with a hollow in it. He put the bag of biscuits there and lay down. His body formed a protecting lid over the receptacle for his food. The rat could not reach the biscuits without first gnawing the man. But the man slept fitfully and even through his dreams there moved, a hazy, groping thought. The rat must die, or he must . . .

In the morning the man chewed his ration for hours. It was the fraction of a sea biscuit. He savored every particle of flavor it possessed. The heat beat upon him. He panted, watching the unchanging horizon beneath a brazen sun. He kept his body wetted with sea-water so that he would not need to drink. But already he suffered severely from thirst. And then, toward nightfall, he saw the rat.

It was swimming toward an outlying rock which was

perhaps ten yards from the main island. The rock was certainly no more than five feet across and rose perhaps that much above the slow, smooth swells which forever swayed across the sea.

The rat reached the base of that rock. It swam about it, trying to find gripping places for its paws. The man watched in a passion of sheer hatred until it disappeared. Then he moved closer. He heard its paws scratching and scrambling, out of sight. Presently its pointed muzzle appeared on top of the small rock. It went sniffing here and there. Suddenly it stopped stock-still. It began to eat. And the man smelled something tainted. Perhaps a dead fish flung to the top of the rock by a wave or swell. Perhaps a gull or tern which had died there recently. Whatever it was, the rat ate it.

The man trembled all over with hatred. He could no longer compute the anguish he had suffered, of hunger with but a tantalizing morsel of food a day, and of thirst with but enough of luke-warm water barely to moisten his lips. But the rat had enough of water, somehow, and now it fed!

The man stumbled back to his utterly useless cache of shattered timbers and weathered cordage. He thought bitterly of the rat's smooth body. Of its ununshrunken muscles. Of its sleek fur. And suddenly, as in his hatred he envisioned rending it limb from limb —suddenly he saw it in a new light. From a thing to be hated and destroyed, the rat suddenly became a fascinating, an infinitely desirable thing. The man was starving. As he thought of the rat his mouth watered.

The conditions of the game now were wholly clear. If the man died, the rat's chances of survival would be directly increased. If the rat died, the man would live longer at least by days. So the rat must die, or the man. They had played a deadly game before. Now the side bet—of life—was explicit.

Days passed. The sun rose and there was a vast blue

bowl which was the sky. The sun sank and a multitude of stars gazed down. The man gave all his thought, now, to the game. He did not even glance at the horizon. He grew rapidly weaker, but his whole thought was fixed upon the construction of elaborate gins and traps by which the rat might be captured. He made them, and they failed, because he could not bring himself to risk even a scrap of food for bait.

When at last he risked a full quarter of his day's ration in hopes of luring the rat into capture, the rat cunningly sprang the trap and escaped with the bread. It was a morsel about half the size of a thimble. The man wept when he discovered his failure. But it was for the loss of the bread.

Then he made a bow and arrow. It was clumsy and crude and it would be hopelessly inaccurate, because he had no tools. When he had made the weapon, he spent three days stalking the rat over the uneven surface of the island. Most of the time he had to crawl, because of his weakness. Much of the time he knew where the rat was. Some of the time he even saw it, because the rat had grown bolder since the man's weakness had forced him to crawl rather than walk.

The first day's stalking brought no result. Nor the second. But on the third day—even the rat was starving, now—the man's persistence and infinite care took him to where he saw the rat clearly. It was sleeping. The man crept closer, inch by inch. He moved with breathless caution. He saw, though he did not realize, that the rat's ribs now showed through its fur. Its eyes were rimmed with red. It was no longer sleek and well-muscled. It was shabby and unkempt and almost as emaciated as the man.

The man drew his solitary arrow back. But he had not realized his weakness. His heart pounded hysterically. His eyes glared. His mouth slobbered in horrible anticipation. His hands shook. And when he had drawn back the arrow to the fullest extent of which he

was capable, the arrow flicked forward, glanced off a rock—it would have missed—and by sheer ironic accident was deflected again into its true path. It struck the rat.

And the bow had been drawn so weakly that the arrow did not penetrate. The rat leaped upright, squeaking, and fled. And the useless arrow lay where it had fallen while the starving man wept. He saw, now, that it was the rat which would win the game and the stakes—and the side bet.

The rat knew it too. Two days later the man's rations, both of food and of water, came to an end. He regarded them both for a long time. Once gone, the rat won their deadly game.

The man ate the bread and drank the water. He lay down. He did not bother even to glance at the horizon, because the game was over and he had lost. He was not suffering at all when night came. He felt no hunger and even his thirst was not severe. He was peculiarly clearheaded and calm. His body was weak, to be sure, but there were no gripings in his belly. He lay and looked up at the stars and foresaw the rat's winning of game and stakes and side bet, and was unmoved by the foreknowledge. He was too weak for emotion.

But then he heard a little sound, and in the starlight he saw a movement. It was the rat.

It was still for a long time. The man did not move. It crept toward him. The man stirred. The rat stopped. Presently it sank down on all fours, watching the man with glowing eyes.

There was silence save for the gurgling of the long slow swells among the rocks. The man even laughed weakly. The rat waited with a quivering impatience. It had known nothing of rationing. It had eaten more fully than the man, but not as often. It's whole body was a clamoring, raging hunger. It quivered with a horrible desire to claim its winnings in the deadly game.

"No," said the man detachedly. His voice was a bare croak, but there was almost amusement in it. "Not yet! The one who dies first loses. I'm not dead yet..."

The rat quivered. It backed away when the man spoke, its eyes flaring hatred. But when he stopped it crept forward. A little closer than before. It stopped only when the man stirred.

Then the man thought of something. He was very weak indeed, but at the very beginning he had picked out some soft fiber from the cordage he had saved. He had worked out a small spike, and he tested it against the rock. He had even dried out a little seaweed, as more practical than hemp for the making of a blaze.

Now he struck the spike against the rock. It sparked. The rat retreated. Presently it crept forward again. The man struck the spike again upon the rock. The rat was checked.

It happened many times before the sparks struck in the improvised oakum tinder. Then it fatigued the man very much to blow it and sift dried and crumpled seaweed upon it—blowing the while—and later to transfer the small coal to the assembly of little splinters he had made ready long since. They were to kindle the signal fire he had intended to light if a ship should ever come into view. But now he lighted the kindling because the rat was no more than five feet from him and he could hear it panting in a desperate eagerness to claim its winnings. The flames caught and climbed.

The rat drew back slowly, his eyes desperate. The man watched.

Over his head malicious stars looked down, but now a huge and spreading column of smoke rose up, lighted from below by the blaze. It blotted out the stars. And the flames climbed higher and higher, crackling fiercely, and the fire roared. There was a leaping thicket of yellow flame beneath the smoke. Its topmost branches reared up for fifteen feet. Twenty. Long tongues of detached incandescence licked up into the

thick smoke even higher still. And the reddish-yellow glare upon the smoke made it into a radiant mist.

"It would have been a pretty good signal," the man thought.

Then he thought of something else. If he could have contrived to be upon that heap of blazing timber, and had contrived that it should catch fire after he was dead, the rat would never collect its winnings from the game.

"But that wouldn't have been fair," said the man lightheartedly. "It, it would've been welshing . . ."

The rat had vanished, crept into some crack or crevice to hide from the glare and the heat of the fire. And the fire blazed up and up, and slowly died down, and when the dawn came the man saw smoke still rising from the ashes.

And again he saw the rat.

But he heard—he heard the rattle of an anchor chain. Which was that of a ship which had seen the flame-lit smoke of the fire during the dark hours, and had thought it another ship ablaze, and had come to offer help. Now a boat was on its way ashore.

When they carried the man to the small boat, he croaked out a request. They placed him as he wished in the boat, so that as it pulled toward the ship he saw the island. And he saw the rat upon it.

The rat ran crazily back and forth, squealing. The squeals were cries of rage. The rat was a bare skeleton covered with tight-stretched hide, and its rage was ghastly. Its disappointment was incredible. The man was being carried away and there was no other food upon the island . . .

"I—I've got a money belt on," croaked the man. "There's sixty dollars in it. I . . . I've lost a bet." He rested for a moment. "I want to buy some food and have it left on the island for that . . . rat. He won a game from me and I . . . don't want to welsh on a bet . . ."

They lifted him carefully to the steamer's deck. Weakly, he insisted on this final favor. The boat went back to the island. It left a great heap of more than a hundred pounds of ship's biscuit where the sea was not likely to wash any of it away. Before it had pulled out from the island, the rat had flung itself upon the heap and was eating.

They told the man. He grinned feebly... he had been fed... and went incontinently to sleep. They told him afterward that the rat was still eating when the ship sailed over the horizon.

What happened after that, the man never knew. But he felt that he had paid the side bet.

SECOND NIGHT OUT

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

It was past midnight when I left my stateroom. The upper promenade deck was entirely deserted and thin wisps of fog hovered about the deck chairs and curled and uncurled about the gleaming rails. There was no air stirring. The ship moved forward sluggishly through a quiet, fog-enshrouded sea.

But I did not object to the fog. I leaned against the rail and inhaled the damp, murky air with a positive greediness. The almost unendurable nausea, the pervasive physical and mental misery had departed, leaving me serene and at peace. I was again capable of experiencing sensuous delight, and the aroma of the brine was not to be exchanged for pearls and rubies. I had paid in exorbitant coinage for what I was about to enjoy—for the five brief days of freedom and exploration in glamorous, sea-splendid Havana which I had been promised by an enterprising and, I hoped, reasonably honest tourist agent. I am in all respects the antithesis of a wealthy man, and I had drawn so heavily upon my bank balance to satisfy the greedy demands of The Loriland Tours, Inc., that I had been compelled to renounce such really indispensable amenities as after-dinner cigars and ocean-privileged sherry and chartreuse.

But I was enormously content. I paced the deck and inhaled the moist, pungent air. For thirty hours I had been confined to my cabin with a sea-illness more debilitating than bubonic plague or malignant sepsis, but

having at length managed to squirm from beneath its iron heel I was free to enjoy my prospects. They were enviable and glorious. Five days in Cuba, with the privilege of driving up and down the sun-drenched Malecon in a flamboyantly upholstered limousine, and an opportunity to feast my discerning gaze on the pink walls of the Cabanas and the Columbus Cathedral and La Fuerza, the great storehouse of the Indies. Opportunity, also, to visit sunlit *patios,* and saunter by iron-barred *rejas,* and to sip *refrescos* by moonlight in open-air cafés, and to acquire, incidentally, a Spanish contempt for Big Business and the Strenuous Life. Then on to Haiti, dark and magical, and the Virgin Islands, and the quaint, incredible Old World harbor of Charlotte Amalie, with its chimneyless, red-roofed houses rising in tiers to the quiet stars; the natural Sargasso, the inevitable last port of call for rainbow fishes, diving boys and old ships with sun-bleached funnels and incurably drunken skippers. A flaming opal set in an amphitheater of malachite—its allure blazed forth through the gray fog and dispelled my northern spleen. I leaned against the rail and dreamed also of Martinique, which I would see in a few days, and of the Indian and Chinese wenches of Trinidad. And then, suddenly, a dizziness came upon me. The ancient and terrible malady had returned to plague me.

Sea-sickness, unlike all other major afflictions, is a disease of the individual. No two people are ever afflicted with precisely the same symptoms. The manifestations range from a slight malaise to a devastating impairment of all one's faculties. I was afflicted with the gravest symptoms imaginable. Choking and gasping, I left the rail and sank helplessly down into one of the three remaining deck chairs.

Why the steward had permitted the chairs to remain on deck was a mystery I couldn't fathom. He had obviously shirked a duty, for passengers did not habitually visit the promenade deck in the small hours, and

foggy weather plays havoc with the wicker-work of steamer chairs. But I was too grateful for the benefits which his negligence had conferred upon me to be excessively critical. I lay sprawled at full length, grimacing and gasping and trying fervently to assure myself that I wasn't nearly as sick as I felt. And then, all at once, I became aware of an additional source of discomfiture.

The chair exuded an unwholesome odor. It was unmistakable. As I turned about, as my cheek came to rest against the damp, varnished wood my nostrils were assailed by an acrid and alien odor of a vehement, cloying potency. It was at once stimulating and indescribably repellent. In a measure, it assuaged my physical unease, but it also filled me with the most overpowering revulsion, with a sudden, hysterical and almost frenzied distaste.

