ALFRED HITCHCOCK

13 MORE STORIES THEY WOULDN'T LET ME DO ON TV

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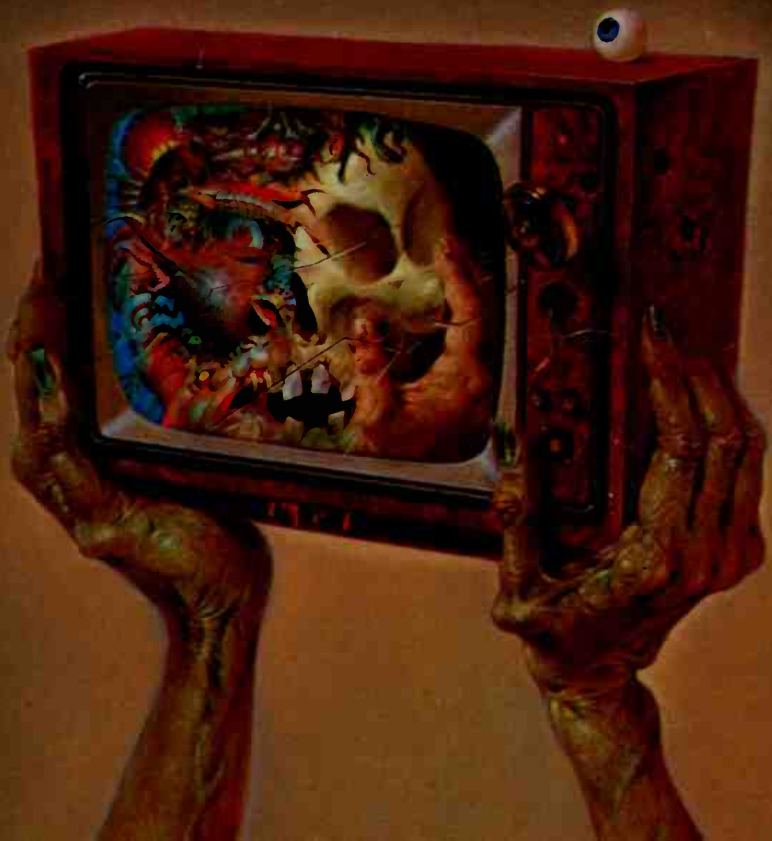

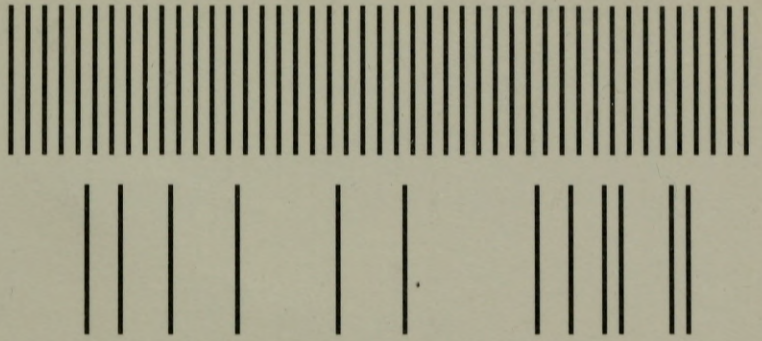

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Edited by Alfred Hitchcock

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Preface

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, this is Alfred Hitchcock speaking.

Being what is probably one of the most obtrusive producers on television has spoiled me. I cannot conceive of giving people stories without adding my own comments. The publishers of this book, being far wiser than my television sponsors, have limited my interference to this short preface.

First of all I should make it absolutely clear to you that these stories will not be interspersed with long-playing commercials. You may enjoy them while facing in any direction in any room in the house. Or outside, if you like. Furthermore, you may read them at any time, and if you take longer than half an hour for one of them you will not be penalized. Of course, this information is for those of you with poor memories and good television sets who may have forgotten some of the freedom allowed a reader.

An anthology of stories, like a soufflé, reflects the taste of the person who selects and mixes the ingredients. It matters a great deal, for example, whether onions or garlic are used and when the arsenic is added. I doubt that you will find much garlic or onions in this volume, but I am certain that you will find more than a little arsenic. I only hope that, like me, you have developed a taste for it.

This particular selection of tales is primarily aimed at those of you who find television fare too bland. You may not care for some of these stories because you think them

Despite this, and despite the fact that Hugh was my brother-in-law—a curious relationship when you come to think of it—I liked him immensely, just as everyone else did who knew him. He was a big, good-looking man, with clear blue eyes in a ruddy face, and with a quick, outgoing nature eager to appreciate whatever you had to offer. He was overwhelmingly generous, and his generosity was of that rare and excellent kind which makes you feel as if you are doing the donor a favor by accepting it.

I wouldn't say he had any great sense of humor, but plain good humor can sometimes be an adequate substitute for that, and in Hugh's case it was. His stormy side was largely reserved for those times when he thought you might have needed his help in something and failed to call on him for it. Which meant that ten minutes after Hugh had met you and liked you, you were expected to ask him for anything he might be able to offer. A month or so after he married my sister Elizabeth she mentioned to him my avid interest in a fine Copley he had hanging in his gallery at Hilltop, and I can still vividly recall my horror when it suddenly arrived, heavily crated and with his gift card attached, at my barren room-and-a-half. It took considerable effort, but I finally managed to return it to him by foregoing the argument that the picture was undoubtedly worth more than the entire building in which I lived and by complaining that it simply didn't show to advantage on my wall. I think he suspected I was lying, but being Hugh he would never dream of charging me with that in so many words.

Of course, Hilltop and the two hundred years of Lozier tradition that went into it did much to shape Hugh this way. The first Loziers had carved the estate from the heights overlooking the river, had worked hard and flourished exceedingly; its successive generations had invested their income so wisely that money and position eventually erected a towering wall between Hilltop and the world outside. Truth to tell,

Hugh was very much a man of the eighteenth century who somehow found himself in the twentieth, and simply made the best of it.

Hilltop itself was almost a replica of the celebrated, but long untenanted, Dane house nearby, and was striking enough to open anybody's eyes at a glance. The house was weathered stone, graceful despite its bulk, and the vast lawns reaching to the river's edge were tended with such fanatic devotion over the years that they had become carpets of purest green which magically changed luster under any breeze. Gardens ranged from the other side of the house down to the groves which half hid the stables and outbuildings, and past the far side of the groves ran the narrow road which led to town. The road was a courtesy road, each estate holder along it maintaining his share, and I think it safe to say that for all the crushed rock he laid in it Hugh made less use of it by far than any of his neighbors.

Hugh's life was bound up in Hilltop; he could be made to leave it only by dire necessity; and if you did meet him away from it you were made acutely aware that he was counting off the minutes until he could return. And if you weren't wary you would more than likely find yourself going along with him when he did return, and totally unable to tear yourself away from the place while the precious weeks rolled by. I know. I believe I spent more time at Hilltop than at my own apartment after my sister brought Hugh into the family.

At one time I wondered how Elizabeth took to this marriage, considering that before she met Hugh she had been as restless and flighty as she was pretty. When I put the question to her directly, she said, "It's wonderful, darling. Just as wonderful as I knew it would be when I first met him."

It turned out that their first meeting had taken place at an art exhibition, a showing of some ultramodern stuff, and she had been intently studying one of the

more bewildering concoctions on display when she became aware of this tall, good-looking man staring at her. And, as she put it, she had been about to set him properly in his place when he said abruptly, "Are you admiring that?"

This was so unlike what she had expected that she was taken completely aback. "I don't know," she said weakly. "Am I supposed to?"

"No," said the stranger, "it's damned nonsense. Come along now, and I'll show you something which isn't a waste of time."

"And," Elizabeth said to me, "I came along like a pup at his heels, while he marched up and down and told me what was good and what was bad, and in a good loud voice, too, so that we collected quite a crowd along the way. Can you picture it, darling?"

"Yes," I said, "I can." By now I had shared similar occasions with Hugh, and learned at firsthand that nothing could dent his cast-iron assurance.

"Well," Elizabeth went on, "I must admit that at first I was a little put off, but then I began to see that he knew exactly what he was talking about, and that he was terribly sincere. Not a bit self-conscious about anything, but just eager for me to understand things the way he did. It's the same way with everything. Everybody else in the world is always fumbling and bumbling over deciding anything—what to order for dinner, or how to manage his job, or whom to vote for—but Hugh always *knows*. It's *not* knowing that makes for all those nerves and complexes and things you hear about, isn't that so? Well, I'll take Hugh, thank you, and leave everyone else to the psychiatrists."

So there it was. An Eden with flawless lawns and no awful nerves and complexes, and not even the glimmer of a serpent in the offing. That is, not a glimmer until the day Raymond made his entrance on the scene.

We were out on the terrace that day, Hugh and Elizabeth and I, slowly being melted into a sort of liquid

torpor by the August sunshine, and all of us too far gone to make even a pretense at talk. I lay there with a linen cap over my face, listening to the summer noises around me and being perfectly happy.

There was the low, steady hiss of the breeze through the aspens nearby, the plash and drip of oars on the river below, and now and then the melancholy *tink-tunk* of a sheep bell from one of the flock on the lawn. The flock was a fancy of Hugh's. He swore that nothing was better for a lawn than a few sheep grazing on it, and every summer five or six fat sleepy ewes were turned out on the grass to serve this purpose and to add a pleasantly pastoral note to the view.

My first warning of something amiss came from the sheep—from the sudden sound of their bells clanging wildly and then a baa-ing which suggested an assault by a whole pack of wolves. I heard Hugh say, "Damn!" loudly and angrily, and I opened my eyes to see something more incongruous than wolves. It was a large black poodle in the full glory of a clownish haircut, a bright red collar, and an ecstasy of high spirits as he chased the frightened sheep around the lawn. It was clear the poodle had no intention of hurting them—he probably found them the most wonderful playmates imaginable—but it was just as clear that the panicky ewes didn't understand this, and would very likely end up in the river before the fun was over.

In the bare second it took me to see all this, Hugh had already leaped the low terrace wall and was among the sheep, herding them away from the water's edge, and shouting commands at the dog who had different ideas.

"Down, boy!" he yelled. "Down!" And then as he would to one of his own hounds, he sternly commanded, "Heel!"

He would have done better, I thought, to have picked up a stick or stone and made a threatening gesture, since the poodle paid no attention whatever to Hugh's words. Instead, continuing to bark happily,

the poodle made for the sheep again, this time with Hugh in futile pursuit. An instant later the dog was frozen into immobility by a voice from among the aspens near the edge of the lawn.

"Assieds!" the voice called breathlessly. *"Assieds-toi!"*

Then the man appeared, a small, dapper figure trotting across the grass. Hugh stood waiting, his face darkening as we watched.

Elizabeth squeezed my arm. "Let's get down there," she whispered. "Hugh doesn't like being made a fool of."

We got there in time to hear Hugh open his big guns. "Any man," he was saying, "who doesn't know how to train an animal to its place shouldn't own one."

The man's face was all polite attention. It was a good face, thin and intelligent, and webbed with tiny lines at the corners of the eyes. There was also something behind those eyes that couldn't quite be masked. A gentle mockery. A glint of wry perception turned on the world like a camera lens. It was nothing anyone like Hugh would have noticed, but it was there all the same, and I found myself warming to it on the spot. There was also something tantalizingly familiar about the newcomer's face, his high forehead, and his thinning gray hair, but much as I dug into my memory during Hugh's long and solemn lecture I couldn't come up with an answer. The lecture ended with a few remarks on the best methods of dog training, and by then it was clear that Hugh was working himself into a mood of forgiveness.

"As long as there's no harm done—" he said.

The man nodded soberly. "Still, to get off on the wrong foot with one's new neighbors—"

Hugh looked startled. "Neighbors?" he said almost rudely. "You mean that you live around here?"

The man waved toward the aspens. "On the other side of those woods."

"The *Dane* house?" The Dane house was almost as sacred to Hugh as Hilltop, and he had once explained

to me that if he were ever offered a chance to buy the place he would snap it up. His tone now was not so much wounded as incredulous. "I don't believe it!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes," the man assured him, "the Dane house. I performed there at a party many years ago, and always hoped that some day I might own it."

It was the word *performed* which gave me my clue —that and the accent barely perceptible under the precise English. He had been born and raised in Marseilles—that would explain the accent—and long before my time he had already become a legend.

"You're Raymond, aren't you?" I said. "Charles Raymond."

"I prefer Raymond alone." He smiled in deprecation of his own small vanity. "And I am flattered that you recognize me."

I don't believe he really was. Raymond the Magician, Raymond the Great, would, if anything, expect to be recognized wherever he went. As the master of sleight of hand who had paled Thurston's star, as the escape artist who had almost outshone Houdini, Raymond would not be inclined to underestimate himself.