I tried to rise from the chair, but the strength was gone from my limbs. An intangible presence seemed to rest upon me and weigh me down. And then the bottom seemed to drop out of everything. I am not being facetious. Something of the sort actually occurred. The *base* of the sane, familiar world vanished, was swallowed up. I sank down. Limitless gulfs seemed open beneath me, and I was immersed, lost in a gray void. The ship, however, did not vanish. The ship, the deck, the chair continued to support me, and yet, despite the retention of these outward symbols of reality, I was afloat in an unfathomable void. I had the illusion of falling, of sinking helplessly down through an eternity of space. It was as though the chair which supported me had passed into another dimension without ceasing to leave the familiar world—as though it floated simultaneously both in our three-dimensional world and in another world of alien, unknown dimensions. I became aware of strange shapes and shadows all about me. I gazed through illimitable dark gulfs at continents and islands, lagoons, atolls, vast gray waterspouts. I sank

down into the great deep. I was immersed in dark slime. The boundaries of sense were dissolved away, and the breath of an active corruption blew through me, gnawing at my vitals and filling me with extravagant torment. I was alone in the great deep. And the shapes that accompanied me in my utter abysmal isolation were shriveled and black and dead, and they cavorted deliriously with little monkey-heads with streaming, sea-drenched viscera and putrid, pupilless eyes.

And then, slowly, the unclean vision dissolved. I was back again in my chair and the fog was as dense as ever, and the ship moved forward steadily through the quiet sea. But the odor was still present—acrid, overpowering, revolting. I leapt from the chair, in profound alarm.... I experienced a sense of having emerged from the bowels of some stupendous and unearthly *encroachment,* of having in a single instant exhausted the resources of earth's malignity, and drawn upon untapped and intolerable reserves.

I have gazed without flinching at the turbulent, demon-seething utterly benighted infernos of the Italian and Flemish primitives. I have endured with calm vision the major inflictions of Hieronymus Bosch, and Lucas Cranach, and I have not quailed even before the worst perversities of the elder Breughel, whose outrageous gargoyles and ghouls and cacodemons are so self-contained that they fester with an over-brimming malignancy, and seem about to burst asunder and dissolve hideously in a black and intolerable froth. But not even Signorelli's *Soul of the Damned,* or Goya's *Los Caprichos,* or the hideous, ooze-encrusted sea-shapes with half-assembled bodies and dead, pupilless eyes which drag themselves sightlessly through Segrelles' blue worlds of fetor and decay were as unnerving and ghastly as the flickering visual sequence which had accompanied my perception of the odor. I was vastly and terribly shaken.

I got indoors somehow, into the warm and steamy interior of the upper saloon, and waited, gasping, for the deck steward to come to me. I had pressed a small button labeled "Deck Steward" in the wainscoting adjoining the central stairway, and I frantically hoped that he would arrive before it was too late, before the odor outside percolated into the vast, deserted saloon.

The steward was a daytime official, and it was a cardinal crime to fetch him from his berth at one in the morning, but I had to have someone to talk to, and as the steward was responsible for the chairs I naturally thought of him as the logical target for my interrogations. He would *know*. He would be able to explain. The odor would not be unfamiliar to him. He would be able to explain about the chairs . . . about the chairs . . . about the chairs . . . I was growing hysterical and confused.

I wiped the perspiration from my forehead with the back of my hand, and waited with relief for the steward to approach. He had come suddenly into view above the top of the central stairway, and he seemed to advance toward me through a blue mist.

He was extremely solicitous, extremely courteous. He bent above me and laid his hand concernedly upon my arm. "Yes, sir. What can I do for you, sir? A bit under the weather, perhaps. What can I do?"

Do? Do? It was horribly confusing. I could only stammer: "The chairs, steward. On the deck. Three chairs. Why did you leave them there? Why didn't you take them inside?"

It wasn't what I had intended asking him. I had intended questioning him about the odor. But the strain, the shock had confused me. The first thought that came into my mind on seeing the steward standing above me, so solicitous and concerned, was that he was a hypocrite and a scoundrel. He pretended to be concerned about me and yet out of sheer perversity he had prepared the snare which had reduced me to a

pitiful and helpless wreck. He had left the chairs on deck deliberately, with a cruel and crafty malice, knowing all the time, no doubt, that *something* would occupy them.

But I wasn't prepared for the almost instant change in the man's demeanor. It was ghastly. Befuddled as I had become I could perceive at once that I had done him a grave, a terrible injustice. *He hadn't known.* All the blood drained out of his cheeks and his mouth fell open. He stood immobile before me, completely inarticulate, and for an instant I thought he was about to collapse, to sink helplessly down upon the floor.

"You saw—chairs?" he gasped at last.

I nodded.

The steward leaned toward me and gripped my arm. The flesh of his face was completely destitute of luster. From the parchment-white oval his two eyes, tumescent with fright, stared wildly down at me.

"It's the black, dead thing," he muttered. "The monkey-face. I *knew* it would come back. It always comes aboard at midnight on the second night out."

He gulped and his hand tightened on my arm.

"It's always on the second night out. It knows where I keep the chairs, and it takes them on deck and sits in them. I *saw* it last time. It was squirming about in the chair—lying stretched out and squirming horribly. Like an eel. It sits in all three of the chairs. When it saw me it got up and started toward me. But I got away. I came in here, and shut the door. But I saw it through the window."

The steward raised his arm and pointed.

"There. Through that window there. Its face was pressed against the glass. It was all black and shriveled and eaten away. A monkey-face, sir. So help me, the face of a dead, shriveled monkey. And wet—dripping. I was so frightened I couldn't breathe. I just stood and groaned, and then it went away."

He gulped.

"Doctor Blodgett was mangled, clawed to death at ten minutes to one. We heard his shrieks. The thing went back, I guess, and sat in the chairs for thirty or forty minutes after it left the window. Then it went down to Doctor Blodgett's stateroom and took his clothes. It was horrible. Doctor Blodgett's legs were missing, and his face was crushed to a pulp. There were claw-marks all over him. And the curtains of his berth were drenched with blood.

"The captain told me not to talk. But I've got to tell someone. I can't help myself, sir. I'm afraid—I've got to talk. This is the third time it's come aboard. It didn't take anybody the first time, but it sat in the chairs. It left them all wet and slimy, sir—all covered with black stinking slime."

I stared in bewilderment. What was the man trying to tell me? Was he completely unhinged? Or was I too confused, too ill myself to catch all that he was saying?

He went on wildly: "It's hard to explain, sir, but this boat is *visited.* Every voyage, sir—on the second night out. And each time it sits in the chairs. Do you understand?"

I didn't understand, clearly, but I murmured a feeble assent. My voice was appallingly tremulous and it seemed to come from the opposite side of the saloon.

"Something out there," I gasped. "It was awful. Out there, you hear? An awful odor. My brain. I can't imagine what's come over me, but I feel as though something were pressing on my brain. Here."

I raised my fingers and passed them across my forehead.

"Something here—something—"

The steward appeared to understand perfectly. He nodded and helped me to my feet. He was still self-engrossed, still horribly wrought up, but I could sense that he was also anxious to reassure and assist me.

"Stateroom 16D? Yes, of course. Steady, sir."

The steward had taken my arm and was guiding me toward the central stairway. I could scarcely stand erect. My decrepitude was so apparent, in fact, that the steward was moved by compassion to the display of an almost heroic attentiveness. Twice I stumbled and would have fallen had not the guiding arm of my companion encircled my shoulders and levitated my sagging bulk.

"Just a few more steps, sir. That's it. Just take your time. There isn't anything will come of it, sir. You'll feel better when you're inside, with the fan going. Just take your time, sir."

At the door of my stateroom I spoke in a hoarse whisper to the man at my side. "I'm all right now. I'll ring if I need you. Just—let me—get inside. I want to lie down. Does this door lock from the inside?"

"Why, yes. Yes, of course. But maybe I'd better get you some water."

"No, don't bother. Just leave me—please."

"Well—all right, sir." Reluctantly the steward departed, after making certain that I had a firm grip on the handle of the door.

The stateroom was extremely dark. I was so weak that I was compelled to lean with all my weight against the door to close it. It shut with a slight click and the key fell out upon the floor. With a groan I went down on my knees and grovelled apprehensively with my fingers on the soft carpet. But the key eluded me.

I cursed and was about to rise when my hand encountered something fibrous and hard. I started back, gasping. Then, frantically, my fingers slid over it, in a hectic effort at appraisal. It was—yes, undoubtedly a shoe. And sprouting from it, an ankle. The shoe reposed firmly on the floor of the stateroom. The flesh of the ankle, beneath the sock which covered it, was very cold.

In an instant I was on my feet, circling like a caged

animal about the narrow dimensions of the stateroom. My hands slid over the walls, the ceiling. If only, dear God, the electric light button would not continue to elude me!

Eventually my hands encountered a rubbery excresence on the smooth panels. I pressed, resolutely, and the darkness vanished to reveal a man sitting upright on a couch in the corner—a stout, well-dressed man holding a grip and looking perfectly composed. Only his face was invisible. His face was concealed by a handkerchief—a large handkerchief which had obviously been placed there intentionally, perhaps as a protection against the rather chilly air currents from the unshuttered port. The man was obviously asleep. He had not responded to the tugging of my hands on his ankles in the darkness, and even now he did not stir. The glare of the electric light bulbs above his head did not appear to annoy him in the least.

I experienced a sudden and overwhelming relief. I sat down beside the intruder and wiped the sweat from my forehead. I was still trembling in every limb, but the calm appearance of the man beside me was tremendously reassuring. A fellow-passenger, no doubt, who had entered the wrong compartment. It should not be difficult to get rid of him. A mere tap on the shoulder, followed by a courteous explanation, and the intruder would vanish. A simple procedure, if only I could summon the strength to act with decision. I was so horribly enfeebled, so incredibly weak and ill. But at last I mustered sufficient energy to reach out my hand and tap the intruder on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry, sir," I murmured, "but you've got into the wrong stateroom. If I wasn't a bit under the weather I'd ask you to stay and smoke a cigar with me, but you see I"—with a distorted effort at a smile I tapped the stranger again nervously—"I'd rather be alone, so if you don't mind—sorry I had to wake you."

Immediately I perceived that I was being prema-

ture. I had not waked the stranger. The stranger did not budge, did not so much as agitate by his breathing the handkerchief which concealed his features.

I experienced a resurgence of my alarm. Tremulously I stretched forth my hand and seized a corner of the handkerchief. It was an outrageous thing to do, but I had to know. If the intruder's face matched his body, if it was composed and familiar all would be well, but if for any reason—

The fragment of physiognomy revealed by the uplifted corner was not reassuring. With a gasp of affright I tore the handkerchief completely away. For a moment, a moment only, I stared at the dark and repulsive visage, with its stary, corpse-white eyes, viscid and malignant, its flat simian nose, hairy ears, and thick black tongue that seemed to leap up at me from out of the mouth. The face *moved* as I watched it, wriggled and squirmed revoltingly, while the head itself shifted its position, turning slightly to one side and revealing a profile more bestial and gangrenous and unclean than the brunt of his countenance.

I shrank back against the door, in frenzied dismay. I suffered as an animal suffers. My mind, deprived by shock of all capacity to form concepts, agonized instinctively, at a brutish level of consciousness. Yet through it all one mysterious part of myself remained horribly observant. I saw the tongue snap back into the mouth; saw the lines of the features shrivel and soften until presently from the slavering mouth and white sightless eyes there began to trickle thin streams of blood. In another moment the mouth was a red slit in a splotched horror of countenance—a red slit rapidly widening and dissolving in an amorphous crimson flood. The horror was hideously and repellently dissolving into the basal sustainer of all life.

It took the steward nearly ten minutes to restore me. He was compelled to force spoonfuls of brandy be-

tween my tightly-locked teeth, to bathe my forehead with ice-water and to massage almost savagely my wrists and ankles. And when, finally, I opened my eyes he refused to meet them. He quite obviously wanted me to rest, to remain quiet, and he appeared to distrust his own emotional equipment. He was good enough, however, to enumerate the measures which had contributed to my restoration, and to enlighten me in respect to the *remnants:*

"The clothes were all covered with blood—*drenched,* sir. I burned them."

On the following day he became more loquacious. "It was wearing the clothes of the gentleman who was killed last voyage, sir—it was wearing Doctor Blodgett's things. I recognized them instantly."

"But why—"

The steward shook his head. "I don't know, sir. Maybe your going up on deck saved you. Maybe it couldn't wait. It left a little after one the last time, sir, and it was later than that when I saw you to your stateroom. The ship may have passed out of its *zone,* sir. Or maybe it fell asleep and couldn't get back in time, and that's why it—dissolved. I don't think it's gone for good. There was blood on the curtains in Dr. Blodgett's cabin, and I'm afraid it always *goes* that way. It will come back next voyage, sir. I'm sure of it."

He cleared his throat.

"I'm glad you rang for me. If you'd gone right down to your stateroom it might be wearing your clothes next voyage."

Havana failed to restore me. Haiti was a black horror, a repellent quagmire of menacing shadows and alien desolation, and in Martinique I did not get a single hour of undisturbed sleep in my room at the hotel.

OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS

PHILIP MACDONALD

The hot, hard August sunshine poured its pale and blazing gold over the countryside. At the crest of the hill, which overlooked a county and a half, the tiny motorcar drawn up to the side of the dusty road which wound up the hill like a white riband looked not so much mechanical as insectile. It looked like a Brobdingnagian bee which, wings folded, had settled for a moment's sleepy basking in the fierce sunshine.

Beside the car, seeming almost ludicrously out of proportion with it, stood a man and a woman. The sum of their ages could not have exceeded forty-five. The dress of the girl, which was silken and slight, would not, at all events upon her charming body, have done aught save grace a car as large and costly as this one was minute and cheap. But the clothes of the boy, despite his youth and erect comeliness, were somehow eloquent of Norwood, a careful and not unintelligent clerkliness pursued in the city of London, and a pseudo-charitable arrangement whereby the bee-like motorcar should be purchased, for many pounds more than its actual worth, in small but almost eternal slices.

The girl was hatless, and her clipped golden poll glittered in the sunrays. She looked, and was, cool, despite the great heat of the afternoon. The boy, in his tweed jacket, thick flannel trousers, and over-tight collar, at whose front blazed a tie which hoped to look like that of some famous school or college, was hot, and

very hot. He pulled his hat from his dark head and mopped at his brow with a vivid handkerchief.

"Coo!" he said. "Hot enough for you, Vi?"

She wriggled slim, half-covered shoulders. "It's a treat!" she said. She gazed about her with wide blue eyes; she looked down and around at the county-and-a-half. "Where's this, Jack?"

The boy continued to puff and mop. He said:

"Blessed if *I* know! . . . I lost me bearings after that big village place—what was it? . . ."

"Greyne, or some such," said the girl absently. Her gaze was now directed down the hillside to her right, where the emerald roof of a dense wood shone through the sun's gold. There was no breath of wind, even right up upon this hill, and the green of the leaves showed smooth and unbroken.

The boy put on his hat again. "Better be getting on, I s'pose. You've had that leg-stretch you were wanting."

"Ooh! Not *yet*, Jack. Don't let's yet!" She put her fingers on her left hand upon his sleeve. On the third of these fingers there sparkled a ring of doubtful brilliance. "Don't let's go on yet, Jack!" she said. She looked up into his face, her lips pouted in a way which was not the least of reasons for the flashing ring.

He slid an arm about the slim shoulders; he bent his head and kissed thoroughly the red mouth. "Just's *you* like Vi. . . . But what you want to do?" He looked about him with curling lip. "Sit around up here on this dusty grass and frizzle?"

"Silly!" she said, pulling herself away from him. She pointed down to the green roof. "I want to go down there. . . . Into that wood. Jest to see what it's like. Haven't been in a reel wood since the summer holidays before last, when Effie an' me went to Hastings. . . . Cummon! Bet it's lovely and cool down there. . . ."

This last sentence floated up to him, for already

she was off the narrow road and beginning a slipping descent of the short rough grass of the hillside's first twenty feet.

He went sliding and stumbling after her. But he could not catch up with the light, fragile little figure in its absurdly enchanting wisp of blue silk. The soles of his thick shoes were of leather, and, growing polished by the brushing of the close, arid grass, were treacherous. Forty feet down, on the suddenly jutting and only gently sloping plateau where the wood began, he did come up with her: he ended a stumbling, sliding rush with an imperfect and involuntary somersault which landed him asprawl at her feet.

He sat up, shouting with laughter. With a shock of surprise greater than any of his short life, he felt a little foot kick sharply—nearly savagely—at his arm, and heard a tensely whispered "SSH!"

He scrambled to his feet, to see that she was standing facing the trees, her shining golden head thrust forward, her whole body tense as that of a sprinter waiting for the pistol's crack. As, wonderingly, he shuffled to take his stand at her shoulder, she said:

"Listen! . . . Birds! . . . Jever hear the like? . . ." Her tone was a hushed yet clear whisper—like none he had ever heard her use before.

He said nothing. He stood scowling sulkily down at the grass beneath his feet and rubbing at the spot where her shoe had met his arm.

It seemed to him an hour before she turned. But turn at last she did. He still had his hand at the kicked arm, for all the world as if it really were causing him pain. From beneath his brows he watched her, covertly. He saw the odd rapt look leave the small face once more its pertly pretty self; saw the blue eyes suddenly widen with memory of what she had done. . . .

And then soft warm arms came about his neck and by their pressure pulled down his head so that, close

pressed against him and standing upon tiptoe, she might smother his face with the kisses of contrition.

He said, in answer to the pleas for forgiveness with which the caresses were interspersed:

"Never known you do a thing like that before, Vi!"

"No," she said. "And you never won't again! Reely, Jack darling! ... It ... it ..."—a cloud came over the blue eyes—"it ... I don't rightly know what came over me.... I was listening to the birds.... I never heard the like ... and ... and I never heard you till you laughed ... and I dunno *what* it was, but it seemed 's if I jest *had* to go on hearing what the birds were ... 's if it was ... was wrong to listen to anything else.... Oh, *I* dunno!"

The small face was troubled and the eyes desperate with the realization of explanation's impossibility. But the mouth pouted. The boy kissed it. He laughed and said:

"Funny kid, you!" He drew her arm through the crook of his and began to walk towards the first ranks of the trees. He put up his free hand and felt tenderly at the back of his neck. He said:

"Shan't be sorry for some shade. Neck's gettin' all sore."

They walked on, finding that the trees were strangely further away than they had seemed. They did not speak, but every now and then the slim, naked arm would squeeze the thick, clothed arm and have its pressure returned.

They had only some ten paces to go to reach the fringe of the wood when the girl halted. He turned his head to look down at her and found that once more she was tense in every muscle and thrusting the golden head forward as if the better to hear. He frowned; then smiled; then again bent his brows. He sensed that there was somewhere an oddness which he knew he would never understand—a feeling abhorrent to

him, as, indeed, to most men. He found that he, too, was straining to listen.

He supposed it must be birds that he was listening for. And quite suddenly he laughed. For he had realized that he was listening for something which had been for the last few moments so incessantly in his ears that he had forgotten he was hearing it. He explained this to the girl. She seemed to listen to him with only half an ear, and for a moment he came near to losing his temper. But only for a moment. He was a good-natured boy, with sensitive instincts serving him well in place of realized tact.

He felt a little tugging at his arm and fell into step with her as she began to go forward again. He went on with his theme, ignoring her patently half-hearted attention.

"Like at a dance," he said. "You know, Vi—you never hear the noise of the people's feet on the floor unless you happen to listen for it, an' when you do listen for it an' hear that sort of *shishing*—then you know you've been hearing it all the time, see? That's what we were doing about the birds...." He became suddenly conscious that, in order to make himself clearly heard above the chattering, twittering flood of birdsong, he was speaking in a tone at least twice as loud as the normal. He said:

"Cool . . . You're right, Vi. *I* never heard anything like it!"

They were passing now through the ranks of the outer line of trees. To the boy, a little worried by the strangeness of his adored, and more than a little discomfited by the truly abnormal heat of the sun, it seemed that he passed from an inferno to a paradise at one step. No more did the sun beat implacably down upon the world. In here, under the roof of green which no ray pierced but only a gentle, pervading, filtered softness of light, there was a cool peacefulness

which seemed to bathe him, instantly, in a placid bath of contentment.

But the girl shivered a little. She said:

"Oh! It's almost cold in here!"

He did not catch the words. The chirping and carolling which was going on all about and above them seemed to catch up and absorb the sound of her voice.

"Drat the birds!" he said. "What you say?"

He saw her lips move, but though he bent his head, did not catch a sound. There had come, from immediately above their heads, the furious squeaks and flutterings of a bird-quarrel.

"Drat the birds!" he said again.

They were quite deep in the wood now. Looking round, he could not see at all the sun-drenched grass plateau from which they had come. He felt a tugging at his arm. The girl was pointing to a gently sloping bed of thick moss which was like a carpet spread at the foot of an old and twisted tree.

They sauntered to this carpet and sat down upon it, the boy sprawling at his ease, the girl very straight of back, with her hands clasped tightly about her raised knees. Had he been looking at her, rather than at the pipe he was filling, he would have seen again that craning forward of her head.

He did not finish the filling of his pipe. The singing of the birds went on. It seemed to gather volume until the whole world was filled with its chaotic whistling. The boy found, now that he had once consciously listened for and to it, that he could not again make his ears unconscious of the sound; the sound which, with its seemingly momentarily increased volume, was now so plucking at the nerves within his head—indeed over his whole body—that he felt he could not sit much longer to endure it. He thrust pipe and pouch savagely back into his pocket and turned to say to the girl that the quicker they got away from this blinking twittering the better he'd be pleased.

But the words died upon his lips. For even as he turned he became aware of a diminution of the reedy babel. He saw, too, calmer now with the decrease of irritation, that the girl was still in rapt attention.

So he held his tongue. The singing of the birds grew less and lesser with each moment. He began to feel drowsy, and once caught himself with a startled jerk from the edge of actual slumber. He peered sideways at his companion and saw that still she sat rigid; not by the breadth of a hair had she altered her first attentive pose. He felt again for pipe and pouch.

His fingers idle in the jacket-pocket, he found himself listening again. Only this time he listened because he wanted to listen. There was now but one bird who sang. And the boy was curiously conscious, hearing these liquid notes alone and in the fullness of their uninterrupted and almost unbearable beauty, that the reason for his hatred of that full and somehow discordant chorus which a few moments ago had nearly driven him from the trees and their lovely shelter had been his inability to hear more than an isolated note or two of this song whose existence then he had realized only subconsciously.

The full, deep notes ceased their rapid and incredible trilling, cutting their sound off sharply, almost in the manner of an operatic singer. There was, then, only silence in the wood. It lasted, for the town-bred boy and girl caught suddenly in this placid whirlpool of natural beauty, for moments which seemed strained and incalculable ages. And then into this pool of pregnant no-sound were dropped, one by one, six exquisite jewels of sound, each pause between these isolated lovelinesses being of twice the duration of its predecessor.

After the last of these notes—deep and varying and crystal-pure, yet misty with unimaginable beauties—

the silence fell again; a silence not pregnant, as the last, with the vibrant foreshadowings of the magic to come, but a silence which had in it the utter and miserable quietness of endings and nothingness.

The boy's arm went up and wrapped itself gently about slim, barely covered shoulders. Two heads turned, and dark eyes looked into blue. The blue were abrim with unshed tears. She whispered:

"It was *him* I was listening to all the while. I could hear *that* all . . . all through the others. . . ."

A tear brimmed over and rolled down the pale cheek. The arm about her shoulders tightened, and at last she relaxed. The little body grew limp and lay against his strength.

"You lay quiet, darling," he said. His voice trembled a little. And he spoke in the hushed voice of a man who knows himself in a holy or enchanted place.

Then silence. Silence which weighed and pressed upon a man's soul. Silence which seemed a living deadness about them. From the boy's shoulder came a hushed, small voice which endeavoured to conceal its shaking. It said:

"I . . . I . . . felt all along . . . we shouldn't . . . shouldn't be here. . . . We didn't ought to 've come. . . ."

Despite its quietness there was something like panic in the voice.