He had started with the standard box of tricks which makes up the repertoire of most professional magicians; he had gone far beyond that to those feats of escape which, I suppose, are known to us all by now. The lead casket sealed under a foot of lake ice, the welded-steel strait jackets, the vaults of the Bank of England, the exquisite suicide knot which nooses throat and doubles legs together so that the motion of a leg draws the noose tighter around the throat—all these Raymond had known and escaped from. And then at the pinnacle of fame he had dropped from sight and his name had become relegated to the past.

When I asked him why, he shrugged.

"A man works for money or for the love of his work. If he has all the wealth he needs and has no more love for his work, why go on?"

"But to give up a great career—" I protested.

"It was enough to know that the house was waiting here."

"You mean," Elizabeth said, "that you never intended to live any place but here?"

"Never—not once in all these years." He laid a finger along his nose and winked broadly at us. "Of course, I made no secret of this to the Dane estate, and when the time came to sell I was the first and only one approached."

"You don't give up an idea easily," Hugh said in an edged voice.

Raymond laughed. "Idea? It became an obsession really. Over the years I traveled to many parts of the world, but no matter how fine the place, I knew it could not be as fine as that house on the edge of the woods there, with the river at its feet and the hills beyond. Some day, I would tell myself, when my travels are done I will come here, and, like Candide, cultivate my garden."

He ran his hand abstractedly over the poodle's head and looked around with an air of great satisfaction. "And now," he said, "here I am."

Here he was, indeed, and it quickly became clear that his arrival was working a change on Hilltop. Or, since Hilltop was so completely a reflection of Hugh, it was clear that a change was being worked on Hugh. He became irritable and restless, and more aggressively sure of himself than ever. The warmth and good nature were still there—they were as much part of him as his arrogance—but he now had to work a little harder at them. He reminded me of a man who is bothered by a speck in the eye, but can't find it, and must get along with it as best he can.

Raymond, of course, was the speck, and I got the impression at times that he rather enjoyed the role. It would have been easy enough for him to stay close to his own house and cultivate his garden, or paste up his album, or whatever retired performers do, but he evi-

dently found that impossible. He had a way of drifting over to Hilltop at odd times, just as Hugh was led to find his way to the Dane house and spend long and troublesome sessions there.

Both of them must have known that they were so badly suited to each other that the easy and logical solution would have been to stay apart. But they had the affinity of negative and positive forces, and when they were in a room together the crackling of the antagonistic current between them was so strong you could almost see it in the air.

Any subject became a point of contention for them, and they would duel over it bitterly: Hugh armored and weaponed with his massive assurance, Raymond flicking away with a rapier, trying to find a chink in the armor. I think that what annoyed Raymond most was the discovery that there was no chink in the armor. As someone with an obvious passion for searching out all sides to all questions and for going deep into motives and causes, he was continually being outraged by Hugh's single-minded way of laying down the law.

He didn't hesitate to let Hugh know that. "You are positively medieval," he said. "And of all things men should have learned since that time, the biggest is that there are no easy answers, no solutions one can give with a snap of the fingers. I can only hope for you that some day you may be faced with the perfect dilemma, the unanswerable question. You would find that a revelation. You would learn more in that minute than you dreamed possible."

And Hugh did not make matters any better when he coldly answered: "And *I* say, that for any man with a brain and the courage to use it there is no such thing as a perfect dilemma."

It may be that this was the sort of episode that led to the trouble that followed, or it may be that Raymond acted out of the most innocent and aesthetic motives possible. But, whatever the motives, the results were inevitable and dangerous.

They grew from the project Raymond outlined for us in great detail one afternoon. Now that he was living in the Dane house he had discovered that it was too big, too overwhelming. "Like a museum," he explained. "I find myself wandering through it like a lost soul through endless galleries."

The grounds also needed landscaping. The ancient trees were handsome, but, as Raymond put it, there were just too many of them. "Literally," he said, "I cannot see the river for the trees, and I am one devoted to the sight of running water."

Altogether there would be drastic changes. Two wings of the house would come down, the trees would be cleared away to make a broad aisle to the water, the whole place would be enlivened. It would no longer be a museum, but the perfect home he had envisioned over the years.

At the start of this recitative Hugh was slouched comfortably in his chair. Then as Raymond drew the vivid picture of what was to be, Hugh sat up straighter and straighter until he was as rigid as a trooper in the saddle. His lips compressed. His face became blood-red. His hands clenched and unclenched in a slow, deadly rhythm. Only a miracle was restraining him from an open outburst, but it was not the kind of miracle to last. I saw from Elizabeth's expression that she understood this, too, but was as helpless as I to do anything about it. And when Raymond, after painting the last glowing strokes of his description, said complacently, "Well, now, what do you think?" there was no holding Hugh.

He leaned forward with deliberation and said, "Do you really want to know what I think?"

"Now, Hugh," Elizabeth said in alarm. "Please, Hugh—"

He brushed that aside.

"Do you really want to know?" he demanded of Raymond.

Raymond frowned. "Of course."

"Then I'll tell you," Hugh said. He took a deep breath. "I think that nobody but a damned iconoclast could even conceive the atrocity you're proposing. I think you're one of those people who take pleasure in smashing apart anything that's stamped with tradition or stability. You'd kick the props from under the whole world if you could!"

"I beg your pardon," Raymond said. He was very pale and angry. "But I think you are confusing change with destruction. Surely, you must comprehend that I do not intend to destroy anything, but only wish to make some necessary changes."

"Necessary?" Hugh gibed. "Rooting up a fine stand of trees that's been there for centuries? Ripping apart a house that's as solid as a rock? *I* call it wanton destruction."

"I'm afraid I do not understand. To refresh a scene, to reshape it—"

"I have no intention of arguing," Hugh cut in. "I'm telling you straight out that you don't have the right to tamper with that property!"

They were on their feet now, facing each other truculently, and the only thing that kept me from being really frightened was the conviction that Hugh would not become violent, and that Raymond was far too level-headed to lose his temper. Then the threatening moment was magically past. Raymond's lips suddenly quirked in amusement, and he studied Hugh with courteous interest.

"I see," he said. "I was quite stupid not to have understood at once. This property, which, I remarked, was a little too much like a museum, is to remain that way, and I am to be its custodian. A caretaker of the past, one might say, a curator of its relics."

He shook his head smilingly. "But I am afraid I am not quite suited to that role. I lift my hat to the past, it is true, but I prefer to court the present. For that reason I will go ahead with my plans, and hope they do not make an obstacle to our friendship."

I remember thinking, when I left next day for the city and a long hot week at my desk, that Raymond had carried off the affair very nicely, and that, thank God, it had gone no further than it did. So I was completely unprepared for Eizabeth's call at the end of the week.

It was awful, she said. It was the business of Hugh and Raymond and the Dane house, but worse than ever. She was counting on my coming down to Hilltop the next day; there couldn't be any question about that. She had planned a way of clearing up the whole thing, but I simply had to be there to back her up. After all, I was one of the few people Hugh would listen to, and she was depending on me.

"Depending on me for what?" I said. I didn't like the sound of it. "And as for Hugh's listening to me, Elizabeth, isn't that stretching it a good deal? I can't see him wanting my advice on his personal affairs."

"If you're going to be touchy about it—"

"I'm *not* touchy about it," I retorted. "I just don't like getting mixed up in this thing. Hugh's quite capable of taking care of himself."

"Maybe too capable."

"And what does that mean?"

"Oh, I can't explain now," she wailed. "I'll tell you everything tomorrow. And, darling, if you have any brotherly feelings you'll be here on the morning train. Believe me, it's serious."

I arrived on the morning train in a bad state. My imagination is one of the overactive kind that can build a cosmic disaster out of very little material, and by the time I arrived at the house I was prepared for almost anything.

But, on the surface, at least, all was serene. Hugh greeted me warmly, Elizabeth was her cheerful self, and we had an amiable lunch and a long talk which never came near the subject of Raymond or the Dane house. I said nothing about Elizabeth's phone call,

but thought of it with a steadily growing sense of outrage until I was alone with her.

"Now," I said, "I'd like an explanation of all this mystery. The Lord knows what I expected to find out here, but it certainly wasn't anything I've seen so far. And I'd like some accounting for the bad time you've given me since that call."

"All right," she said grimly, "and that's what you'll get. Come along."

She led the way on a long walk through the gardens and past the stables and outbuildings. Near the private road which lay beyond the last grove of trees she suddenly said, "When the car drove you up to the house didn't you notice anything strange about this road?"

"No, I didn't."

"I suppose not. The driveway to the house turns off too far away from here. But now you'll have a chance to see for yourself."

I did see for myself. A chair was set squarely in the middle of the road and on the chair sat a stout man placidly reading a magazine. I recognized the man at once: he was one of Hugh's stable hands, and he had the patient look of someone who has been sitting for a long time and expects to sit a good deal longer. It took me only a second to realize what he was there for, but Elizabeth wasn't leaving anything to my deductive powers. When we walked over to him, the man stood up and grinned at us.

"William," Elizabeth said, "would you mind telling my brother what instructions Mr. Lozier gave you?"

"Sure," the man said cheerfully. "Mr. Lozier told us there was always supposed to be one of us sitting right here, and any truck we saw that might be carrying construction stuff or suchlike for the Dane house was to be stopped and turned back. All we had to do is tell them it's private property and they were trespassing. If they laid a finger on us we just call in the police. That's the whole thing."

"Have you turned back any trucks?" Elizabeth asked for my benefit.

The man looked surprised. "Why, you know that, Mrs. Lozier," he said. "There was a couple of them the first day we were out here, and that was all. There wasn't any fuss either," he explained to me. "None of those drivers wants to monkey with trespass."

When we were away from the road again I clapped my hand to my forehead. "It's incredible!" I said. "Hugh must know he can't get away with this. That road is the only one to the Dane place, and it's been in public use so long that it isn't even a private thoroughfare any more!"

Elizabeth nodded. "And that's exactly what Raymond told Hugh a few days back. He came over here in a fury, and they had quite an argument about it. And when Raymond said something about hauling Hugh off to court, Hugh answered that he'd be glad to spend the rest of his life in litigation over this business. But that wasn't the worst of it. The last thing Raymond said was that Hugh ought to know that force only invites force, and ever since then I've been expecting a war to break out here any minute. Don't you see? That man blocking the road is a constant provocation, and it scares me."

I could understand that. And the more I considered the matter, the more dangerous it looked.

"But I have a plan," Elizabeth said eagerly, "and that's why I wanted you here. I'm having a dinner party tonight, a very small, informal dinner party. It's to be a sort of peace conference. You'll be there, and Dr. Wynant—Hugh likes you both a great deal—and," she hesitated, "Raymond."

"No!" I said. "You mean he's actually coming?"

"I went over to see him yesterday and we had a long talk. I explained everything to him—about neighbors being able to sit down and come to an understanding, and about brotherly love and—oh, it must have

sounded dreadfully inspirational and sticky, but it worked. He said he would be there."

I had a foreboding. "Does Hugh know about this?"

"About the dinner? Yes."

"I mean, about Raymond's being there."

"No, he doesn't." And then when she saw me looking hard at her, she burst out defiantly with, "Well, *something* had to be done, and I did it, that's all! Isn't it better than just sitting and waiting for God knows what?"

Until we were all seated around the dining-room table that evening I might have conceded the point. Hugh had been visibly shocked by Raymond's arrival, but then, apart from a sidelong glance at Elizabeth which had volumes written in it, he managed to conceal his feelings well enough. He had made the introductions gracefully, kept up his end of the conversation, and, all in all, did a creditable job of playing host.

Ironically, it was the presence of Dr. Wynant which made even this much of a triumph possible for Elizabeth, and which then turned it into disaster. The doctor was an eminent surgeon, stocky and gray-haired, with an abrupt, positive way about him. Despite his own position in the world he seemed pleased as a schoolboy to meet Raymond, and in no time at all they were as thick as thieves.

It was when Hugh discovered during dinner that nearly all attention was fixed on Raymond and very little on himself that the mantle of good host started to slip, and the fatal flaws in Elizabeth's plan showed through. There are people who enjoy entertaining lions and who take pleasure in reflected glory, but Hugh was not one of them. Besides, he regarded the doctor as one of his closest friends, and I have noticed that it is the most assured of men who can be the most jealous of their friendships. And when a prized friendship is being impinged on by the man one loathes more

than anything else in the world—! All in all, by simply imagining myself in Hugh's place and looking across the table at Raymond who was gaily and unconcernedly holding forth, I was prepared for the worst.

The opportunity for it came to Hugh when Raymond was deep in a discussion of the devices used in effecting escapes. They were innumerable, he said. Almost anything one could seize on would serve as such a device. A wire, a scrap of metal, even a bit of paper—at one time or another he had used them all.