He spoke reassuring words. To shake her from this queer, repressed hysteria, he said these words in a loud and virile tone. But this had only the effect of conveying to himself something of the odd disquiet which had possessed the girl.

"It's cold in here," she whispered suddenly. Her body pressed itself against him.

He laughed; an odd sound. He said hastily:

"Cold! You're talking out of the back of your neck, Vi."

"It is," she said. But her voice was more natural now. "We better be getting along, hadn't we?"

He nodded. "Think we had," he said. He stirred, as if to get to his feet. But a small hand suddenly gripped his arm, and her voice whispered:

"Look! *Look!*" It was her own voice again, so that, even while he started a little at her sudden clutch and the urgency of her tone, he felt a wave of relief and a sudden quietening of his own vague but discomfortable uneasiness.

His gaze followed the line of her pointing finger. He saw, upon the carpeting of rotten twigs and brown mouldering leaves, just at the point where this brown and the dark cool green of their mossbank met, a small bird. It stood upon its slender sticks of legs and gazed up at them, over the plump bright-hued breast, with shining little eyes. Its head was cocked to one side.

"D'you know," said the girl's whisper, "that's the first one we've *seen!*"

The boy pondered for a moment. "Gosh!" he said at last. "So it is and all!"

They watched in silence. The bird hopped nearer.

"Isn't he *sweet,* Jack?" Her whisper was a delighted chuckle.

"Talk about tame!" said the boy softly. "Cunning little beggar!"

Her elbow nudged his ribs. She said, her lips barely moving:

"Keep still. If we don't move, I believe he'll come right up to us."

Almost on her words, the bird hopped nearer. Now he was actually upon the moss, and thus less than an inch from the toe of the girl's left shoe. His little pert head, which was of a shining green with a rather comically long beak of yellow, was still cocked to one side. His bright, small eyes still surveyed them with the unwinking stare of his kind.

The girl's fascinated eyes were upon the small creature. She saw nothing else. Not so the boy. There was a nudge, this time from his elbow.

"Look there!" he whispered, pointing. "And there!"

She took, reluctantly enough, her eyes from the small intruder by her foot. She gazed in the directions he had indicated. She gasped in wonder. She whispered:

"Why, they're *all* coming to see us!"

Everywhere between the boles of the close-growing trees were birds. Some stood singly, some in pairs, some in little clumps of four and more. Some seemed, even to urban eyes, patently of the same family as their first visitor, who still stood by the white shoe, staring up at the face of its owner. But there were many more families. There were very small birds, and birds of sparrow size but unsparrowlike plumage, and birds which were a little bigger than this, and birds which were twice and three times the size. But one and all faced the carpet of moss and stared with their shining eyes at the two humans who lay upon it.

"This," said the boy, "is the rummest start *I* ever . . ."

The girl's elbow nudged him to silence. He followed the nod of her head and, looking down, saw that the first visitor was now perched actually upon her instep. He seemed very much at his ease there. But he was no longer looking up at them with those bright little eyes. And his head was no longer cocked to one side: it was level, so that he appeared to be in contemplation of a silk-clad shin.

Something—perhaps it was a little whispering, pattering rustle among the rotting leaves of the wood's carpet—took the boy's fascinated eyes from this strange sight. He lifted them to see a stranger; a sight perhaps more fascinating, but with by no means the same fascination.

The birds were nearer. Much, much nearer. And their line was solid now; an unbroken semicircle with bounding-line so wide-flung that he felt rather than saw its extent. One little corner of his brain for an instant busied itself with wild essays at numerical computation, but reeled back defeated by the impossibility of the task. Even as he stared, his face pale now, and his eyes wide with something like terror, that semicircle drew yet nearer, each unit of it taking four hops and four hops only. Now, its line unmarred, it was close upon the edge of the moss.

But was it only a semicircle? A dread doubt of this flashed into his mind.

One horrified glance across his shoulder told him that semicircle it was not. Full circle it was.

Birds, birds, birds! Was it possible that the world itself should hold such numbers of birds?

Eyes! Small, shining, myriad button-points of glittering eyes. All fixed upon him... and—God!—upon *her*....

In one wild glance he saw that as yet she had not seen. Still she was in rapt, silent ecstasy over her one bird. And this now sat upon the outspread palm of her hand. Close to her face she was holding this hand....

Through the pall of silence he could feel those countless eyes upon him. Little eyes; bright, glittering eyes....

His breath came in shuddering gasps. He tried to get himself in hand; tried, until the sweat ran off him with the intensity of his effort, to master his fear. To some extent he succeeded. He would no longer sit idle while the circle... while the circle...

The silence was again ruffled upon its surface by a rustling patter.... It was one hop this time. It brought

the semicircle fronting him so near that there were birds within an inch of his feet.

He leapt up. He waved his arms and kicked out and uttered one shout which somehow cracked and was half-strangled in his throat.

Nothing happened. At the edge of the moss a small bird, crushed by his kick, lay in a soft, small heap.

Not one of the birds moved. Still their eyes were upon him.

The girl sat like a statue in living stone. She had seen, and terror held her. Her palm, the one bird still motionless upon it, still was outspread near her face.

From high above them there dropped slowly into the black depths of the silence one note of a sweetness ineffable. It lingered upon the breathless air, dying slowly until it fused with the silence.

And then the girl screamed. Suddenly and dreadfully. The small green poll had darted forward. The yellow beak had struck and sunk. A scarlet runnel coursed down the tender cheek.

Above the lingering echo of that scream there came another of those single notes from on high.

The silence died then. There was a whirring which filled the air. That circle was no more.

There were two feathered mounds which screamed and ran and leapt, and at last lay and were silent.

BACK THERE IN THE GRASS

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

It was spring in the South Seas when, for the first time, I went ashore at Batengo, which is the Polynesian village, and the only one on the big grass island of the same name. There is a cable station just up the beach from the village, and a good-natured young chap named Graves had charge of it. He was an upstanding, clean-cut fellow, as the fact that he had been among the islands for three years without falling into any of their ways proved. The interior of the corrugated iron house in which he lived, for instance, was bachelor from A to Z. And if that wasn't a sufficient alibi, my pointer dog, Don, who dislikes anything Polynesian or Melanesian, took to him at once. And they established a romping friendship. He gave us lunch on the porch, and because he had not seen a white man for two months or a liver-and-white dog for years, he told us the entire story of his young wife, with reminiscences of early childhood and plans for the future thrown in.

The future was very simple. There was a girl coming out to him from the States by the next steamer but one; the captain of that steamer would join them together in holy wedlock, and after that the Lord would provide.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you think I'm asking her to share a very lonely sort of life, but if you could imagine all the—the affection and gentleness, and thoughtfulness that I've got stored up to pour out at

her feet for the rest of our lives, you wouldn't be a bit afraid for her happiness. If a man spends his whole time and imagination thinking up ways to make a girl happy and occupied, he can think up a whole lot.... I'd like ever so much to show her to you."

He led the way to his bedroom, and stood in silent rapture before a large photograph that leaned against the wall over his dressing-table.

She didn't look to me like the sort of girl a cable agent would happen to marry. She looked like a swell girl—the real thing—beautiful and simple and unaffected.

"Yes," he said, "isn't she?"

I hadn't spoken a word. Now I said:

"It's easy to see why you aren't lonely with that wonderful girl to look at. Is she really coming out by the next steamer but one? It's hard to believe because she's so much too good to be true."

"Yes," he said, "isn't she?"

"The usual cable agent," I said, "keeps from going mad by having a dog or a cat or some pet or other to talk to. But I can understand a photograph like this being all-sufficient to any man—even if he had never seen the original. Allow me to shake hands with you."

Then I got him away from the girl, because my time was short and I wanted to find out about some things that were important to *me*.

"You haven't asked me my business in these parts," I said, "but I'll tell you. I'm collecting grasses for the Bronx Botanical Garden."

"Then, by jove!" said Graves, "you have certainly come to the right place. There used to be a tree on this island, but the last man who saw it died in 1789 —Grass! The place is all grass: there are fifty kinds right around my house here."

"I've noticed only eighteen," I said, "but that isn't the point. The point is: when do the Batengo Island grasses begin to go to seed?" And I smiled.

"You think you've got me stumped, don't you?" he said. "That a mere cable agent wouldn't notice such things. Well, that grass there," and he pointed—"beach nut we call it—is the first to ripen seed, and, as far as I know, it does it just six weeks from now."

"Are you just making things up to impress me?"

"No, sir, I am not. I know to the minute. You see, I'm a victim of hay-fever."

"In that case," I said, "expect me back about the time your nose begins to run."

"Really?" And his whole face lighted up. "I'm delighted. Only six weeks. Why, then, if you'll stay round for only five or six weeks *more* you'll be here for the wedding."

"I'll make it if I possibly can," I said. "I want to see if that girl's really true."

"Anything I can do to help you while you're gone? I've got loads of spare time——"

"If you knew anything about grasses——"

"I don't. But I'll blow back into the interior and look around. I've been meaning to right along, just for fun. But I can never get any of *them* to go with me."

"The natives?"

"Yes. Poor lot. They're committing race suicide as fast as they can. There are more wooden gods than people in Batengo village, and the superstition's so thick you could cut it with a knife. All the manly virtues have perished. . . . Aloiu!"

The boy who did Graves's chores for him came lazily out of the house.

"Aloiu," said Graves, "just run back into the island to the top of that hill—see?—that one over there—and fetch a handful of grass for this gentleman. He'll give you five dollars for it."

Aloiu grinned sheepishly and shook his head.

"Fifty dollars?"

Aloiu shook his head with even more firmness, and

I whistled. Fifty dollars would have made him the Rockefeller-Carnegie-Morgan of those parts.

"All right, coward," said Graves cheerfully. "Run away and play with the other children.... Now, isn't that curious? Neither love, money, nor insult will drag one of them a mile from the beach. They say that if you go 'back there in the grass' something awful will happen to you."

"As what?" I asked.

"The last man to try it," said Graves, "in the memory of the oldest inhabitant was a woman. When they found her she was all black and swollen—at least that's what they say. Something had bitten her just above the ankle."

"Nonsense," I said, "there are no snakes in the whole Batengo group."

"They didn't say it was a snake," said Graves. "They said the marks of the bite were like those that would be made by the teeth of a very little—child."

Graves rose and stretched himself.

"What's the use of arguing with people that tell yarns like that! All the same, if you're bent on making expeditions back into the grass, you'll make 'em alone, unless the cable breaks and I'm free to make 'em with you."

Five weeks later I was once more coasting along the wavering hills of Batengo Island, with a sharp eye out for a first sight of the cable station and Graves. Five weeks with no company but Kanakas and a pointer dog makes one white man pretty keen for the society of another. Furthermore, at our one meeting I had taken a great shine to Graves and to the charming young lady who was to brave a life in the South Seas for his sake. If I was eager to get ashore, Don was more so. I had a shot-gun across my knees with which to salute the cable station, and the sight of that weapon, coupled with toothsome memories of a recent big hunt

down on Forked Peak, had set the dog quivering from stem to stern, to crouching, wagging his tail till it disappeared, and beating sudden tattoos upon the deck with his forepaws. And when at last we rounded on the cable station and I let off both barrels, he began to bark and race about the schooner like a thing possessed.

The salute brought Graves out of his house. He stood on the porch waving a handkerchief, and I called to him through a megaphone, hoped that he was well, said how glad I was to see him, and asked him to meet me in Batengo village.

Even at that distance I detected something irresolute in his manner; and a few minutes later when he had fetched a hat out of the house, locked the door, and headed toward the village, he looked more like a soldier marching to battle than a man walking half a mile to greet a friend.

"That's funny," I said to Don. "He's coming to meet us in spite of the fact that he'd much rather not. Oh, well!"

I left the schooner while she was still under way, and reached the beach before Graves came up. There were too many strange brown men to suit Don, and he kept very close to my legs. When Graves arrived the natives fell away from him as if he had been a leper. He wore a sort of sickly smile, and when he spoke the dog stiffened his legs and growled menacingly.

"Don!" I exclaimed sternly, and the dog cowered, but the spines along his back bristled and he kept a menacing eye upon Graves. The man's face looked drawn and rather angry. The frank boyishness was clean out of it. He had been strained by something or other to the breaking-point—so much was evident.

"My dear fellow," I said, "what the devil is the matter?"

Graves looked to right and left, and the islanders shrank still farther away from him.