"But of them all," he said with a sudden solemnity, "there is only one I would stake my life on. Strange, it is one you cannot see, cannot hold in your hand—in fact, for many people it does not even exist. Yet, it is the one I have used most often and which has never failed me."

The doctor leaned forward, his eyes bright with interest. "And it is—?"

"It is a knowledge of people, my friend. Or, as it may be put, a knowledge of human nature. To me it is as vital an instrument as the scalpel is to you."

"Oh?" said Hugh, and his voice was so sharp that all eyes were instantly turned on him. "You make sleight of hand sound like a department of psychology."

"Perhaps," Raymond said, and I saw he was watching Hugh now, gauging him. "You see there is no great mystery in the matter. My profession—my art, as I like to think of it—is no more than the art of misdirection, and I am but one of its many practitioners."

"I wouldn't say there were many escape artists around nowadays," the doctor remarked.

"True," Raymond said, "but you will observe I referred to the art of misdirection. The escape artist, the master of legerdemain, these are a handful who practice the most exotic form of that art. But what of those who engage in the work of politics, of advertising, of salesmanship?" He laid his finger along his nose in the familiar gesture, and winked. "I am afraid they have all made my art their business."

The doctor smiled. "Since you haven't dragged medicine into it I'm willing to go along with you," he said. "But what I want to know is, exactly how does this knowledge of human nature work in your profession?"

"In this way," Raymond said. "One must judge a person carefully. Then, if he finds in that person certain weaknesses, he can state a false premise and it will be accepted without question. Once the false premise is swallowed, the rest is easy. The victim will then see only what the magician wants him to see, or will give his vote to that politician, or will buy merchandise because of that advertising." He shrugged. "And that is all there is to it."

"Is it?" Hugh said. "But what happens when you're with people who have some intelligence and won't swallow your false premise? How do you do your tricks then? Or do you keep them on the same level as selling beads to the savages?"

"Now that's uncalled for, Hugh," the doctor said. "The man's expressing his ideas. No reason to make an issue of them."

"Maybe there is," Hugh said, his eyes fixed on Raymond. "I have found he's full of interesting ideas. I was wondering how far he'd want to go in backing them up."

Raymond touched the napkin to his lips with a precise little flick, and then laid it carefully on the table before him. "In short," he said, addressing himself to Hugh, "you want a small demonstration of my art."

"It depends," Hugh said. "I don't want any trick cigarette cases or rabbits out of hats or any damn nonsense like that. I'd like to see something good."

"Something good," echoed Raymond reflectively. He looked around the room, studied it, and then turned to Hugh, pointing toward the huge oak door which was closed between the dining room and the living room, where we had gathered before dinner.

"That door is not locked, is it?"

"No," Hugh said, "it isn't. It hasn't been locked for years."

"But there is a key to it?"

Hugh pulled out his key chain, and with an effort detached a heavy, old-fashioned key. "Yes, it's the same one we use for the butler's pantry." He was becoming interested despite himself.

"Good. No, do not give it to me. Give it to the doctor. You have faith in the doctor's honor, I am sure?"

"Yes," said Hugh dryly, "I have."

"Very well. Now, Doctor, will you please go to that door and lock it."

The doctor marched to the door, with his firm, decisive tread, thrust the key into the lock, and turned it. The click of the bolt snapping into place was loud in the silence of the room. The doctor returned to the table holding the key, but Raymond motioned it away. "It must not leave your hand or everything is lost," he warned.

"Now," Raymond said, "for the finale I approach the door, I flick my handkerchief at it—" the handkerchief barely brushed the keyhole—"and presto, the door is unlocked!"

The doctor went to it. He seized the doorknob, twisted it dubiously, and then watched with genuine astonishment as the door swung silently open.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said.

"Somehow," Elizabeth laughed, "a false premise went down easy as an oyster."

Only Hugh reflected a sense of personal outrage. "All right," he demanded, "how was it done? How did you work it?"

"I?" Raymond said reproachfully, and smiled at all of us with obvious enjoyment. "It was you who did it all. I used only my little knowledge of human nature to help you along the way."

I said, "I can guess part of it. That door was set in advance, and when the doctor thought he was locking

it, he wasn't. He was really unlocking it. Isn't that the answer?"

Raymond nodded. "Very much the answer. The door *was* locked in advance. I made sure of that, because with a little forethought I suspected there would be such a challenge during the evening, and this was the simplest way of preparing for it. I merely made certain that I was the last one to enter this room, and when I did I used this." He held up his hand so that we could see the sliver of metal in it. "An ordinary skeleton key, of course, but sufficient for an old and primitive lock."

For a moment Raymond looked grave, then he continued brightly, "It was our host himself who stated the false premise when he said the door was unlocked. He was a man so sure of himself that he would not think to test anything so obvious. The doctor is also a man who is sure, and he fell into the same trap. It is, as you now see, a little dangerous always to be so sure."

"I'll go along with that," the doctor said ruefully, "even though it's heresy to admit it in my line of work." He playfully tossed the key he had been holding across the table to Hugh who let it fall in front of him and made no gesture toward it. "Well, Hugh, like it or not, you must admit the man has proved his point."

"Do I?" said Hugh softly. He sat there smiling a little now, and it was easy to see he was turning some thought over and over in his head.

"Oh, come on, man," the doctor said with some impatience. "You were taken in as much as we were. You know that."

"Of course you were, darling," Elizabeth agreed.

I think that she suddenly saw her opportunity to turn the proceedings into the peace conference she had aimed at, but I could have told her she was choosing her time badly. There was a look in Hugh's eye I didn't like—a veiled look which wasn't natural to him. Ordinarily, when he was really angered, he would blow up a violent storm, and once the thunder and lightning

had passed he would be honestly apologetic. But this present mood of his was different. There was a slumbrous quality in it which alarmed me.

He hooked one arm over the back of his chair and rested the other one on the table, sitting halfway around to fix his eyes on Raymond. "I seem to be a minority of one," he remarked, "but I'm sorry to say I found your little trick disappointing. Not that it wasn't cleverly done—I'll grant that, all right—but because it wasn't any more than you'd expect from a competent locksmith."

"Now there's a large helping of sour grapes," the doctor jeered.

Hugh shook his head. "No, I'm simply saying that where there's a lock on a door and the key to it in your hand, it's no great trick to open it. Considering our friend's reputation, I thought we'd see more from him than that."

Raymond grimaced. "Since I had hoped to entertain," he said, "I must apologize for disappointing."

"Oh, as far as entertaining goes I have no complaints. But for a real test—"

"A real test?"

"Yes, something a little different. Let's say, a door without any locks or keys to tamper with. A closed door which can be opened with a fingertip, but which is nevertheless impossible to open. How does that sound to you?"

Raymond narrowed his eyes thoughtfully, as if he were considering the picture being presented to him. "It sounds most interesting," he said at last. "Tell me more about it."

"No," Hugh said, and from the sudden eagerness in his voice I felt that this was the exact moment he had been looking for. "I'll do better than that. I'll *show* it to you."

He stood up brusquely and the rest of us followed suit—except Elizabeth, who remained in her seat. When

I asked her if she wanted to come along, she only shook her head and sat there watching us hopelessly as we left the room.

We were bound for the cellars, I realized when Hugh picked up a flashlight along the way, but for a part of the cellars I had never seen before. On a few occasions I had gone downstairs to help select a bottle of wine from the racks there, but now we walked past the wine vault and into a long, dimly lit chamber behind it. Our feet scraped loudly on the rough stone, the walls around us showed the stains of seepage, and warm as the night was outside, I could feel the chill of dampness turning my chest to gooseflesh. When the doctor shuddered and said hollowly, "These are the very tombs of Atlantis," I knew I wasn't alone in my feeling, and felt some relief at that.

We stopped at the very end of the chamber, before what I can best describe as a stone closet built from floor to ceiling in the farthest angle of the walls. It was about four feet wide and not quite twice that in length, and its open doorway showed impenetrable blackness inside. Hugh reached into the blackness and pulled a heavy door into place.

"That's it," he said abruptly. "Plain solid wood, four inches thick, fitted flush into the frame so that it's almost airtight. It's a beautiful piece of carpentry, too, the kind they practiced two hundred years ago. And no locks or bolts. Just a ring set into each side to use as a handle." He pushed the door gently and it swung open noiselessly at his touch. "See that? The whole thing is balanced so perfectly on the hinges that it moves like a feather."

"But what's it for?" I asked. "It must have been made for a reason."

Hugh laughed shortly. "It was. Back in the bad old days, when a servant committed a crime—and I don't suppose it had to be more of a crime than talking back to one of the ancient Loziers—he was put in here to

repent. And since the air inside was good for only a few hours at the most, he either repented damn soon or not at all."

"And that door?" the doctor said cautiously. "That impressive door of yours which opens at a touch to provide all the air needed—what prevented the servant from opening it?"

"Look," Hugh said. He flashed his light inside the cell and we crowded behind him to peer in. The circle of light reached across the cell to its far wall and picked out a short, heavy chain hanging a little above head level with a U-shaped collar dangling from its bottom link.

"I see," Raymond said, and they were the first words I had heard him speak since we had left the dining room. "It is truly ingenious. The man stands with his back against the wall, facing the door. The collar is placed around his neck, and then—since it is clearly not made for a lock—it is clamped there, hammered around his neck. The door is closed, and the man spends the next few hours like someone on an invisible rack, reaching out with his feet to catch the ring on the door which is just out of reach. If he is lucky he may not strangle himself in his iron collar, but may live until someone chooses to open the door for him."

"My God," the doctor said. "You make me feel as if I were living through it."

Raymond smiled faintly. "I have lived through many such experiences, and, believe me, the reality is always a little worse than the worst imaginings. There is always the ultimate moment of terror, of panic, when the heart pounds so madly you think it will burst through your ribs, and the cold sweat soaks clear through you in the space of one breath. That is when you must take yourself in hand, must dispel all weakness, and remember all the lessons you have ever learned. If not—!" He whisked the edge of his hand across his lean throat. "Unfortunately for the usual victim of such a device," he concluded sadly, "since he

lacks the essential courage and knowledge to help himself, he succumbs."

"But you wouldn't," Hugh said.

"I have no reason to think so."

"You mean," and the eagerness was creeping back into Hugh's voice, stronger than ever, "that under the very same conditions as someone chained in there two hundred years ago you could get this door open?"

The challenging note was too strong to be brushed aside lightly. Raymond stood silent for a long minute, face strained with concentration, before he answered.

"Yes," he said. "It would not be easy—the problem is made formidable by its very simplicity—but it could be solved."

"How long do you think it would take you?"

"An hour at the most."

Hugh had come a long way around to get to this point. He asked the question slowly, savoring it. "Would you want to bet on that?"

"Now, wait a minute," the doctor said. "I don't like any part of this."

"And I vote we adjourn for a drink," I put in. "Fun's fun, but we'll all wind up with pneumonia, playing games down here."

Neither Hugh nor Raymond appeared to hear a word of this. They stood staring at each other—Hugh waiting on pins and needles, Raymond deliberating—until Raymond said, "What is this bet you offer?"

"This. If you lose, you get out of the Dane house inside of a month, and sell it to me."

"And if I win?"

It was not easy for Hugh to say it, but he finally got it out. "Then I'll be the one to get out. And if you don't want to buy Hilltop I'll arrange to sell it to the first comer."

For anyone who knew Hugh it was so fantastic, so staggering a statement to hear from him, that none of us could find words at first. It was the doctor who recovered most quickly.

"You're not speaking for yourself, Hugh," he warned. "You're a married man. Elizabeth's feelings have to be considered."

"Is it a bet?" Hugh demanded of Raymond. "Do you want to go through with it?"

"I think before I answer that, there is something to be explained." Raymond paused, then went on slowly, "I'm afraid I gave the impression—out of false pride, perhaps—that when I retired from my work it was because of a boredom, a lack of interest in it. That was not altogether the truth. In reality, I was required to go to a doctor some years ago, the doctor listened to the heart, and suddenly my heart became the most important thing in the world. I tell you this because, while your challenge strikes me as being a most unusual and interesting way of settling differences between neighbors, I must reject it for reasons of health."

"You were healthy enough a minute ago," Hugh said in a hard voice.

"Perhaps not as much as you would want to think, my friend."

"In other words," Hugh said bitterly, "there's no accomplice handy, no keys in your pocket to help out, and no way of tricking anyone into seeing what isn't there! So you have to admit you're beaten."

Raymond stiffened. "I admit no such thing. All the tools I would need even for such a test as this I have with me. Believe me, they would be enough."

Hugh laughed aloud, and the sound of it broke into small echoes all down the corridors behind us. It was that sound, I am sure—the living contempt in it rebounding from wall to wall around us—which sent Raymond into the cell.

Hugh wielded the hammer, a short-handled but heavy sledge, which tightened the collar into a circlet around Raymond's neck, hitting with hard even strokes at the iron which was braced against the wall. When he was finished I saw the pale glow of the radium-

painted numbers on a watch as Raymond studied it in his pitch darkness.

"It is now eleven," he said calmly. "The wager is that by midnight this door must be opened, and it does not matter what means are used. Those are the conditions, and you gentlemen are the witnesses to them."

Then the door was closed, and the walking began.

Back and forth we walked—the three of us—as if we were being compelled to trace every possible geometric figure on that stony floor, the doctor with his quick, impatient step, and I matching Hugh's long, nervous strides. A foolish, meaningless march, back and forth across our own shadows, each of us marking the time by counting off the passing seconds, and each ashamed to be the first to look at his watch.

For a while there was a counterpoint to this scraping of feet from inside the cell. It was a barely perceptible clinking of chain coming at brief, regular intervals. Then there would be a long silence, followed by a renewal of the sound. When it stopped again I could not restrain myself any longer. I held up my watch toward the dim yellowish light of the bulb overhead and saw with dismay that barely twenty minutes had passed.

After that there was no hesitancy in the others about looking at the time, and, if anything, this made it harder to bear than just wondering. I caught the doctor winding his watch with small, brisk turns, and then a few minutes later he would try to wind it again, and suddenly drop his hand with disgust as he realized he had already done it. Hugh walked with his watch held up near his eyes, as if by concentration on it he could drag that crawling minute hand faster around the dial.

Thirty minutes had passed.

Forty.

Forty-five.

I remember that when I looked at my watch and saw there were less than fifteen minutes to go I wondered if I could last out even that short time. The chill had sunk so deep into me that I ached with it. I was shocked when I saw that Hugh's face was dripping with sweat, and that beads of it gathered and ran off while I watched.

It was while I was looking at him in fascination that it happened. The sound broke through the walls of the cell like a wail of agony heard from far away, and shivered over us as if it were spelling out the words.

"Doctor!" it cried. *"The air!"*

It was Raymond's voice, but the thickness of the wall blocking it off turned it into a high, thin sound. What was clearest in it was the note of pure terror, the plea growing out of that terror.

"Air!" it screamed, the word bubbling and dissolving into a long-drawn sound which made no sense at all.

And then it was silent.

We leaped for the door together, but Hugh was there first, his back against it, barring the way. In his upraised hand was the hammer which had clinched Raymond's collar.

"Keep back!" he cried. "Don't come any nearer, I warn you!"

The fury in him, brought home by the menace of the weapon, stopped us in our tracks.

"Hugh," the doctor pleaded, "I know what you're thinking, but you can forget that now. The bet's off, and I'm opening the door on my own responsibility. You have my word for that."

"Do I? But do you remember the terms of the bet, Doctor? This door must be opened within an hour *—and it doesn't matter what means are used!* Do you understand now? He's fooling both of you. He's faking a death scene, so that you'll push open the door and win his bet for him. But it's my bet, not yours, and I have the last word on it!"

I saw from the way he talked, despite the shaking tension in his voice, that he was in perfect command of himself, and it made everything seem that much worse.

"How do you know he's faking?" I demanded. "The man said he had a heart condition. He said there was always a time in a spot like this when he had to fight panic and could feel the strain of it. What right do you have to gamble with his life?"

"Damn it, don't you see he never mentioned any heart condition until he smelled a bet in the wind? Don't you see he set his trap that way, just as he locked the door behind him when he came into dinner! But this time nobody will spring it for him—nobody!"

"Listen to me," the doctor said, and his voice cracked like a whip. "Do you concede that there's one slim possibility of that man being dead in there, or dying?"

"Yes, it is possible—anything is possible."

"I'm not trying to split hairs with you! I'm telling you that if that man is in trouble every second counts, and you're stealing that time from him. And if that's the case, by God, I'll sit in the witness chair at your trial and swear you murdered him! Is that what you want?"

Hugh's head sank forward on his chest, but his hand still tightly gripped the hammer. I could hear the breath drawing heavily in his throat, and when he raised his head, his face was gray and haggard. The torment of indecision was written in every pale sweating line of it.

And then I suddenly understood what Raymond had meant that day when he told Hugh about the revelation he might find in the face of a perfect dilemma. It was the revelation of what a man may learn about himself when he is forced to look into his own depths, and Hugh had found it at last.

In that shadowy cellar, while the relentless seconds thundered louder and louder in our ears, we waited to to see what he would do.

A Jungle Graduate

by JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

The moonlight fell upon Schreiber's bald head as he jerked his body out of the depths of the roughhewn lounge chair. His eyes were turned to the blue-black smear of jungle, but his ears were absorbing the faint sounds that came from the interior of the bungalow. The path, like a whitewashed strip, reached toward the weird tree masses, and alongside it the coarse rirro grass stood up haughtily, as if protesting against the man-made barrenness. The jungle resents a cleared space; it speaks of the presence of human beings.

"What is it?" I asked softly.

"Nothing," murmured the naturalist, but his grip on the unplaned pine limbs, which formed the frame upon which the Dyak mat was stretched, did not relax. He gave one the impression of a man sifting the noises of the night with his whole body.

Suddenly his head came sharply down between his shoulders, and the chair seemed to groan protestingly as he left it with a spring. A black line appeared upon the moon-whitened path, and the heavy German pounced upon it with the agility of a cat.

"It is that damn vermilion snake," he grunted, hold-

From *The Story-Teller,* 1932.

ing the wriggling thing up by the tail as he shuffled toward the door. "This is the second time he has escaped."

When the chair had again received him with a long-drawn creaking sound, I put a question.

"Did you see him before he started across the path?" I asked.

"No!" snapped Schreiber. "I just felt that things are not right. That is easy. When he escaped, it caused a little silence and just a little change in the note of those that didn't keep altogether quiet. Listen, please, now."

From inside the darkened bungalow came a peculiar wasplike buzzing that filtered unceasingly into the mysterious night. The surrounding jungle appeared to be listening to it. At first it defied the attempts of the ear when it sought to analyze the medley, then the different noises asserted themselves slowly. It was the inarticulate cry of the German's prisoners. There was the soft moaning of the wakeful gibbon, the *pat-pat* of the civet, the whimper of the black monkey, the snuffling of caged small things, and the rustle of snakes that crawled wearily around their boxes. The sounds seemed to bring to the place a peculiar aura that put the bungalow apart from the untrammeled jungle that surrounded it on all sides.

"They are all right now," murmured the German contentedly. "They are quiet, so."

"But how did they know that the vermilion snake had escaped?" I asked. "They're in the dark, and the snake made no noise."

The naturalist laughed, the pleasant laugh of the man to whom a question like mine brings the thrill of subtle flattery.

"How?" he repeated. "My friend, the gibbon in there felt it in his blood, ja. He whimper softly, oh, so softly, and the news ran along the cages. The dark makes no difference to the wild people. Every little bit of their bodies is an eye. Every little hair listens and

tells them something. That is as it should be. I felt the change in their notes. I was dreaming of Jan Wyck's place in Amsterdam just then, and I wake up mighty quick. The black monkey is wise, but the tune of the others changed to pianissimo very, very sudden. A snake is a fellow that can get in anywhere. Listen to them now. I did not tell them that he was back, but they know."

A feeling of nausea crept over me as the German spoke haltingly, groping for the words to express himself. To me the bungalow appeared as a leprous spot in the jungle of wild, waving tapang, pandanus, and sandalwood, laced together with riotous creepers. The whimpering, snuffling, and protesting rustling made me shiver, and I surprised myself by voicing my thoughts.

"It seems so infernally cruel," I stammered. "If you look at—"

The naturalist interrupted me with a quiet laugh, and I remained silent. The big meerschaum was being puffed vigorously.

"It is not cruel," he said slowly. "Out there—" he waved a hand at the blue-black smear of jungle that looked like a foundation upon which the pearly sky reared itself—"they are dining on each other. My prisoners are safe and have plenty. Did you not hear just now how it troubled them when the snake escaped? So! The black monkey has a little one, and she was afraid. The jungle life is not a lengthy one for the weak. I was at Amsterdam five years ago—*ach Gott!* it seems fifty years ago—and at Hagenbeck's I see a one-eared *mias* that I trapped years ago. She looked well. Would she be alive here? I do not know."

The irritating droning noise continued to pour out of the bungalow. It floated out into the night that appeared to be all ears, in an effort to absorb it.

"No, captivity is not bad if they are treated right," continued the naturalist, "and can you tell me where they are not treated well?"

I did not answer. Confronted with a request for reasons to back up my stammered protest, I found myself without any. Schreiber's captives were well fed. The baby monkey was guarded from the snake.

The big German smoked silently for several minutes, his eyes fixed on the jungle belt in front.

"The zoological people treat their animals better than society treats human beings," he said gently. "And the naturalists? Well, they treat them well. I never knew one who did not."

He stopped for a moment, and then gave a little throaty gurgle. Memory had pushed forward something that displeased him.

"I made a mistake," he remarked harshly. "I did know of one. The night is young; I will tell you of him. It happened a long while ago, when I first came to the Samarahan River—Fogelberg and I came together. This man's name was Lesohn—Pierre Lesohn—and he was a naturalist of a kind. That is, his heart was not in his work. *Nein!* He was always thinking of other ways of making money, and no man who calls himself a naturalist can do that. This business calls for everything—heart, soul, brains, all. That is why I said Lesohn was not a naturalist. The devil of discontent was gnawing at him, and in this work there should be no discontent. No, my friend.

"One day I pulled down the river to Lesohn's place, and he pushed at me an illustrated paper from Paris. He laughed, too, very excitedly. He was nearly always excited; the discontented people always are.

" 'What do you think of that?' he said.

"I read the piece in the paper, and I looked at the picture that went with it. It was the picture of an orangoutang, and it had under it the brute's name. He had two names, just like you and me. There he was, sitting at a desk, smoking a cigar and making a bluff that he was writing a letter. It turned me sick. It was not good to me. I handed the paper back to Lesohn and I said nothing.

" 'Well?' he snapped. 'I asked you what you thought of it.'

" 'Not much,' I said. 'It interests me not.'

" 'You old fool!' he cried out. 'That monkey is earning two hundred pounds a week at the Royal Music Hall, in Piccadilly. He is making a fortune for his trainer.'

" 'I do not care,' I said; 'I am not concerned one little bit.'

" 'Ho, ho!' he sneered. 'You want to work in this foul jungle till you die, eh? I have other things in my mind, Schreiber.' I knew he had, but I didn't interrupt him just then. 'Yes,' he cried out, 'I do not want to be buried out here with the wahwahs singing the "Dead March" over my grave. I want to die in Paris. And I want to have some fun before I die, Schreiber. There is a little girl whose father keeps the Café des Primroses —*Mon dieu!* Why did I come to this wilderness?'

" 'And how will that help you?' I asked, pointing to the paper that had the picture of the smart monkey in it.

" 'How?' he screamed. 'How? Why, you old stupid, I, Pierre Lesohn, will train an orangoutang, too.'

" 'It is not good to make a brute into a human,' I said. 'I would not try if I were you.'

"Lesohn laughed himself nearly into convulsions when I said that. It was a great joke to him. He fell on the bed and laughed for ten minutes. He was a smart man, was Pierre Lesohn—too smart to come out of Paris. The smart men should always stay in the cities. The jungle is not for them. It agrees only with men who have made a proper assay of their faculties. Lesohn never had time to make an assay. He was too busy scheming."

Schreiber stopped and again leaned forward in the big chair. Something had gone astray in the buzzing noise from the prison house, and like a maestro he listened for the jarring note. Softly he rose from his seat and disappeared into the interior darkness.

When he returned he relit his pipe slowly—the jungle life makes a man's movements composed and deliberate—then he settled himself back in the seat of his own manufacture.

"The little one of the black monkey is ill," he explained. "If it was in the jungle it would die. Here it will live, I think. But we will get back to Lesohn, the smart Frenchman, who should have stayed in Paris. He pasted that picture of the man-ape over his cot, and he looked at it every day. It got between him and his sleep.

" 'Two hundred pounds a week,' he would cry out. 'Think of that, you old, squareheaded German. That is nearly five thousand francs! That is four thousand marks! Could we not train one, too?'

" 'Not me,' I said. 'I like the orangoutang just as he is. He suits me like that. If he got so clever that he could smoke my cigars and read my letters I would not like him one bit. He would be out of the place that God gave him in the animal kingdom.'

"I annoyed Lesohn by telling him that. I annoyed him very much. Three days afterward a Dyak trapped an orangoutang that was just getting out of its babyhood, and the Frenchman bought it quick.