"You can see for yourself," he said curtly. "I'm taboo." And then, with a little break in his voice: "Even your dog feels it. Don, good boy! Come here, sir!"

Don growled quietly.

"You see!"

"Don," I said sharply, "this man is my friend and yours. Pat him, Graves."

Graves reached forward and patted Don's head and talked to him soothingly.

But although Don did not growl or menace, he shivered under the caress and was unhappy.

"So you're taboo!" I said cheerfully. "That's the result of anything, from stringing pink and yellow shells on the same string to murdering your uncle's grandmother-in-law. Which have *you* done?"

"I've been back there in the grass," he said, "and because—because nothing happened to me I'm taboo."

"Is that all?"

"As far as they know—yes."

"Well!" said I, "my business will take me back there for days at a time, so I'll be taboo, too. Then there'll be two of us. Did you find any curious grasses for me?"

"I don't know about grasses," he said, "but I found something very curious that I want to show you and ask your advice about. Are you going to share my house?"

"I think I'll keep headquarters on the schooner," I said, "but if you'll put me up now and then for a meal or for the night——"

"I'll put you up for lunch right now," he said, "if you'll come. I'm my own cook and bottle-washer since the taboo, but I must say the change isn't for the worse so far as food goes."

He was looking and speaking more cheerfully.

"May I bring Don?"

He hesitated.

"Why—yes—of course."

"If you'd rather not?"

"No, bring him. I want to make friends again if I can."

So we started for Graves's house, Don very close at my heels.

"Graves," I said, "surely a taboo by a lot of fool islanders hasn't upset you. There's something on your mind. Bad news?"

"Oh, no," he said. "She's coming. It's other things. I'll tell you by and by—everything. Don't mind me. I'm all right. Listen to the wind in the grass. That sound day and night is enough to put a man off his feed."

"You say you found something very curious back there in the grass?"

"I found, among other things, a stone monolith. It's fallen down, but it's almost as big as the Empire State Building in New York. It's ancient as days—all carved—it's a sort of woman, I think. But we'll go back one day and have a look at it. Then, of course, I saw all the different kinds of grasses in the world—they'd interest you more—but I'm such a punk botanist that I gave up trying to tell 'em apart. I like the flowers best—there's millions of 'em—down among the grass.... I tell you, old man, this island is the greatest curiosity-shop in the whole world."

He unlocked the door of his house and stood aside for me to go in first.

"Shut up, Don!"

The dog growled savagely, but I banged him with my open hand across the snout, and he quieted down and followed into the house, all tense and watchful.

On the shelf where Graves kept his books, with its legs hanging over, was what I took to be an idol of some light brownish wood—say sandalwood, with a touch of pink. But it was the most life-like and astounding piece of carving I ever saw in the islands or out of them. It was about a foot high, and represented a Polynesian woman in the prime of life, say, fifteen or

sixteen years old, only the features were finer and cleaner carved.

It was a nude, in an attitude of easy repose—the legs hanging, the toes dangling—the hands resting, palms downward, on the blotter, the trunk relaxed. The eyes, which were a kind of steely blue, seemed to have been made, depth upon depth, of some wonderful translucent enamel, and to make his work still more realistic the artist had planted the statuette's eyebrows, eyelashes, and scalp with real hair, very soft and silky, brown on the head and black for the lashes and eyebrows. The thing was so lifelike that it frightened me. And when Don began to growl like distant thunder I didn't blame him. But I leaned over and caught him by the collar, because it was evident that he wanted to get at that statuette and destroy it.

When I looked up the statuette's eyes had moved. They were turned downward upon the dog, with cool curiosity and indifference. A kind of shudder went through me. And then, lo and behold, the statuette's tiny brown breasts rose and fell slowly, and a long breath came out of its notsrils.

I backed violently into Graves, dragging Don with me and half-choking him. "My God Almighty!" I said. "It's alive!"

"Isn't she!" said he. "I caught her back there in the grass—the little minx. And when I heard your signal I put her up there to keep her out of mischief. It's too high for her to jump—and she's very sore about it."

"You found her in the grass," I said. "For God's sake!—are there more of them?"

"Thick as quail," said he, "but it's hard to get a sight of 'em. But *you* were overcome by curiosity, weren't you, old girl? You came out to have a look at the big white giant and he caught you with his thumb and forefinger by the scruff of the neck—so you couldn't bite him—and here you are."

The womankin's lips parted and I saw a flash of

white teeth. She looked up into Graves's face and the steely eyes softened. It was evident that she was very fond of him.

"Rum sort of a pet," said Graves. "What?"

"Rum?" I said. "It's horrible—it isn't decent—it—it ought to be taboo. Don's got it sized up right. He—he wants to kill it."

"Please don't keep calling her It," said Graves. "She wouldn't like it—if she understood." Then he whispered words that were Greek to me, and the womankin laughed aloud. Her laugh was sweet and tinkly, like the upper notes of a spinet.

"You can speak her language?"

"A few words—Tog ma Lao?"

"Na!"

"Aba Ton sug ato."

"Nan Tane dom ud lon anea!"

It sounded like that—only all whispered and very soft. It sounded a little like the wind in the grass.

"She says she isn't afraid of the dog," said Graves, "and that he'd better let her alone."

"I almost hope he won't," said I. "Come outside. I don't like her. I think I've got a touch of the horrors."

Graves remained behind a moment to lift the womankin down from the shelf, and when he rejoined me I had made up my mind to talk to him like a father.

"Graves," I said, "although that creature in there is only a foot high, it isn't a pig or a monkey, it's a woman and you're guilty of what's considered a pretty ugly crime at home—abduction. You've stolen this woman away from kith and kin, and the least you can do is to carry her back where you found her and turn her loose. Let me ask you one thing—what would Miss Chester think?"

"Oh, that doesn't worry me," said Graves. "But I *am* worried—worried sick. It's early—shall we talk now, or wait till after lunch?"

"Now," I said.

"Well," said he, "you left me pretty well enthused on the subject of botany—so I went back there twice to look up grasses for you. The second time I went I got to a deep sort of valley where the grass is waisthigh —that, by the way, is where the big monolith is—and that place was alive with things that were frightened and ran. I could see the directions they took by the way the grass tops acted. There were lots of loose stones about and I began to throw 'em to see if I could knock one of the things over. Suddenly all at once I saw a pair of bright little eyes peering out of a bunch of grass—I let fly at them, and something gave a sort of moan and thrashed about in the grass—and then lay still. I went to look, and found that I'd stunned—*her.*

She came to and tried to bite me, but I had her by the scruff of the neck and she couldn't. Further, she was sick with being hit in the chest with the stone, and first thing I knew she keeled over in the palm of my hand in a dead faint. I couldn't find any water or anything—and I didn't want her to die—so I brought her home. She was sick for a week—and I took care of her —as I would a sick pup—and she began to get well and want to play and romp and poke into everything. She'd get the lower drawer of my desk open and hide in it—or crawl into a rubber boot and play house. And she got to be right good company—same as any pet does—a cat or a dog—or a monkey—and naturally, she being so small, I couldn't think of her as anything but a sort of little beast that I'd caught and tamed.... You see how it all happened, don't you? Might have happened to anybody."

"Why, yes," I said. "If she didn't give a man the horrors right at the start—I can understand making a sort of pet of her—but, man, there's only one thing to do. Be persuaded. Take her back where you found her, and turn her loose."

"Well, and good," said Graves. "I tried that, and next morning I found her at my door, sobbing—hor-

rible, dry sobs—no tears.... You've said one thing that's full of sense: she isn't a pig—or a monkey—she's a woman."

"You don't mean to say," said I, "that that mite of a thing is in love with you?"

"I don't know what else you'd call it."

"Graves," I said, "Miss Chester arrives by the next steamer. In the meanwhile something has got to be done."

"What?" said he hopelessly.

"I don't know," I said. "Let me think."

The dog Don laid his head heavily on my knee, as if he wished to offer a solution of the difficulty.

A week before Miss Chester's steamer was due the situation had not changed. Graves's pet was as much a fixture of Graves's house as the front door. And a man was never confronted with a more serious problem. Twice he carried her back into the grass and deserted her, and each time she returned and was found sobbing—horrible, dry sobs—on the porch. And a number of times we took her, or Graves did, in the pocket of his jacket, upon systematic searches for her people. Doubtless she could have helped us to find them, but she wouldn't. She was very sullen on these expeditions and frightened. When Graves tried to put her down she would cling to him, and it took real force to pry her loose.

In the open she could run like a rat; and in open country it would have been impossible to desert her; she would have followed at Graves's heels as fast as he could move them. But forcing through the thick grass tired her after a few hundred yards, and she would gradually drop farther and farther behind—sobbing. There was a pathetic side to it.

She hated me and made no bones about it, but there was an armed truce between us. She feared my influence over Graves, and I feared her—well, just as some

people fear rats or snakes. Things utterly out of the normal always do worry me, and Bo, which was the name Graves had learned for her, was, so far as I know, unique in human experience. In appearance she was like an unusually good-looking island girl observed through the wrong end of an opera-glass, but in habit and action she was different. She would catch flies and little grasshoppers and eat them all alive and kicking, and if you teased her more than she liked her ears would flatten the way a cat's do, and she would hiss like a snapping-turtle, and show her teeth.

But one got accustomed to her. Even poor Don learned that it was not his duty to punish her with one bound and a snap. But he would never let her touch him, believing that in her case discretion was the better part of valor. If she approached him he withdrew, always with dignity, but equally with determination. He knew in his heart that something about her was horribly wrong and against nature. I knew it, too, and I think Graves began to suspect it.

Well, a day came when Graves, who had been up since dawn, saw the smoke of a steamer along the horizon, and began to fire off his revolver so that I, too, might wake and participate in his joy. I made tea and went ashore.

"It's *her* steamer," he said.

"Yes," said I, "and we've got to decide something."

"About Bo?"

"Suppose I take her off your hands—for a week or so—till you and Miss Chester have settled down and put your house in order. Then Miss Chester—Mrs. Graves, that is—can decide what is to be done. I admit that I'd rather wash my hands of the business—but I'm the only white man available, and I propose to stand by my race. Don't say a word to Bo—just bring her out to the schooner and leave her."

In the upshot Graves accepted my offer, and while Bo, fairly bristling with excitement and curiosity, was

exploring the farther corners of my cabin, we slipped out and locked the door on her. The minute she knew what had happened she began to tear around and raise Cain. It sounded a little like a cat having a fit.

Graves was white and unhappy. "Let's get away quick," he said; "I feel like a skunk."

But Miss Chester was everything that her photograph said about her, and more too, so that the trick he had played Bo was very soon a negligible weight on Graves's mind.

If the wedding was quick and business-like, it was also jolly and romantic. The oldest passenger gave the bride away. All the crew came aft and sang "The Voice That Breathed O'er That Earliest Wedding-Day"—to the tune called "Blairgowrie." They had worked it up in secret for a surprise. And the bride's dove-brown eyes got a little teary. I was best man. The captain read the service, and choked occasionally. As for Graves—I had never thought him handsome—well, with his brown face and white linen suit, he made me think, and I'm sure I don't know why, of St. Michael —that time he overcame Lucifer. The captain blew us to breakfast, with champagne and a cake, and then the happy pair went ashore in a boat full of the bride's trousseau, and the crew manned the bulwarks and gave three cheers, and then something like twenty-seven more, and last thing of all the brass cannon was fired, and the little square flags that spell G-o-o-d L-u-c-k were run up on the signal halyards.

As for me, I went back to my schooner feeling blue and lonely. I knew little about women and less about love. It didn't seem quite fair. For once I hated my profession—seed-gatherer to a body of scientific gentlemen whom I had never seen. Well, there's nothing so good for the blues as putting things in order.

I cleaned my rifle and revolver. I wrote up my notebook. I developed some plates; I studied a brand-new book on South Sea grasses that had been sent out to

me, and I found some mistakes. I went ashore with Don, and had a long walk on the beach—in the opposite direction from Graves's house, of course—and I sent Don into the water after sticks, and he seemed to enjoy it, and so I stripped and went in with him. Then I dried in the sun, and had a match with my hands to see which could find the tinest shell. Toward dusk we returned to the schooner and had dinner, and after that I went into my cabin to see how Bo was getting on.