" 'It is just the size I want,' he said to Fogelberg and me. 'I want to train it as quick as I can. Ho, ho, you two fools, just wait! There is a little girl whose father keeps the Café des Primroses—wait, German, and see things. Professor Pierre Lesohn and his wonderful trained orangoutang! Five thousand francs a week! Is it not good?'

"But Fogelberg and I said nothing. We knew the status of the orangoutang in the animal kingdom, and we were content to leave him on his proper plane. Mother Nature fixes the grades, and she knows that the orang is not the fellow that shall send notes to his sweetheart or puff cigars when he is sitting in tight boots that squeeze his toes that have been made for swinging him through the palm trees. From the ant-eating manis, with his horn armor, right up to Pierre

Lesohn, Mother Nature has settled things very properly and very quietly.

"Lesohn was not the man for the wilderness. No, my friend. He was all bubble, all nerves, and he wanted to feed on excitement ten times a day. And there is no excitement here. Not a bit. People in the cities think that there is, but they are mistaken. This is a cradle where you get a rest if you sit quiet. Do you understand? The Frenchman could not sit quiet. His imagination made him a millionaire after he had that orangoutang two days. It did so. It bought him a house at Passy, and a carriage and pair, and the smiles of the ballet girls at the Grand Casino. Some men are like that. They make their imaginations into gas-wagons, and ride to the devil. And Lesohn was taking something that didn't improve things. He kept a square bottle under his cot, and he toasted the monkey and the good times that he was going to have in Paris —toasted them much too often for my liking.

"That monkey learned things mighty fast. He was a great mimic. Every time Fogelberg and I pulled down to Lesohn's place, the Frenchman trotted the damn hairy brute out to do things for our approval. Fogelberg didn't like it. I didn't like it. *Nein!* We told Lesohn, and he laughed and made fun of us.

" 'Oh, you two old fools!' he cried out. 'Oh, you two old monkey-snarers! You wait! Professor Pierre Lesohn and his trained orangoutang at five thousand francs a week! Five thousand francs! Think of it! In the Café des Primroses I will think sometimes of you two fools on the stinking mudbanks of the Samarahan.'

"He was going mad thinking of the good times he would have on the boulevards. He drank—*Gott im Himmel,* how he drank! He saw himself strutting in Europe with the monkey bringing in the money. He was mad, all right. And I think that orangoutang began to think that he was mad. He would sit alongside Lesohn and puzzle his old head to know what the Frenchman was so excited about. The brute didn't

know of the dreams of Monsieur Pierre Lesohn. No, my friend. He didn't know that the Frenchman was going to make a pedestal of his wisdom, upon which he could climb and kiss his fingers to the Milky Way. Oh, no! He was only an orangoutang, and he didn't know that people would pay four thousand marks a week to see him stick his blue nose into a stein and puff at a cigarette. *Ach!* it sickens me.

"Then one day the monkey got sulky, and would not do a single thing. I think Lesohn was drunk that day. He must have been. The brute was sulky and the Frenchman was drunk. Pierre told me of it afterward. The *mias* knocked over the specimen cases, and went cranky. Lesohn went cranky, too. He saw the boulevards and house at Passy and the ballet girls and the Café des Primroses floating away on the monkey's tantrums, and he got sick. He got very sick. He swigged away at the flat bottle till he went nearly mad, and then he done something."

The blue depths of the jungle appeared to pulsate as Schreiber halted in his story to listen again to the sounds that came from within. There was witchery in the soft night. It touched one with mysterious fingers. It watched outside the lonely bungalow, wondering, inquisitive, wide-eyed.

"He must have been mad," continued the German, "mad or drunk. The Samarahan flowed right by Lesohn's bungalow, and the Samarahan was alive at that place. Dirty, ugly, scaly-backed crocodiles slept in the mud there all day long. Ugh! I hate crocodiles. They turn me sick. The Frenchman, he was mad, though—mad with drink and mad because he thought the orangoutang was turning stupid."

"Well," I asked, "what happened?" The night was listening to the story. The buzzing noise from the prisoners died down to the faintest murmur.

"Well," repeated the naturalist, "Pierre Lesohn taught that orangoutang a lesson in obedience. He tied the animal to the trunk of a tree near the mud-

banks—yes, near the stinking, slimy mudbanks that smell like asafetida, and then he, Pierre, laid himself down on the veranda of his bungalow with his Winchester rifle in his lap.

"The orangoutang whimpered, and Lesohn laughed. He told me of this afterward. The orang whimpered again and again. Then he cried out with fear. A bit of the mud started to move, and the big *mias* was afraid, very much afraid. You know the cold eye of the crocodile? It is the icicle eye. It is the eye of the monte shark. No animal has such a cold eye. The shark? *Nein!* The shark has a fighting eye. The crocodile doesn't fight. He waits till all the cards are his way. He is a devil. That tied-up pet of Lesohn's attracted the dirty brute in the mud, and the orangoutang had been fool enough to tell him by that whimper that he was helpless. See?

"The crocodile watched him for one hour—for two hours—for three hours. He thought it might be a trap. Lesohn watched, too. He was teaching the monkey what mighty smart fellows come out of Paris.

"The crocodile knocked the mud off his back to get a better view, and the orang screamed out to Pierre to save him. He screamed mighty hard. He chattered of the things he would learn if Lesohn came to his aid quick, but Lesohn smiled to himself and sat quiet.

"The crocodile dug himself out of the mud and looked at the *mias* and the *mias* shivered in every bit of his body. Lesohn told me all about it afterward. He said the monkey cursed him when the crocodile flicked the water out of his eye and moved a little farther up the bank. That icicle eye had the orangoutang fascinated. He lost his nerve. He shrieked and he prayed in monkey gibberish, and that gave the crocodile plenty heart. *Ach,* yes! He thought that he held four aces in the little game with the orang, and he thinks it good to take a chance. He made a big rush at the tree, but Pierre was waiting for that rush. He threw the rifle forward quick, the bullet took the brute

in the eye, and he flopped back into the stinking mud with a grunt.

"You see what Lesohn was? He was a madman. Next day, when Fogelberg and I went down there, he told us all about it, and laughed a lot. The orangoutang was so mighty afraid that Lesohn would repeat the stunt that he was hopping round doing everything that he could. *Gott!* He was much afraid was that monkey. I bet he dreamed of nights of the icicle eye of that crocodile. Every time Lesohn looked at him he shivered as if he was going to take a fit, and he whimpered like a baby. That crocodile had watched him for three hours. See?

" 'Look at him!' screamed the Frenchman. 'No more sulks from him! I tamed him! Here!' he yelled to the orang. 'Bring me my bottle!'

"Didn't that monkey rush to get it? You bet he did. He went as if it was a matter of life and death to him, and I suppose it was, to his thinking. And Lesohn shrieked with laughter till you could hear him at Brunei. He reckoned that the cold eye of the crocodile was the very best thing in the world to bring a monkey to his senses.

" 'I will take him over to Singapore next week,' said Lesohn, 'and from there I will get a boat to Colombo, and then ship by the Messageries Maritimes to Paris. Five thousand francs a week! You will read of me. *Mon Dieu!* Yes! You will read of Pierre Lesohn—Professor Pierre Lesohn and his trained orangoutang!' "

Schreiber halted in his recital. A wind came out of the China Sea, charged down upon the jungle and slashed the fronds of the big palms like a regiment of cuirassiers thundering through space. It died away suddenly, leaving an atmosphere of weird expectancy that put one's nerves on a tension. The night seemed to listen for something that it knew was coming.

"Go on!" I cried excitedly. "Tell me! Tell me what happened!"

"Four days after that night," said Schreiber quietly,

"I pulled down the Samarahan. When I came in front of Lesohn's bungalow I called out to him, but I got no answer. 'He is in the forest,' I said to myself; 'I will go up to the hut and get a drink.' It was a mighty hot day, and the Samarahan is not a summer resort. *Nein!* It is not.

"Did you ever feel that a silence can be too much a silence? Sometimes in the jungle I feel a hush that is not nice. It was here tonight when the vermilion snake escaped. Often in the forest it chokes the whistle of the cicada and it seems to stop the little blades of grass from waving. *Ja!* It is strange. Whenever I feel that silence I am careful. I am not afraid, but I know that other things that can feel in a way that I cannot feel are much afraid.

"It was that kind of a silence that I feel when I was going up the path to Lesohn's bungalow. It touched me like ten thousand cold hands. I am not imaginative, no, but in the jungle one gets a skin that feels and sees and hears. And my skin was working overtime just then. . . . It was telling my brain something that my brain could not understand.

"I walked on my toes through the mangrove bushes at the top of that path. I know not why, but I did. I was near to making a discovery. I knew that. I stopped and peeped through the branches and I saw something. *Gott!* Yes! I saw something that made me reach out for the news that my skin was trying to tell me. I knew, and I did not know. Do you understand? I chased that thing all around in my brain, and was getting closer to it each minute. The things I thought of made it come closer, and my lips got dry. I thought of what Lesohn had done to the orang, how he had tied him to the tree and frightened him into a fit with the cold stare of that scaly-backed crocodile, and while I thought of that I watched the veranda of the bungalow. I seemed to see that monkey tied to the tree and that icicle eye looking at him from the mud, and then

—why, I knew! It came on me like a flash. I felt as if I was hit with a sandbag.

"For three minutes I could not move, then I staggered toward the veranda. Do you know what was there? *That big ugly mias was fumbling with the Frenchman's rifle, and he was crying like a human.*

" 'Where is Lesohn?' I cried out. 'Where is he?' And then I laughed like a madman at my own question. My skin, that was all eyes and ears, had told me where Lesohn was. *Ja!* It was so.

"The big *mias* sprang up on his feet and he looked at me just as if he understood every word I said. My legs were as weak as two blades of grass. I had not seen the thing done. *Ach!* It was strange. I thought I had dreamed about it, but then I knew I hadn't. It was the silence, and the crying *mias,* and something inside me which told me it is not good to teach a brute too much. 'Where is he?' I cried out again. 'Show me where is he.'

"The orang wiped the tears from his ugly blue nose and touched me with his big, hairy arm, and then he started to shamble toward the mudbanks where the Frenchman had tied him to give him that little lesson in obedience.

"I was sick, then. That atmosphere turned me all upside down. I knew what had happened. Yes, I knew. My mind had pieced things together like the pieces of a picture puzzle. I knew what Lesohn had done to the brute. I knew the imitative ways of the *mias,* and I knew that Pierre was often drunk—very often drunk. And then there was the knowledge which my skin had strained out of the silence. A cold sweat ran from me as I followed the orang, and I clutched the rifle tight as I got near the mudbank and looked around for something to confirm the horror my soul had sensed. And the proof was there. It was a coat sleeve tied to the tree where the Frenchman had tied the *mias* a week before, and the sleeve wasn't empty. *Nien!* The cords had been tied around the wrist of Pierre Lesohn, and the cords

were very strong. They had stood the strain of the pull, and—and it was there as a proof of what had happened.

"It was all so plain to me. Lesohn must have been drunk, see? Well, while he was drunk it had come into the ugly head of that brute to let Pierre get a thrill from the icicle eyes of the scaly-backed devils in the mud. He had tied Lesohn to the tree, and then he got the rifle and copied the Frenchman by sitting on the veranda to watch for the first one of those things that would find out that Pierre was helpless. It was plain—oh, so plain to me. But the Frenchman, in educating that orang, had forgotten to teach him how to load a rifle. It was unfortunate, was it not? The rifle was empty, and when the dirty brutes came out of the mud, the *mias* could do nothing. *Gott,* no! He just fumbled with the breech and cried like a human being till I came along, and then it was too late."

"What did you do then?" I cried, as the German's heavy bass tones were pursued and throttled by the palpitating silence.

"I did nothing," said Schreiber quietly. "Lesohn had told me what he had done to that brute. Fate—Nemesis —call it what you will—has funny ways. I looked at the orangoutang, and he backed away from me crying. And he looked back a dozen times, still crying, till the jungle swallowed him up. Somewhere out there—" the German waved a hand at the dark forest that was watching and listening—"there is an orangoutang with a tragedy on his mind."

Recipe for Murder

by C. P. DONNEL, JR.

Just as the villa, clamorous with flowers, was not what he had expected, so was its owner a new quality in his calculations. Madame Chalon, at forty, fitted no category of murderess; she was neither Cleopatra nor beldame. A Minerva of a woman, he told himself instantly, whose large, liquid eyes were but a shade lighter than the cobalt blue of the Mediterranean twinkling outside the tall windows of the salon where they sat.

Not quite a Minerva, he decided upon closer inspection. Her cheeks had the peach bloom of eighteen, and she was of a roundness, a smoothness, a desirability that rendered her, if less regal, infinitely more interesting. An ungraceful woman of her weight might be considered as journeying toward stoutness, but with Madame Chalon, he knew by instinct, the body was static with regard to weight and outline, and she would be at sixty what she was this day, neither more nor less.

"Dubonnet, Inspector Miron?" As he spoke, she prepared to pour. His reflex of hesitation lit a dim glow of amusement in her eyes, which her manners prevented from straying to her lips.

"Thank you." Annoyed with himself, he spoke forcefully.

Madame Chalon made a small, barely perceptible point of drinking first, as though to say, "See, M. Miron, you are quite safe." It was neat. Too neat?

With a tiny smile now: "You have called about my poisoning of my husbands," she stated flatly.

"Madame!" Again he hesitated, nonplused. "Madame, I . . ."

"You must already have visited the Prefecture. All Villefranche believes it," she said placidly.

He adjusted his composure to an official calm. "Madame, I come to ask permission to disinter the body of M. Charles Wesser, deceased January 1939, and M. Etienne Chalon, deceased May 1946, for official analysis of certain organs. You have already refused Sergeant Luchaire of the local station this permission. Why?"

"Luchaire is a type without politeness. I found him repulsive. He is, unlike you, without finesse. I refuse the attitude of the man, not the law." She raised the small glass to her full lips. "I shall not refuse you, Inspector Miron." Her eyes were almost admiring.

"You are most flattering."

"Because," she continued gently, "I am quite sure, knowing the methods of you Paris police, that the disinterment has already been conducted secretly." She waited for his color to deepen, affecting not to notice the change. "And the analyses," she went on, as though there had been no break, "completed. You are puzzled. You found nothing. So now you, new to the case, wish to estimate me, my character, my capacity for self-control—and incidentally your own chances of maneuvering me into talk that will guide you in the direction of my guilt."

So accurately did these darts strike home that it would be the ultimate stupidity to deny the wounds. Better a disarming frankness, Miron decided quickly. "Quite true, Madame Chalon. True to the letter. But—" he regarded her closely—"when one loses two

husbands of some age—but not old—to a fairly violent gastric disturbance, each within two years of marriage, each of a substantial fortune and leaving all to the widow . . . you see . . . ?"

"Of course." Madame Chalon went to the window, let her soft profile, the grand line of her bosom be silhouetted against the blue water. "Would you care for a full confession, Inspector Miron?" She was very much woman, provocative woman, and her tone, just short of caressing, warned Miron to keep a grip on himself.

"If you would care to make one, Madame Chalon," he said, as casually as he could. A dangerous woman. A consumedly dangerous woman.

"Then I shall oblige." Madame Chalon was not smiling. Through the open window a vagrant whiff of air brought him the scent of her. Or was it the scent of the garden? Caution kept his hand from his notebook. Impossible that she would really talk so easily. And yet . . .

"You know something of the art of food, M. Miron?"

"I am from Paris, you remember?"

"And love, too?"

"As I said, I am from Paris."

"Then—" the bosom swelled with her long breath—"I can tell you that I, Hortense Eugenie Villerois Wesser Chalon, did slowly and deliberately, with full purpose, kill and murder my first husband, M. Wesser, aged 57, and likewise my second, M. Chalon, aged 65."

"For some reason, no doubt." Was this a dream? Or insanity?

"M. Wesser I married through persuasion of family. I was no longer a girl. M. Wesser, I learned within a fortnight, was a pig—a pig of insatiable appetites. A crude man, Inspector; a belcher, a braggart, cheater of the poor, deceiver of the innocent. A gobbler of food, an untidy man of unappetizing habits—in short, with all the revolting faults of advancing age and none of its tenderness or dignity. Also, because of these things, his stomach was no longer strong."

Having gone thoroughly into the matter of M. Wesser in Paris and obtained much the same picture, he nodded. "And M. Chalon?"

"Older—as I was older when I wed him."

With mild irony. "And also with a weak stomach?"

"No doubt. Say, rather a weak will. Perhaps less brutish than Wesser. Perhaps, *au fond,* worse, for he knew too many among the Germans here. Why did they take pains to see that we had the very best, the most unobtainable of foods and wines, when, daily, children fainted in the street? Murderess I may be, Inspector, but also a Frenchwoman. So I decided without remorse that Chalon should die, as Wesser died."

Very quietly, not to disturb the thread. "How, Madame Chalon?"

She turned, her face illuminated by a smile. "You are familiar, perhaps with such dishes as *'Dindonneau Forci aux Marrons'*? Or *'Supremes de Volaille à l'Indienne'*? Or *'Tournedos Mascotte'*? Or *'Omelette en Surprise à la Napolitaine'*? Or *'Potage Bagration Gras,' 'Aubergines à la Turcque,' 'Chaud-Froid de Cailles en Belle Vue,'* or . . . ?"

"Stop, Madame Chalon! I am simultaneously ravenous and smothering in food. Such richness of food! Such . . ."

"You asked my methods, Inspector Miron. I used these dishes and a hundred others. And in each of them, I concealed a bit of . . ." Her voice broke suddenly.

Inspector Miron, by a mighty effort, studied his hand as he finished his Dubonnet. "You concealed a bit of what, Madame Chalon?"

"You have investigated me. You know who was my father."

"Jean-Marie Villerois, chef superb, matchless disciple of the matchless Escoffier. Once called Escoffier's sole worthy successor."

"Yes. And before I was twenty-two, my father—just before his death—admitted that outside of a certain

negligible weakness in the matter of braising, he would not be ashamed to own me as his equal."

"Most interesting. I bow to you." Miron's nerves tightened at this handsome woman's faculty for irrelevancy. "But you said you concealed in each of these incomparable dishes a bit of . . . ?"

Madame Chalon turned her back to him. Fine shoulders, he noted; a waist not to be ignored; hips that delighted. She addressed the sea: "A bit of my art, and no more. That and no more, Inspector. The art of Escoffier, or Villerois. What man like Wesser or Chalon could resist? Three, four times a day I fed them rich food of the richest; varied irresistibly. I forced them to gorge to bursting, sleep, gorge again; and drink too much wine that they might gorge still more. How could they, at their ages, live—even as long as they did?"

A silence like the ticking of a far-off clock. "And love, Madame Chalon? Forgive me, but it was you who mentioned it."

"Rich food breeds love—or the semblancé of it. What they called love, Inspector. They had me. Nor did I discourage them having also some little friends. And so they died—M. Wesser, aged 57, M. Chalon, aged 65. That is all."

Another silence, one that hummed. Inspector Miron stood up, so abruptly that she started, whirled. She was paler.

"You will come with me to Nice this evening, Madame Chalon."

"To the police station, Inspector Miron?"

"To the Casino, Madame Chalon. For champagne and music. We shall talk some more."

"But Inspector Miron . . . !"

"Listen to me, Madame. I am a bachelor. Of forty-four. Not too bad to look at, I have been told. I have a sum put away. I am not a great catch, but still, not one to be despised." He looked into her eyes. "I wish to die."

He straightened his shoulders, set his figure at its

best as Madame Chalon's eloquent eyes roamed over him in the frankest of frank appraisals.

"The diets," said Madame Chalon finally and thoughtfully, "if used in moderation, are not necessarily fatal. Would you care to kiss my hand, Inspector Miron?"

Nunc Dimittis

by ROALD DAHL

It is nearly midnight, and I can see that if I don't make a start with writing this story now, I never shall. All evening I have been sitting here trying to force myself to begin, but the more I have thought about it, the more appalled and ashamed and distressed I have become by the whole thing.

My idea—and I believe it was a good one—was to try, by a process of confession and analysis, to discover a reason or at any rate some justification for my outrageous behavior toward Janet de Pelagia. I wanted, essentially, to address myself to an imaginary and sympathetic listener, a kind of mythical *you,* someone gentle and understanding to whom I might tell unashamedly every detail of this unfortunate episode. I can only hope that I am not too upset to make a go of it.

If I am to be quite honest with myself, I suppose I shall have to admit that what is disturbing me most is not so much the sense of my own shame, or even the

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hurt that I have inflicted upon poor Janet; it is the knowledge that I have made a monstrous fool of myself and that all my friends—if I can still call them that—all those warm and lovable people who used to come so often to my house, must now be regarding me as nothing but a vicious, vengeful old man. Yes, that surely hurts. When I say to you that my friends were my whole life—everything, absolutely everything in it—then perhaps you will begin to understand.

Will you? I doubt it—unless I digress for a minute to tell you roughly the sort of person I am.

Well—let me see. Now that I come to think of it, I suppose I am, after all, a type; a rare one, mark you, but nevertheless a quite definite type—the wealthy, leisurely, middle-aged man of culture, adored (I choose the word carefully) by his many friends for his charm, his money, his air of scholarship, his generosity and, I sincerely hope, for himself also. You will find him (this type) only in the big capitals, London, Paris, New York; of that I am certain. The money he has was earned by his dead father whose memory he is inclined to despise. This is not his fault, for there is something in his make-up that compels him secretly to look down upon all people who never had the wit to learn the difference between Rockingham and Spode, Waterford and Venetian, Sheraton and Chippendale, Monet and Manet, or even Pommard and Montrachet.

He is, therefore, a connoisseur, possessing above all things an exquisite taste. His Constables, Boningtons, Lautrecs, Redons, Veuillards, Mathew Smiths are as fine as anything in the Tate; and because they are so fabulous and beautiful, they create an atmosphere of suspense around him in the home, something tantalizing, breathtaking, faintly frightening—frightening to think that he has the power and the right, if he feels inclined, to slash, tear, plunge his fist right through a superb Dedham Vale, a Mont Saint-Victoire, an Arles corn field, a Tahiti maiden, a portrait of Madame Cézanne. And from the walls on which these wonders

hang there issues a little golden glow of splendor, a subtle emanation of grandeur in which he lives and moves and entertains with a sly nonchalance that is not entirely unpracticed.

He is invariably a bachelor, yet he never appears to get entangled with the women who surround him, who love him so dearly. It is just possible—and this you may or may not have noticed—that there is a frustration, a discontent, a regret somewhere inside him. Even a slight aberration.

I don't think I need say any more. I have been very frank. You should know me well enough by now to judge me fairly—and dare I hope it?—to sympathize with me when you hear my story. You may even decide that much of the blame for what has happened should be placed, not upon me, but upon a lady called Gladys Ponsonby. After all, she was the one who started it. Had I not escorted Gladys Ponsonby back to her house that night nearly six months ago, and had she not spoken so freely to me about certain people, certain things, then this tragic business could never have taken place.

It was last December, if I remember rightly, and I had been dining with the Ashendens in that lovely house of theirs that overlooks the southern fringe of Regents Park. There were a fair number of people there, but Gladys Ponsonby was the only one beside myself who had come alone. So when it was time for us to leave, I naturally offered to see her safely back to her house. She accepted and we left together in my car; but unfortunately, when we arrived at her place she insisted that I come in and have "one for the road," as she put it. I didn't wish to seem stuffy, so I told the chauffeur to wait and followed her in.

Gladys Ponsonby is an unusually short woman, certainly not more than four feet nine or ten, maybe even less than that—one of those tiny persons who gives me, when I am beside her, the comical, rather wobbly feeling that I am standing on a chair. She is a widow,

a few years younger than I—maybe fifty-three or four, and it is possible that thirty years ago she was quite a fetching little thing. But now the face is loose and puckered with nothing distinctive about it whatsoever. The individual features, the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the chin, are buried in the folds of fat around the puckered little face and one does not notice them. Except perhaps a mouth, which reminds me—I cannot help it—of a salmon.

In the living room, as she gave me my brandy, I noticed that her hand was a trifle unsteady. The lady is tired, I told myself, so I mustn't stay long. We sat down together on the sofa and for a while discussed the Ashendens' party and the people who were there. Finally I got up to go.

"Sit down, Lionel," she said. "Have another brandy."

"No, really, I must go."

"Sit down and don't be so stuffy. *I'm* having another one, and the least you can do is keep me company while I drink it."

I watched her as she walked over to the sideboard, this tiny woman, faintly swaying, holding her glass out in front of her with both hands as though it were an offering; and the sight of her walking like that, so incredibly short and squat and stiff, suddenly gave me the ludicrous notion that she had no legs at all above the knees.

"Lionel, what are you chuckling about?" She half turned to look at me as she poured the drink, and some of it slopped over the side of the glass.

"Nothing, my dear. Nothing at all."

"Well, stop it, and tell me what you think of my new portrait." She indicated a large canvas hanging over the fireplace that I had been trying to avoid with my eye ever since I entered the room. It was a hideous thing, painted, as I well knew, by a man who was now all the rage in London, a very mediocre painter called John Royden. It was a full length portrait of Gladys Lady Ponsonby, painted with a certain technical

cunning that made her out to be a tall and quite alluring creature.