She flew at me like a cat, and if I hadn't jerked my foot back she would have bitten me. As it was, her teeth tore a piece out of my trousers. I'm afraid I kicked her. Anyway, I heard her land with a crash in a far corner. I struck a match and lighted candles—they are cooler than lamps—very warily, one eye on Bo. She had retreated under a chair and looked out—very sullen and angry. I sat down and began to talk to her.

"It's no use," I said, "your trying to bite and scratch, because you're only as big as a minute. So come out here and make friends. I don't like you and you don't like me; but we're going to be thrown together for quite some time, so we'd better make the best of it. You come out here and behave pretty and I'll give you a bit of gingersnap."

The last word was intelligible to her, and she came a little way out from under the chair. I had a bit of gingersnap in my pocket, left over from treating Don, and I tossed it on the floor midway between us. She darted forward and ate it with quick bites.

Well, then, she looked up, and her eyes asked—just as plain as day: "Why are things thus? Why have I come to live with you? I don't like you. I want to go back to Graves."

I couldn't explain very well, and just shook my head and then went on trying to make friends—it was no use. She hated me, and after a time I got bored. I threw

a pillow on the floor for her to sleep on, and left her. Well, the minute the door was shut and locked she began to sob. You could hear her for quite a distance, and I couldn't stand it. So I went back—and talked to her as nicely and soothingly as I could. But she wouldn't even look at me—just lay face down—heaving and sobbing.

Now I don't like little creatures that snap—so when I picked her up it was by the scruff of the neck. She had to face me then, and I saw that in spite of all the sobbing her eyes were perfectly dry. That struck me as curious. I examined them through a pocket magnifying-glass, and discovered that they had no tear-ducts. Of course she couldn't cry. Perhaps I squeezed the back of her neck harder than I meant to—anyway, her lips began to draw back and her teeth to show.

It was exactly at that second that I recalled the legend Graves had told me about the island woman being found dead, and all black and swollen, back there in the grass, with teeth marks on her that looked as if they had been made by a very little child.

I forced Bo's mouth wide open and looked in. Then I reached for a candle and held it steadily between her face and mine. She struggled furiously so that I had to put down the candle and catch her legs together in my free hand. But I had seen enough. I felt wet and cold all over. For if the swollen glands at the base of the deeply grooved canines meant anything, that which I held between my hands was not a woman—but a snake.

I put her in a wooden box that had contained soap and nailed slats over the top. And, personally, I was quite willing to put scrap-iron in the box with her and fling it overboard. But I did not feel quite justified without consulting Graves.

As an extra precaution in case of accidents, I overhauled my medicine-chest and made up a little package for the breast pocket—a lancet, a rubber bandage,

and a pill-box full of permanganate crystals. I had still much collecting to do, "back there in the grass," and I did not propose to step on any of Bo's cousins or her sisters or her aunts, without having some of the elementary first-aids to the snake-bitten handy.

It was a lovely starry night, and I determined to sleep on deck. Before turning in I went to have a look at Bo. Having nailed her in a box securely, as I thought, I must have left my cabin door ajar. Anyhow she was gone. She must have braced her back against one side of the box, her feet against the other and burst it open. I had most certainly underestimated her strength and resources.

The crew, warned of peril, searched the whole schooner over, slowly and methodically, lighted by lanterns. We could not find her. Well, swimming comes natural to snakes.

I went ashore as quickly as I could get a boat manned and rowed. I took Don on a leash, a shot-gun loaded, and both pockets of my jacket full of cartridges. We ran swiftly along the beach, Don and I, and then turned into the grass to make a short cut for Graves's house. All of a sudden Don began to tremble with eagerness and nuzzle and sniff among the roots of the grass. He was "making game."

"Good Don," I said, "good boy—hunt her up! Find her!"

The moon had risen. I saw two figures standing in the porch of Graves's house. I was about to call to them and warn Graves that Bo was loose and dangerous—when a scream—shrill and frightful—rang in my ears. I saw Graves turn to his bride and catch her in his arms.

When I came up she had collected her senses and was behaving splendidly. While Graves fetched a lantern and water she sat down on the porch, her back against the house, and undid her garter, so that I could pull the stocking off her bitten foot. Her instep,

into which Bo's venomous teeth had sunk, was already swollen and discolored. I slashed the teethmarks this way and that with my lancelet. And Mrs. Graves kept saying: "All right—all right—don't mind me—do what's best."

Don's leash had wedged between two of the porch planks, and all the time we were working over Mrs. Graves he whined and struggled to get loose.

"Graves," I said, when we had done what we could, "if your wife begins to seem faint, give her brandy—just a very little at a time—and—I think we were in time—and for God's sake don't ever let her know *why* she was bitten—or by *what*—"

Then I turned and freed Don and took off his leash.

The moonlight was now very white and brilliant. In the sandy path that led from Graves's porch I saw the print of feet—shaped just like human feet—less than an inch long. I made Don smell them, and said:

"Hunt close, boy! Hunt close!"

Thus hunting, we moved slowly through the grass toward the interior of the island. The scent grew hotter—suddenly Don began to move more stiffly—as if he had the rheumatism—his eyes straight ahead saw something that I could not see—the tip of his tail vibrated furiously—he sank lower and lower—his legs worked more and more stiffly—his head was thrust forward to the full stretch of his neck toward a thick clump of grass. In the act of taking a wary step he came to a dead halt—his right forepaw just clear of the ground. The tip of his tail stopped vibrating. The tail of itself stood straight out behind him and became rigid like a bar of iron. I never saw a stancher point.

"Steady, boy!" I pushed forward the safety of my shot-gun and stood at attention . . .

"How is your wife?"

"Seems to be pulling through. I heard you fire both barrels. What luck?"

D-DAY

ROBERT TROUT

COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM
CBS WORLD NEWS—Robert Trout
April 12, 196—
2:07 a.m.

TROUT: Columbia's News Headquarters in New York, Bob Trout speaking. It's a little more than two hours after midnight here in New York, and we still don't have much real news on the Pittsburgh explosion but—standing here beside the teletypewriters in the news room with the portable microphone—I'll summarize briefly for you what we do have. Just thirty-six—no, forty-six, just forty-six minutes ago, the United Press and the Associated Press almost simultaneously flashed the news that the great steel and iron city had been rocked by a tremendous explosion. Strangely—and of course we hope *not* ominously—there have been almost no details, since the flash, from Pittsburgh. What we have had is a flood of bulletins and dispatches from places as far as a hundred and eighty miles from Pittsburgh telling of brilliant lights in the sky and the huge roar of the explosion.

In a few moments we'll go over these dispatches that have come in during the past quarter of an hour. But first, I can see that—I can see through the glass wall on the other side of this news room that Paul White, Columbia's Director of Public Affairs, is at last in contact with our correspondent in Washington, so we take

you now to Washington, Bill Henry reporting.

TROUT: Back in New York again. As you could hear, we are still unable to bring you a report from Washington, although—despite the lateness of the hour—that city is certainly not asleep. In fact, it was no more than half an hour ago that the International News Service reported from Washington that the lights were going on in the White House and the State Department, but there has been no dispatch of any kind from Washington since that short one from INS. I've been walking about the news room, with this portable microphone, while talking to you, and now, back at the International News Service teletypewriter—looking back over some of the tape that has come in since we took the air—but nothing at all from Washington. However, there should—just a second, here comes a bulletin. (Bells) . . .

Over at the United Press machine now, those five bells you heard mean a bulletin just being tapped out on the UP machine. I'll read it as it comes. DETROIT, APRIL 12, U.P. Detroit was shaken by a heavy blast at 12:58 this morning. Extent of the damage is not yet known but the indications are it will be heavy and it is feared that a number of persons lost their lives. Although the exact location and nature of the accident have not been revealed, city officials state that an investigation is under way to ascertain whether the blast might have any connection with the explosion reported earlier from Pittsburgh. MORE. There is more coming, as the—more coming from Detroit, but not at the moment, for, after printing that one word "more" the United Press machine has gone back to transmitting the continuation of a story on ladies' fashions—the usual kind of thing that can be expected normally at this hour of the night. Hats, too, will be more extreme with the accent on devastating allure this summer—that's enough of that at this moment of suspense and tension.

This is a good time to repeat that we are not sure yet just what has happened, and while, unfortunately, it does seem that a disaster has occurred, still, no good purpose would be served by becoming excited prematurely. At any rate, there is nothing to do at the moment except wait for the news.

Our Columbia news staff is being assembled as rapidly as possible. Major George Fielding Eliot, who used to be known as Columbia's *military analyst* back in the days when men still fought wars, should be with us here in the news room very shortly. Perhaps he has been delayed by the rather unseasonable thunderstorm that seems to be rolling in from the direction of New Jersey. You have probably been able to hear, above the clatter of the news machines, the loud booms of thunder that have been resounding across the Hudson River into this news room and this microphone.

As we are still unable—I beg your pardon. Yes? I have just been informed that, according to the Associated Press, an emergency call has gone out to all fire-fighting equipment and ambulances in towns as far north as Havre de Grace, Maryland. I'd better repeat that—towns as far north as Havre de Grace, Maryland. That's the wording of the message just handed me. I can't be sure just what it means, but I am told now that this information—incomplete, as you can see—was telephoned to us by the AP offices in New York. Something wrong with the AP wires where? —south of Trenton? Yes, the Associated Press sent over that brief report by telephone as there is some trouble with the regular wire circuit between New York and Philadelphia. That one sentence doesn't tell us much but there will be more to follow as soon as the AP gets it; I don't know exactly *how* they are getting it. We shall see, later. Until a few moments ago, the teletype here, which is connected with the AP building right in New York City, was ticking away—it seems to have stopped now. In fact, there is a general lull. The other

machines have fallen silent also, temporarily; not often that it is so quiet in this office.

Perhaps, at this point, I should read you the accumulation of earlier dispatches from places *outside* Pittsburgh. Mostly, they are extremely vague, very few hard facts, and in none of them is there any hint of—any hint of hostilities; I started to say "war," but even the word "hostilities" sounds completely out of place—fantastic, utterly unbelievable in these modern times.

Still, without wishing to cause any unnecessary alarm, still there is something odd about this unusual quiet in this usually noisy room. Accidents—train wrecks, floods, and explosions—don't usually cut off the flow of news; on the contrary. Every news machine in the entire room remains silent, which I report as a fact, not to cause any—well, panic. That is a harsh word, "panic," but perhaps not too strong judging from the fashion in which our telephone switchboard, here at Columbia, has been tied up since the first flash at—at exactly twenty-one minutes past one o'clock New York time. Apparently, many of those who heard the first news on Columbia were not listening carefully, for there has been no official word—no unofficial suggestion, even—that any kind of war might have begun.

The Second World War ended a good many years ago, and since then mankind has progressed in many fields, until . . . (several sentences missing—broadcast interrupted) . . . and the jagged edges of girders . . . windows smashed and the smoke pouring in now. As soon as the lights stop flickering . . .

THE MAN WHO LIKED DICKENS

EVELYN WAUGH

Although Mr. McMaster had lived in Amazonas for nearly sixty years, no one except a few families of Shiriana Indians was aware of his existence. His house stood in a small savannah, one of those little patches of sand and grass that crop up occasionally in that neighborhood, three miles or so across, bounded on all sides by forest.

The stream which watered it was not marked on any map; it ran through rapids, always dangerous and at most seasons of the year impassable, to join the upper waters of the River Uraricuera, whose course, though boldly delineated in every school atlas, is still largely conjectural. None of the inhabitants of the district, except Mr. McMaster, had ever heard of the republic of Columbia, Venezuela, Brazil or Bolivia, each of whom had at one time or another claimed its possession.

Mr. McMaster's house was larger than those of his neighbours, but similar in character—a palm-thatch roof, breast-high walls of mud and wattle, and a mud floor. He owned a dozen or so head of puny cattle which grazed in the savannah, a plantation of cassava, some banana and mango trees, a dog, and, unique in the neighbourhood, a single-barrelled, breech-loading shotgun. The few commodities which he employed from the outside world came to him through a long succession of traders, passed from hand to hand, bartered for in a dozen languages at the extreme end of

one of the longest threads in the web of commerce that spreads from Manáos into the remote fastness of the forest.