"Charming," I said.

"Isn't it, though! I'm so glad you like it."

"Quite charming."

"I think John Royden is a genius. Don't you think he's a genius, Lionel?"

"Well—that might be going a bit far."

"You mean it's a little early to say for sure?"

"Exactly."

"But listen, Lionel—and I think this will surprise you. John Royden is so sought after now that he won't even *consider* painting anyone for less than a thousand guineas!"

"Really?"

"Oh yes! And everyone's queuing up, simply *queuing up* to get themselves done."

"Most interesting."

"Now take your Mr. Cézanne or whatever his name is. I'll bet *he* never got that sort of money in *his* lifetime."

"Never."

"And you say *he* was a genius?"

"Sort of—yes."

"Then so is Royden," she said, settling herself again on the sofa. "The money proves it."

She sat silent for a while, sipping her brandy, and I couldn't help noticing how the unsteadiness of her hand was causing the rim of the glass to jog against her lower lip. She knew I was watching her, and without turning her head she swiveled her eyes and glanced at me cautiously out of the corners of them. "A penny for your thoughts?"

Now, if there is one phrase in the world I cannot abide, it is this. It gives me an actual physical pain in the chest and I begin to cough.

"Come on, Lionel. A penny for them."

I shook my head, quite unable to answer. She turned away abruptly and placed the brandy glass on a small

table to her left; and the manner in which she did this seemed to suggest—I don't know why—that she felt rebuffed and was now clearing the decks for action. I waited, rather uncomfortable in the silence that followed, and because I had no conversation left in me, I made a great play about smoking my cigar, studying the ash intently and blowing the smoke up slowly toward the ceiling. But she made no move. There was beginning to be something about this lady I did not much like, a mischievous, brooding air that made me want to get up quickly and go away. When she looked around again, she was smiling at me slyly with those little buried eyes of hers, but the mouth—oh, just like a salmon's—was absolutely rigid.

"Lionel, I think I'll tell you a secret."

"Really, Gladys, I simply must get home."

"Don't be frightened, Lionel. I won't embarrass you. You look so frightened all of a sudden."

"I'm not very good at secrets."

"I've been thinking," she said, "you're such a great expert on pictures, this ought to interest you." She sat quite still except for her fingers which were moving all the time. She kept them perpetually twisting and twisting around each other, and they were like a bunch of small white snakes wriggling in her lap.

"Don't you want to hear my secret, Lionel?"

"It isn't that, you know. It's just that it's so awfully late . . ."

"This is probably the best kept secret in London. A woman's secret. I suppose it's known to about—let me see—about thirty or forty women altogether. And not a single man. Except him, of course—John Royden."

I didn't wish to encourage her, so I said nothing.

"But first of all, promise—*promise* you won't tell a soul?"

"Dear me!"

"You *promise,* Lionel?"

"Yes, Gladys, all right, I promise."

"Good! Now listen." She reached for the brandy glass and settled back comfortably in the far corner of the sofa. "I suppose you know John Royden paints only women?"

"I didn't."

"And they're always full-length portraits, either standing or sitting—like mine there. Now take a good look at it, Lionel. Do you see how beautifully the dress is painted?"

"Well . . ."

"Go over and look carefully, please."

I got up reluctantly and went over and examined the painting. To my surprise I noticed that the paint of the dress was laid on so heavily it was actually raised out from the rest of the picture. It was a trick, quite effective in its way, but neither difficult to do nor entirely original.

"You see?" she said. "It's thick, isn't it, where the dress is?"

"Yes."

"But there's a bit more to it than that, you know, Lionel. I think the best way is to describe what happened the very first time I went along for a sitting."

Oh, what a bore this woman is, I thought, and how can I get away?

"That was about a year ago, and I remember how excited I was to be going in to the studio of the great painter. I dressed myself up in a wonderful new thing I'd just got from Norman Hartnell, and a special little red hat, and off I went. Mr. Royden met me at the door, and of course I was fascinated by him at once. He had a small pointed beard and thrilling blue eyes, and he wore a black velvet jacket. The studio was huge, with red velvet sofas and velvet chairs—he loves velvet—and velvet curtains and even a velvet carpet on the floor. He sat me down, gave me a drink and came straight to the point. He told me about how he painted quite differently from other artists. In his opinion, he

said, there was only one method of attaining perfection when painting a woman's body and I mustn't be shocked when I heard what it was.

" 'I don't think I'll be shocked, Mr. Royden,' I told him.

" 'I'm sure you won't either,' he said. He had the most marvelous white teeth and they sort of shone through his beard when he smiled. 'You see, it's like this,' he went on. 'You examine any painting you like of a woman—I don't care who it's by—and you'll see that although the dress may be well painted, there is an effect of artificiality, of flatness about the whole thing, as though the dress were draped over a log of wood. And you know why?'

" 'No, Mr. Royden, I don't.'

" 'Because the painters themselves didn't really know what was underneath!' "

Gladys Ponsonby paused to take a few more sips of brandy. "Don't look so startled, Lionel," she said to me. "There's nothing wrong about this. Keep quiet and let me finish. So then Mr. Royden said, 'That's why I insist on painting my subjects first of all in the nude.'

" 'Good Heavens, Mr. Royden!' I exclaimed.

" 'If you object to that, I don't mind making a slight concession, Lady Ponsonby,' he said. 'But I prefer it the other way.'

" 'Really, Mr. Royden, I don't know.'

" 'And when I've done you like that,' he went on, 'we'll have to wait a few weeks for the paint to dry. Then you come back and I paint on your underclothing. And when that's dry, I paint on the dress. You see, it's quite simple.' "

"The man's an absolute bounder!" I cried.

"No, Lionel, no! You're quite wrong. If only you could have heard him, so charming about it all, so genuine and sincere. Anyone could see he really *felt* what he was saying."

"I tell you, Gladys, the man's a bounder!"

"Don't be so silly, Lionel. And anyway, let me finish. The first thing I told him was that my husband (who was alive then) would never agree.

" 'Your husband need never know,' he answered. 'Why trouble him. No one knows my secret except the women I've painted.'

"And when I protested a bit more, I remember he said, 'My dear Lady Ponsonby, there's nothing immoral about this. Art is only immoral when practiced by amateurs. It's the same with medicine. You wouldn't refuse to undress before your doctor, would you?'

"I told him I would if I'd gone to him for earache. That made him laugh. But he kept on at me about it and I must say he was very convincing, so after a while I gave in and that was that. So now Lionel, my sweet, you know the secret." She got up and went over to fetch herself some more brandy.

"Gladys, is this really true?"

"Of course it's true."

"You mean to say that's the way he paints all his subjects?"

"Yes. And the joke is the husbands never know anything about it. All they see is a nice fully clothed portrait of their wives. Of course, there's nothing wrong with being painted in the nude; artists do it all the time. But our silly husbands have a way of objecting to that sort of thing."

"By gad, the fellow's got a nerve!"

"I think he's a genius."

"I'll bet he got the idea from Goya."

"Nonsense, Lionel."

"Of course he did. But listen, Gladys. I want you to tell me something. Did you by any chance know about this . . . this peculiar technique of Royden's before you went to him?"

When I asked the question she was in the act of pouring the brandy, and she hesitated and turned her head to look at me, a little silky smile moving the

corners of her mouth. "Damn you, Lionel," she said. "You're far too clever. You never let me get away with a single thing."

"So you knew?"

"Of course. Hermione Girdlestone told me."

"Exactly as I thought!"

"There's still nothing wrong."

"Nothing," I said. "Absolutely nothing." I could see it all quite clearly now. This Royden was indeed a bounder, practicing as neat a piece of psychological trickery as ever I'd seen. The man knew only too well that there was a whole set of wealthy indolent women in the city who got up at noon and spent the rest of the day trying to relieve their boredom with bridge and canasta and shopping until the cocktail hour came along. All they craved was a little excitement, something out of the ordinary, and the more expensive the better. Why—the news of an entertainment like this would spread through their ranks like smallpox. I could just see the great plump Hermione Girdlestone leaning over the canasta table and telling them about it. . . . "But my dear, it's *simp*-ly fascinating . . . I can't *tell* you how intriguing it is . . . *much* more fun than going to your doctor . . ."

"You won't tell anyone, Lionel, will you? You promised."

"No, of course not. But now I must go, Gladys, I really must."

"Don't be so silly. I'm just beginning to enjoy myself. Stay till I've finished this drink anyway."

I sat patiently on the sofa while she went on with her interminable brandy sipping. The little buried eyes still watching me out of their corners in that mischievous, canny way, and I had a strong feeling that the woman was now hatching out some further unpleasantness or scandal. There was the look of serpents in those eyes and a queer curl around the mouth; and in the air—although maybe I only imagined it—the faint smell of danger.

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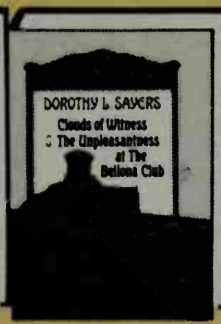

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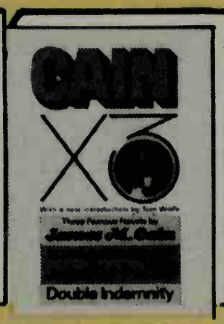

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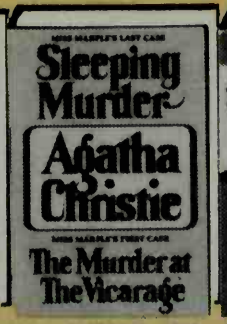

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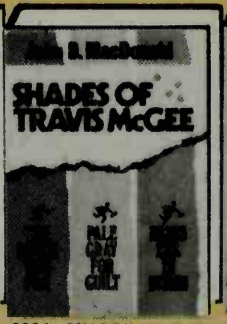

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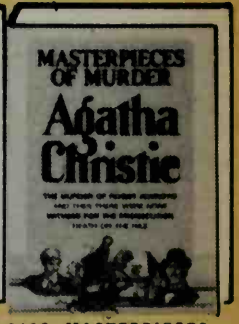

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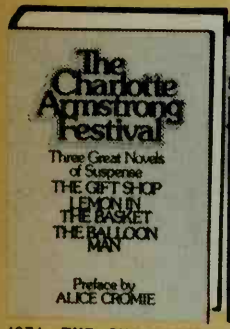

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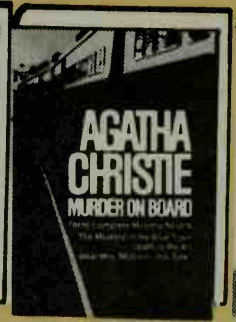

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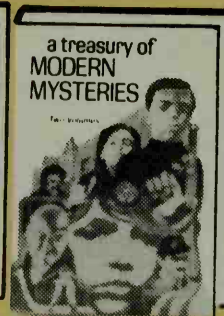

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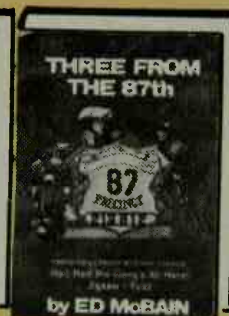

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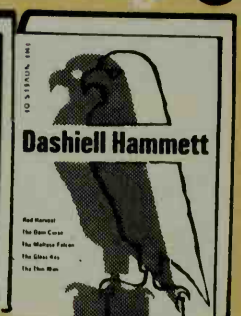

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Then suddenly, so suddenly that I jumped, she said, "Lionel, what's this I hear about you and Janet de Pelagia?"

"Now, Gladys, please . . ."

"Lionel, you're blushing!"

"Nonsense."

"Don't tell me the old bachelor has really taken a tumble at last?"

"Gladys, this is too absurd." I began making movements to go, but she put a hand on my knee and stopped me.

"Don't you know by now, Lionel, that there *are* no secrets?"

"Janet is a fine girl."

"You can hardly call her a *girl.*" Gladys Ponsonby paused, staring down into the large brandy glass that she held cupped in both hands. "But of course, I agree with you, Lionel, she's a wonderful person in every way. Except," and now she spoke very slowly, "except that she *does* say some rather peculiar things occasionally."

"What sort of things?"

"Just things, you know—things about people. About you."

"What did she say about me?"

"Nothing at all, Lionel. It wouldn't interest you."

"What did she say about me?"

"It's not even worth repeating, honestly it isn't. It's only that it struck me as being rather odd at the time."

"Gladys—what did she say?" While I waited for her to answer, I could feel the sweat breaking out all over my body.

"Well now, let me see. Of course, she was only joking or I couldn't dream of telling you, but I suppose she *did* say how it was all a wee bit of a bore."

"What was?"

"Sort of going out to dinner with you nearly every night—that kind of thing."

"She said it was a bore?"