One day, while Mr. McMaster was engaged in filling some cartridges, a Shiriana came to him with the news that a white man was approaching through the forest, alone and very sick. He closed the cartridge and loaded his gun with it, put those that were finished into his pocket and set out in the direction indicated.

The man was already clear of the bush when Mr. McMaster reached him, sitting on the ground, clearly in a bad way. He was without hat or boots, and his clothes were so torn that it was only by the dampness of his body that they adhered to it; his feet were cut and grossly swollen, every exposed surface of skin was scarred by insect and bat bites; his eyes were wild with fever. He was talking to himself in delirium, but stopped when Mr. McMaster approached and addressed him in English.

"I'm tired," the man said; then: "Can't go on any farther. My name is Henty and I'm tired. Anderson died. That was a long time ago. I expect you think I'm very odd."

"I think you are ill, my friend."

"Just tired. It must be several months since I had anything to eat."

Mr. McMaster hoisted him to his feet and, supporting him by the arm, led him across the hummocks of grass towards the farm.

"It is a very short way. When we get there I will give you something to make you better."

"Jolly kind of you." Presently he said: "I say, you speak English. I'm English, too. My name is Henty."

"Well, Mr. Henty, you aren't to bother about anything more. You're ill and you've had a rough journey. I'll take care of you."

They went very slowly, but at length reached the house.

"Lie there in the hammock. I will fetch something for you."

Mr. McMaster went into the back room of the house and dragged a tin canister from under a heap of skins. It was full of a mixture of dried leaf and bark. He took a handful and went outside to the fire. When he returned he put one hand behind Henty's head and held up the concoction of herbs in a calabash for him to drink. He sipped, shuddering slightly at the bitterness. At last he finished it. Mr. McMaster threw out the dregs on the floor. Henty lay back in the hammock sobbing quietly. Soon he fell into a deep sleep.

"Ill-fated" was the epithet applied by the Press to the Anderson expedition to the Parima and upper Uraricuera region of Brazil. Every stage of the enterprise from the preliminary arrangements in London to its tragic dissolution in Amazonas was attacked by misfortune. It was due to one of the early setbacks that Paul Henty became connected with it.

He was not by nature an explorer; an even-tempered, good-looking young man of fastidious tastes and enviable possessions, unintellectual, but appreciative of fine architecture and the ballet, well-traveled in the more accessible parts of the world, a collector though not a connoisseur, popular among hostesses, revered by his aunts. He was married to a lady of exceptional charm and beauty, and it was she who upset the good order of his life by confessing her affection for another man for the second time in the eight years of their marriage. The first occasion had been a short-lived infatuation with a tennis professional, the second was a captain in the Coldstream Guards, and more serious.

Henty's first thought under the shock of this revelation was to go out and dine alone. He was a member of four clubs, but at three of them he was liable to meet his wife's lover. Accordingly he chose one which he rarely frequented, a semi-intellectual company com-

posed of publishers, barristers, and men of scholarship awaiting election to the Athenæum.

Here, after dinner, he fell into conversation with Professor Anderson and first heard of the proposed expedition to Brazil. The particular misfortune that was retarding arrangements at the moment was defalcation of the secretary with two-thirds of the expedition's capital. The principals were ready—Professor Anderson, Dr. Simmons the anthropologist, Mr. Necher the biologist, Mr. Brough the surveyor, wireless operator and mechanic—the scientific and sporting apparatus was packed up in crates ready to be embarked, the necessary facilities had been stamped and signed by the proper authorities but unless twelve hundred pounds was forthcoming the whole thing would have to be abandoned.

Henty, as has been suggested, was a man of comfortable means; the expedition would last from nine months to a year; he could shut his country house—his wife, he reflected, would want to remain in London near her young man—and cover more than the sum required. There was a glamour about the whole journey which might, he felt, move even his wife's sympathies. There and then, over the club fire he decided to accompany Professor Anderson.

When he went home that evening he announced to his wife: "I have decided what I shall do."

"Yes, darling?"

"You are certain that you no longer love me?"

"*Darling,* you *know,* I *adore* you."

"But you are certain you love this guardsman, Tony whatever-his-name-is, more?"

"Oh, yes, *ever* so much more. Quite a different thing altogether."

"Very well, then. I do not propose to do anything about a divorce for a year. You shall have time to think it over. I am leaving next week for the Uraricuera."

"Golly, where's that?"

"I am not perfectly sure. Somewhere in Brazil, I think. It is unexplored. I shall be away a year."

"But darling, how ordinary! Like people in books—big game, I mean, and all that."

"You have obviously already discovered that I am a very ordinary person."

"Now, Paul, don't be disagreeable—oh, there's the telephone. It's probably Tony. If it is, d'you mind terribly if I talk to him alone for a bit?"

But in the ten days of preparation that followed she showed greater tenderness, putting off her soldier twice in order to accompany Henty to the shops where he was choosing his equipment and insisting on his purchasing a worsted cummerbund. On his last evening she gave a supper-party for him at the Embassy to which she allowed him to ask any of his friends he liked; he could think of no one except Professor Anderson, who looked oddly dressed, danced tirelessly and was something of a failure with everyone. Next day Mrs. Henty came with her husband to the boat train and presented him with a pale blue, extravagantly soft blanket, in a suède case of the same colour furnished with a zip fastener and monogram. She kissed him good-bye and said, "Take care of yourself in wherever it is."

Had she gone as far as Southampton she might have witnessed two dramatic passages. Mr. Brough got no farther than the gangway before he was arrested for a debt—a matter of £32; the publicity given to the dangers of the expedition was responsible for the action. Henty settled the account.

The second difficulty was not to be overcome so easily. Mr. Necher's mother was on the ship before them; she carried a missionary journal in which she had just read an account of the Brazilian forests. Nothing would induce her to permit her son's departure; she would remain on board until he came ashore with her. If necessary, she would sail with him, but go into those forests alone he should not. All argument was

unavailing with the resolute old lady who eventually, five minutes before the time of embarkation, bore her son off in triumph, leaving the company without a biologist.

Nor was Mr. Brough's adherence long maintained. The ship in which they were travelling was a cruising liner taking passengers on a round voyage. Mr. Brough had not been on board a week and had scarcely accustomed himself to the motion of the ship before he was engaged to be married; he was still engaged, although to a different lady, when they reached Manáos and refused all inducements to proceed farther, borrowing his return fare from Henty and arriving back in Southampton engaged to the lady of his first choice, whom he immediately married.

In Brazil the officials to whom their credentials were addressed were all out of power. While Henty and Professor Anderson negotiated with the new administrators, Dr. Simmons proceeded up river to Boa Vista where he established a base camp with the greater part of the stores. These were instantly commandeered by the revolutionary garrison, and he himself imprisoned for some days and subjected to various humiliations which so enraged him that, when released, he made promptly for the coast, stopping at Manáos only long enough to inform his colleagues that he insisted on leaving his case personally before the central authorities at Rio.

Thus while they were still a month's journey from the start of their labours, Henty and Professor Anderson found themselves alone and deprived of the greater part of their supplies. The ignominy of immediate return was not to be borne. For a short time they considered the advisability of going into hiding for six months in Madeira or Teneriffe, but even there detection seemed probable; there had been too many photographs in the illustrated papers before they left London. Accordingly, in low spirits, the two explorers

at last set out alone for the Uraricuera with little hope of accomplishing anything of any value to anyone.

For seven weeks they paddled through green, humid tunnels of forest. They took a few snapshots of naked, misanthropic Indians, bottled some snakes and later lost them when their canoe capsized in the rapids; they overtaxed their digestions, imbibing nauseous intoxicants at native galas; they were robbed of the last of their sugar by a Guianese prospector. Finally, Professor Anderson fell ill with malignant malaria, chattered feebly for some days in his hammock, lapsed into coma and died, leaving Henty alone with a dozen Maku oarsmen, none of whom spoke a word of any language known to him. They reversed their course and drifted down stream with a minimum of provisions and no mutual confidence.

One day, a week or so after Professor Anderson's death, Henty awoke to find that his boys and his canoe had disappeared during the night, leaving him with only his hammock and pyjamas some two or three hundred miles from the nearest Brazilian habitation. Nature forbade him to remain where he was although there seemed little purpose in moving. He set himself to follow the course of the stream, at first in the hope of meeting a canoe. But presently the whole forest became peopled for him with frantic apparitions, for no conscious reason at all. He plodded on, now wading in the water, now scrambling through the bush.

Vaguely at the back of his mind he had always believed that the jungle was a place full of food, that there was danger of snakes and savages and wild beasts, but not of starvation. But now he observed that this was far from being the case. The jungle consisted solely of immense tree trunks, embedded in a tangle of thorn and vine rope, all far from nutritious. On the first day he suffered hideously. Later he seemed anæsthetized and was chiefly embarrassed by the behavior of the inhabitants who came out to meet him in footmen's

livery, carrying his dinner, and then irresponsibly disappeared or raised the covers of their dishes and revealed live tortoises. Many people who knew him in London appeared and ran round him with derisive cries, asking him questions to which he could not possibly know the answer. His wife came, too, and he was pleased to see her, assuming that she had got tired of her guardsman and was there to fetch him back, but she soon disappeared, like all the others.

It was then that he remembered that it was imperative for him to reach Manáos; he redoubled his energy, stumbling against boulders in the stream and getting caught up among the vines. "But I mustn't waste my breath," he reflected. Then he forgot that, too, and was conscious of nothing more until he found himself lying in a hammock in Mr. McMaster's house.

His recovery was slow. At first, days of lucidity alternated with delirium; then his temperature dropped and he was conscious even when most ill. The days of fever grew less frequent, finally occurring in the normal system of the tropics between long periods of comparative health. Mr. McMaster dosed him regularly with herbal remedies.

"It's very nasty," said Henty, "but it does do good."

"There is medicine for everything in the forest," said Mr. McMaster; "to make you well and to make you ill. My mother was an Indian and she taught me many of them. I have learned others from time to time from my wives. There are plants to cure you and give you fever, to kill you and send you mad, to keep away snakes, to intoxicate fish so that you can pick them out of the water with your hands like fruit from a tree. There are medicines even I do not know. They say that it is possible to bring dead people to life after they have begun to stink, but I have not seen it done."

"But surely you are English?"

"My father was—at least a Barbadian. He came to

British Guiana as a missionary. He was married to a white woman but he left her in Guiana to look for gold. Then he took my mother. The Shiriana women are ugly but very devoted. I have had many. Most of the men and women living in this savannah are my children. That is why they obey—for that reason and because I have the gun. My father lived to a great age. It is not twenty years since he died. He was a man of education. Can you read?"

"Yes, of course."

"It is not everyone who is so fortunate. I cannot."

Henty laughed apologetically. "But I suppose you haven't much opportunity here."

"Oh, yes, that is just it. I have a great many books. I will show you when you are better. Until five years ago there was an Englishman—at least a black man, but he was well educated in Georgetown. He died. He used to read to me every day until he died. You shall read to me when you are better."

"I shall be delighted to."

"Yes, you shall read to me," Mr. McMaster repeated, nodding over the calabash.

During the early days of his convalescence Henty had little conversation with his host; he lay in the hammock staring up at the thatched roof and thinking about his wife, rehearsing over and over again different incidents in their life together, including her affairs with the tennis professional and the soldier. The days, exactly twelve hours each, passed without distinction. Mr. McMaster retired to sleep at sundown, leaving a little lamp burning—a hand-woven wick drooping from a pot of beef fat—to keep away vampire bats.

The first time that Henty left the house Mr. McMaster took him for a little stroll around the farm.

"I will show you the black man's grave," he said, leading him to a mound between the mango trees. "He was very kind to me. Every afternoon until he died, for

two hours, he used to read to me. I think I will put up a cross—to commemorate his death and your arrival—a pretty idea. Do you believe in God?"

"I've never really thought about it much."

"You are perfectly right. I have thought about it a *great* deal and I still do not know . . . Dickens did."

"I suppose so."

"Oh yes, it is apparent in all his books. You will see."

That afternoon Mr. McMaster began the construction of a headpiece for the negro's grave. He worked with a large spokeshave in a wood so hard that it grated and rang like metal.

At last when Henty had passed six or seven consecutive days without fever, Mr. McMaster said, "Now I think you are well enough to see the books."

At one end of the hut there was a kind of loft formed by a rough platform erected up in the eaves of the roof. Mr. McMaster propped a ladder against it and mounted. Henty followed, still unsteady after his illness. Mr. McMaster sat on the platform and Henty stood at the top of the ladder looking over. There was a heap of small bundles there, tied up with rag, palm leaf and raw hide.

"It has been hard to keep out the worms and ants. Two are practically destroyed. But there is an oil the Indians know how to make that is useful."

He unwrapped the nearest parcel and handed down a calfbound book. It was an early American edition of *Bleak House*.

"It does not matter which we take first."

"You are fond of Dickens?"

"Why, yes, of course. More than fond, far more. You see, they are the only books I have ever heard. My father used to read them and then later the black man . . . and now you. I have heard them all several times by now but I never get tired; there is always more to be learned and noticed, so many characters, so many changes of scene, so many words. . . . I have all

Dickens's books except those that the ants devoured. It takes a long time to read them all—more than two years."

"Well," said Henty lightly, "they will well last out my visit."

"Oh, I hope not. It is delightful to start again. Each time I think I find more to enjoy and admire."

They took down the first volume of *Bleak House* and that afternoon Henty had his first reading.

He had always rather enjoyed reading aloud and in the first year of marriage had shared several books in this way with his wife, until one day, in one of her rare moments of confidence, she remarked that it was torture to her. Sometimes after that he had thought it might be agreeable to have children to read to. But Mr. McMaster was a unique audience.

The old man sat astride his hammock opposite Henty, fixing him throughout with his eyes, and following the words, soundlessly, with his lips. Often when a new character was introduced he would say, "Repeat the name, I have forgotten him," or, "Yes, yes, I remember her well. She dies, poor woman." He would frequently interrupt with questions; not as Henty would have imagined about the circumstances of the story—such things as the procedure of the Lord Chancellor's Court or the social conventions of the time, though they must have been unintelligible, did not concern him—but always about the characters. "Now, why does she say that? Does she really mean it? Did she feel faint because of the heat of the fire or of something in that paper?" He laughed loudly at all the jokes and at some passages which did not seem humorous to Henty, asking him to repeat them two or three times; and later at the description of the sufferings of the outcasts in "Tom-all-alone" tears ran down his cheeks into his beard. His comments on the story were usually simple. "I think that Dedlock is a very proud man," or, "Mrs. Jellyby does not take

enough care of her children." Henty enjoyed the readings almost as much as he did.

At the end of the first day the old man said, "You read beautifully, with a far better accent than the black man. And you explain better. It is almost as though my father were here again." And always at the end of a session he thanked his guest courteously. "I enjoyed that very much. It was an extremely distressing chapter. But, if I remember rightly, it will all turn out well."

By the time that they were well into the second volume, however, the novelty of the old man's delight had begun to wane, and Henty was feeling strong enough to be restless. He touched more than once on the subject of his departure, asking about canoes and rains and the possibility of finding guides. But Mr. McMaster seemed obtuse and paid no attention to these hints.

One day, running his thumb through the pages of *Bleak House* that remained to be read, Henty said, "We still have a lot to get through. I hope I shall be able to finish it before I go."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. McMaster. "Do not disturb yourself about that. You will have time to finish it, my friend."

For the first time Henty noticed something slightly menacing in his host's manner. That evening at supper, a brief meal of farine and dried beef eaten just before sundown, Henty renewed the subject.

"You know, Mr. McMaster, the time has come when I must be thinking about getting back to civilization. I have already imposed myself on your hospitality for too long."

Mr. McMaster bent over his plate, crunching mouthfuls of farine, but made no reply.

"How soon do you think I shall be able to get a boat? . . . I said how soon do you think I shall be

able to get a boat? I appreciate all your kindness to me more than I can say, but . . ."

"My friend, any kindness I may have shown is amply repaid by your reading of Dickens. Do not let us mention the subject again."

"Well, I'm very glad you have enjoyed it. I have, too. But I really must be thinking of getting back . . ."

"Yes," said Mr. McMaster. "The black man was like that. He thought of it all the time. But he died here . . ."

Twice during the next day Henty opened the subject but his host was evasive. Finally he said, "Forgive me, Mr. McMaster, but I really must press the point. When can I get a boat?"

"There is no boat."

"Well, the Indians can build one."

"You must wait for the rains. There is not enough water in the river now."

"How long will that be?"

"A month . . . two months . . ."

They had finished *Bleak House* and were nearing the end of *Dombey and Son* when the rain came.

"Now it is time to make preparations to go."

"Oh, that is impossible. The Indians will not make a boat during the rainy season—it is one of their superstitions."

"You might have told me."

"Did I not mention it? I forgot."

Next morning Henty went out alone while his host was busy, and, looking as aimless as he could, strolled across the savannah to the group of Indian houses. There were four or five Shirianas sitting in one of the doorways. They did not look up as he approached them. He addressed them in the few words of Maku he had acquired during the journey but they made no sign whether they understood him or not. Then he drew a sketch of a canoe in the sand, he went through

some vague motions of carpentry, pointed from them to him, then made motions of giving something to them and scratched out the outlines of a gun and a hat and a few other recognizable articles of trade. One of the women giggled, but no one gave any sign of comprehension, and he went away unsatisfied.

At their midday meal Mr. McMaster said: "Mr. Henty, the Indians tell me that you have been trying to speak with them. It is easier that you say anything you wish through me. You realize, do you not, that they would do nothing without my authority. They regard themselves, quite rightly in most cases, as my children."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was asking them about a canoe."

"So they gave me to understand . . . and now if you have finished your meal perhaps we might have another chapter. I am quite absorbed in the book."

They finished *Dombey and Son;* nearly a year had passed since Henty had left England, and his gloomy foreboding of permanent exile became suddenly acute when, between the pages of *Martin Chuzzlewit,* he found a document written in pencil in irregular characters.

Year 1919.

I James McMaster of Brazil do swear to Barnabas Washington of Georgetown that if he finish this book in fact Martin Chuzzlewit I will let him go away back as soon as finished.

There followed a heavy pencil *X,* and after it: *Mr. McMaster made this mark signed Barnabas Washington.*

"Mr. McMaster," said Henty, "I must speak frankly. You saved my life, and when I get back to civilization I will reward you to the best of my ability. I will give you anything within reason. But at present you are

keeping me here against my will. I demand to be released."

"But, my friend, what is keeping you? You are under no restraint. Go when you like."

"You know very well that I can't get away without your help."

"In that case you must humour an old man. Read me another chapter."

"Mr. McMaster, I swear by anything you like that when I get to Manáos I will find someone to take my place. I will pay a man to read to you all day."

"But I have no need of another man. You read so well."

"I have read for the last time."

"I hope not," said Mr. McMaster politely.

That evening at supper only one plate of dried meat and farine was brought in and Mr. McMaster ate alone. Henty lay without speaking, staring at the thatch.

Next day at noon a single plate was put before Mr. McMaster, but with it lay his gun, cocked, on his knee, as he ate. Henty resumed the reading of *Martin Chuzzlewit* where it had been interrupted.

Weeks passed hopelessly. They read *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Little Dorrit* and *Oliver Twist*. Then a stranger arrived in the savannah, a half-caste prospector, one of that lonely order of men who wander for a lifetime through the forests, tracing the little streams, sifting the gravel and, ounce by ounce, filling the little leather sack of gold dust, more often than not dying of exposure and starvation with five hundred dollars' worth of gold hung round their necks. Mr. McMaster was vexed at his arrival, gave him farine and *passo* and sent him on his journey within an hour of his arrival, but in that hour Henty had time to scribble his name on a slip of paper and put it into the man's hand.

From now on there was hope. The days followed

their unvarying routine: coffee at sunrise, a morning of inaction while Mr. McMaster pottered about on the business of the farm, farine and *passo* at noon, Dickens in the afternoon, farine and *passo* and sometimes some fruit for supper, silence from sunset to dawn with the small wick glowing in the beef fat and the palm thatch overhead dimly discernible; but Henty lived in quiet confidence and expectation.

Some time, this year or the next, the prospector would arrive at a Brazilian village with news of his discovery. The disasters to the Anderson expedition would not have passed unnoticed. Henty could imagine the headlines that must have appeared in the popular Press; even now probably there were search parties working over the country he had crossed; any day English voices might sound over the savannah and a dozen friendly adventurers come crashing through the bush. Even as he was reading, while his lips mechanically followed the printed pages, his mind wandered away from his eager, crazy host opposite, and he began to narrate to himself incidents of his homecoming—the gradual re-encounters with civilization; he shaved and bought new clothes at Manáos, telegraphed for money, received wires of congratulation; he enjoyed the leisurely river journey to Belem, the big liner to Europe; savoured good claret and fresh meat and spring vegetables; he was shy at meeting his wife and uncertain how to address... *"Darling,* you've been much longer than you said. I quite thought you were lost...."

And then Mr. McMaster interrupted. "May I trouble you to read that passage again? It is one I particularly enjoy."

The weeks passed; there was no sign of rescue, but Henty endured the day for hope of what might happen on the morrow; he even felt a slight stirring of cordiality towards his gaoler and was therefore quite willing to join him when, one evening after a long con-

ference with an Indian neighbour, he proposed a celebration.

"It is one of the local feast days," he explained, "and they have been making *piwari*. You may not like it, but you should try some. We will go across to this man's home to-night."

Accordingly after supper they joined a party of Indians that were assembled round the fire in one of the huts at the other side of the savannah. They were singing in an apathetic, monotonous manner and passing a large calabash of liquid from mouth to mouth. Separate bowls were brought for Henty and Mr. McMaster, and they were given hammocks to sit in.

"You must drink it all without lowering the cup. That is the etiquette."

Henty gulped the dark liquid, trying not to taste it. But it was not unpleasant, hard and muddy on the palate like most of the beverages he had been offered in Brazil, but with a flavour of honey and brown bread. He leant back in the hammock feeling unusually contented. Perhaps at that very moment the search party was in camp a few hours' journey from them. Meanwhile he was warm and drowsy. The cadence of song rose and fell interminably, liturgically. Another calabash of *piwari* was offered him and he handed it back empty. He lay full length watching the play of shadows on the thatch as the Shirianas began to dance. Then he shut his eyes and thought of England and his wife and fell asleep.

He awoke, still in the Indian hut, with the impression that he had outslept his usual hour. By the position of the sun he knew it was late afternoon. No one else was about. He looked for his watch and found to his surprise that it was not on his wrist. He had left it in the house, he supposed, before coming to the party.

"I must have been tight last night," he reflected. "Treacherous drink, that." He had a headache and

feared a recurrence of fever. He found when he set his feet to the ground that he stood with difficulty; his walk was unsteady and his mind confused as it had been during the first weeks of his convalescence. On the way across the savannah he was obliged to stop more than once, shutting his eyes and breathing deeply. When he reached the house he found Mr. McMaster sitting there.

"Ah, my friend, you are late for the reading this afternoon. There is scarcely another half-hour of light. How do you feel?"

"Rotten. That drink doesn't seem to agree with me."

"I will give you something to make you better. The forest has remedies for everything; to make you awake and to make you sleep."

"You haven't seen my watch anywhere?"

"You have missed it?"

"Yes. I thought I was wearing it. I say, I've never slept so long."

"Not since you were a baby. Do you know how long? Two days."

"Nonsense. I can't have."

"Yes, indeed. It is a long time. It is a pity because you missed our guests."

"Guests?"

"Why, yes. I have been quite gay while you were asleep. Three men from outside. Englishmen. It is a pity you missed them. A pity for them, too, as they particularly wished to see you. But what could I do? You were sound asleep. They had come all the way to find you, so—I thought you would not mind—as you could not greet them yourself I gave them a little souvenir, your watch. They wanted something to take home to your wife who is offering a great reward for news of you. They were very pleased with it. And they took some photographs of the little cross I put up to commemorate your coming. They were pleased with

that, too. They were very easily pleased. But I do not suppose they will visit us again, our life here is so retired . . . no pleasures except reading . . . I do not suppose we shall ever have visitors again . . . well, well, I will get you some medicine to make you feel better. Your head aches, does it not. . . . We will not have any Dickens to-day . . . but tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. Let us read *Little Dorrit* again. There are passages in that book I can never hear without the temptation to weep."

12 nightmares from ingenious minds that never sleep

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RAY BRADBURY
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