"Yes." Gladys Ponsonby drained the brandy glass with one last big gulp, and sat up straight. "If you really want to know, she said it was a crashing bore. And then . . ."

"What did she say then?"

"Now look, Lionel—there's no need to get excited. I'm only telling you this for your own good."

"Then please hurry up and tell it."

"It's just that I happened to be playing canasta with Janet this afternoon and I asked her if she was free to dine with me tomorrow. She said no, she wasn't."

"Go on."

"Well—actually what she said was, 'I'm dining with that crashing old bore Lionel Lampson.' "

"Janet said that?"

"Yes, Lionel dear."

"What else?"

"Now, that's enough. I don't think I should tell the rest."

"Finish it, please!"

"Why, Lionel, don't keep shouting at me like that. Of course I'll tell you if you insist. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't consider myself a true friend if I didn't. Don't you think it's the sign of true friendship when two people like us . . ."

"Gladys! *Please* hurry."

"Good Heavens, you must give me time to *think*. Let me see now—so far as I can remember, what she *actually* said was this—" and Gladys Ponsonby, sitting upright on the sofa with her feet not quite touching the floor, her eyes away from me now, looking at the wall, began cleverly to mimic the deep tone of that voice I knew so well—" 'Such a bore, my dear, because with Lionel one can *always* tell exactly what will happen *right* from beginning to end. For dinner we'll go to the Savoy Grill—it's *always* the Savoy Grill—and for two hours I'll have to listen to the pompous old . . . I mean I'll have to listen to him droning away about pictures and porcelain—*always* pictures and porcelain. Then in the

taxi going home he'll reach out for my hand, and he'll lean closer, and I'll get a whiff of stale cigar smoke and brandy, and he'll start burbling about how he wished—oh how he wished he was just twenty years younger. And I will say "Could you open a window, do you mind?" And when we arrive at my house I'll tell him to keep the taxi, but he'll pretend he hasn't heard and pay it off quickly. And then at the front door, while I fish for my key, he'll stand beside me with a sort of silly spaniel look in his eyes, and I'll slowly put the key in the lock, and slowly turn it, and then—very quickly, before he has time to move—I'll say good night and skip inside and shut the door behind me . . .' Why Lionel! What's the matter, dear? You look positively ill. . . ."

At that point, mercifully, I must have swooned clear away. I can remember practically nothing of the rest of that terrible night except for a vague and disturbing suspicion that when I regained consciousness I broke down completely and permitted Gladys Ponsonby to comfort me in a variety of different ways. Later, I believe I walked out of the house and was driven home, but I remained more or less unconscious of everything around me until I woke up in my bed the next morning.

I awoke feeling weak and shaken. I lay still with my eyes closed, trying to piece together the events of the night before—Gladys Ponsonby's living room, Gladys on the sofa sipping brandy, the little puckered face, the mouth that was like a salmon's mouth, the things she had said. . . . What was it she had said. Ah yes. About me. My God, yes! About Janet and me! Those outrageous, unbelievable remarks! Could Janet really have made them? Could she?

I can remember with what terrifying swiftness my hatred of Janet de Pelagia now began to grow. It all happened in a few minutes—a sudden, violent welling up of a hatred that filled me till I thought I was going to burst. I tried to dismiss it but it was on me like a

fever, and in no time at all I was hunting around, as would some filthy gangster, for a method of revenge.

A curious way to behave, you may say, for a man such as I; to which I would answer—no, not really, if you consider the circumstances. To my mind, this was the sort of thing that could drive a man to murder. As a matter of fact, had it not been for a small sadistic streak that caused me to seek a more subtle and painful punishment for my victim, I might well have become a murderer myself. But mere killing, I decided, was too good for this woman, and far too crude for my own taste. So I began looking for a superior alternative.

I am not normally a scheming person; I consider it an odious business and have had no practice in it whatsoever. But fury and hate can concentrate a man's mind to an astonishing degree, and in no time at all a plot was forming and unfolding in my head—a plot so superior and exciting that I began to be quite carried away at the idea of it. By the time I had filled in the details and overcome one or two minor objections, my brooding vengeful mood had changed to one of extreme elation, and I remember how I started bouncing up and down absurdly on my bed and clapping my hands. The next thing I knew I had the telephone directory on my lap and was searching eagerly for a name. I found it, picked up the phone, and dialed the number.

"Hello," I said. "Mr. Royden? Mr. John Royden?"

"Speaking."

Well—it wasn't difficult to persuade the man to call around and see me for a moment. I had never met him, but of course he knew my name, both as an important collector of paintings and as a person of some consequence in society. I was a big fish for him to catch.

"Let me see now, Mr. Lampson," he said, "I think I ought to be free in about a couple of hours. Will that be all right?"

I told him it would be fine, gave my address, and rang off.

I jumped out of bed. It was really remarkable how exhilarated I felt all of a sudden. One moment I had been in agony of despair, contemplating murder and suicide and I don't know what; the next, I was whistling an aria from Puccini in my bath. Every now and again I caught myself rubbing my hands together in a devilish fashion, and once, during my exercises, when I overbalanced doing a double-knee-bend, I sat on the floor and giggled like a schoolboy.

At the appointed time Mr. John Royden was shown in to my library and I got up to meet him. He was a small neat man with a slightly ginger goatee beard. He wore a black velvet jacket, a rust-brown tie, a red pullover, and black suède shoes. I shook his small neat hand.

"Good of you to come along so quickly, Mr. Royden."

"Not at all, sir." The man's lips—like the lips of nearly all bearded men—looked wet and naked, a trifle indecent, shining pink in among all that hair. After telling him again how much I admired his work, I got straight down to business.

"Mr. Royden," I said. "I have a rather unusual request to make of you, something quite personal in its way."

"Yes, Mr. Lampson?" He was sitting in the chair opposite me and he cocked his head over to one side, quick and perky like a bird.

"Of course, I know I can trust you to be discreet about anything I say."

"Absolutely, Mr. Lampson."

"All right. Now my proposition is this: there is a certain lady in town here whose portrait I would like you to paint. I very much want to possess a fine painting of her. But there are certain complications. For example, I have my own reasons for not wishing her to know that it is I who am commissioning the portrait."

"You mean . . ."

"Exactly, Mr. Royden. That is exactly what I mean. As a man of the world I'm sure you will understand."

He smiled, a crooked little smile that only just came through his beard, and he nodded his head knowingly up and down.

"Is it not possible," I said, "that a man might be—how shall I put it?—extremely fond of a lady and at the same time have his own good reasons for not wishing her to know about it yet?"

"More than possible, Mr. Lampson."

"Sometimes a man has to stalk his quarry with great caution, waiting patiently for the right moment to reveal himself."

"Precisely, Mr. Lampson."

"There are better ways of catching a bird than by chasing it through the woods."

"Yes indeed, Mr. Lampson."

"Putting salt on its tail, for instance."

"Ha-ha!"

"All right, Mr. Royden. I think you understand. Now—do you happen by any chance to know a lady called Janet de Pelagia?"

"Janet de Pelagia? Let me see now—yes. At least, what I mean is I've heard of her. I couldn't exactly say I know her."

"That's a pity. It makes it a little more difficult. Do you think you could get to meet her—perhaps at a cocktail party or something like that?"

"Shouldn't be too tricky, Mr. Lampson."

"Good, because what I suggest is this: that you go up to her and tell her she's the sort of model you've been searching for for years—just the right face, the right figure, the right colored eyes. You know the sort of thing. Then ask her if she'd mind sitting for you free of charge. Say you'd like to do a picture of her for next year's Academy. I feel sure she'd be delighted to help you, and honored too, if I may say so. Then you will paint her and exhibit the picture and deliver it to me

after the show is over. No one but you need know that I have bought it."

The small round eyes of Mr. John Royden were watching me shrewdly, I thought, and the head was again cocked over to one side. He was sitting on the edge of his chair, and in this position, with the pull-over making a flash of red down his front, he reminded me of a robin on a twig listening for a suspicious noise.

"There's really nothing wrong about it at all," I said. "Just call it—if you like—a harmless little conspiracy being perpetrated by a . . . well . . . by a rather romantic old man."

"I know, Mr. Lampson, I know . . ." He still seemed to be hesitating, so I said quickly, "I'll be glad to pay you double your usual fee."

That did it. The man actually licked his lips. "Well, Mr. Lampson, I must say this sort of thing's not really in my line, you know. But all the same, it'd be a very heartless man who refused such a—shall I say such a romantic assignment?"

"I should like a full length portrait, Mr. Royden, please. A large canvas—let me see—about twice the size of that Manet on the wall there."

"About sixty by thirty-six?"

"Yes. And I should like her to be standing. That, to my mind, is her most graceful attitude."

"I quite understand, Mr. Lampson. And it'll be a pleasure to paint such a lovely lady."

I expect it will, I told myself. The way you go about it, my boy, I'm quite sure it will. But I said, "All right, Mr. Royden, then I'll leave it all to you. And don't forget, please—this is a little secret between ourselves."

When he had gone I forced myself to sit still and take twenty-five deep breaths. Nothing else would have restrained me from jumping up and shouting for joy like an idiot. I have never in my life felt so exhilarated. My plan was working! The most difficult part was al-

ready accomplished. There would be a wait now, a long wait. The way this man painted, it would take him several months to finish the picture. Well, I would just have to be patient, that's all.

I now decided on the spur of the moment that it would be best if I were to go abroad in the interim; and the very next morning, after sending a message to Janet (with whom, you will remember, I was due to dine that night) telling her I had been called away, I left for Italy.

There, as always, I had a delightful time, marred only by a constant nervous excitement caused by the thought of returning to the scene of action.

I eventually arrived back, four months later, in July, on the day after the opening of the Royal Academy, and I found to my relief that everything had gone according to plan during my absence. The picture of Janet de Pelagia had been painted and hung in the Exhibition, and it was already the subject of much favorable comment both by the critics and the public. I myself refrained from going to see it but Royden told me on the telephone that there had been several inquiries by persons who wished to buy it, all of whom had been informed that it was not for sale. When the show was over, Royden delivered the picture to my house and received his money.

I immediately had it carried up to my workroom, and with mounting excitement I began to examine it closely. The man had painted her standing up in a black evening dress and there was a red plush sofa in the background. Her left hand was resting on the back of a heavy chair, also of red plush, and there was a huge crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

My God, I thought, what a hideous thing! The portrait itself wasn't so bad. He had caught the woman's expression—the forward drop of the head, the wide blue eyes, the large, ugly-beautiful mouth with the trace of a smile in one corner. He had flattered

her, of course. There wasn't a wrinkle on her face or the slightest suggestion of fat under her chin. I bent forward to examine the painting of the dress. Yes—here the paint was thicker, much thicker. At this point, unable to wait another moment, I threw off my coat and prepared to go to work.

I should mention here that I am myself an expert cleaner and restorer of paintings. The cleaning, particularly, is a comparatively simple process provided one has patience and a gentle touch, and those professionals who make such a secret of their trade and charge such shocking prices get no business from me. Where my own pictures are concerned I always do the job myself.

I poured out the turpentine and added a few drops of alcohol. I dipped a small wad of cotton-wool in the mixture, squeezed it out, and then gently, so very gently, with a circular motion, I began to work upon the black paint of the dress. I could only hope that Royden had allowed each layer to dry thoroughly before applying the next, otherwise the two would merge and the process I had in mind would be impossible. Soon I would know. I was working on one square inch of black dress somewhere around the lady's stomach and I took plenty of time, cautiously testing and teasing the paint, adding a drop or two more of alcohol to my mixture, testing again, adding another drop until finally it was just strong enough to loosen the pigment.

For perhaps a whole hour I worked away on this little square of black, proceeding more and more gently as I came closer to the layer below. Then, a tiny pink spot appeared, and gradually it spread and spread until the whole of my square inch was a clear shining patch of pink. Quickly I neutralized with pure turps.

So far so good. I knew now that the black paint could be removed without disturbing what was underneath. So long as I was patient and industrious I would

easily be able to take it all off. Also, I had discovered the right mixture to use and just how hard I could safely rub, so things should go much quicker now.

I must say it was rather an amusing business. I worked first from the middle of her body downward, and as the lower half of her dress came away bit by bit onto my little wads of cotton, a queer pink undergarment began to reveal itself. I didn't for the life of me know what the thing was called, but it was a formidable apparatus constructed of what appeared to be a strong thick elastic material, and its purpose was apparently to contain and to compress the woman's bulging figure into a neat streamlined shape, giving a quite false impression of slimness. As I traveled lower and lower down, I came upon a striking arrangement of suspenders, also pink, which were attached to the elastic armor and hung downward four or five inches to grip the tops of the stockings.

Quite fantastic the whole thing seemed to me as I stepped back a pace to survey it. It gave me a strong sense of having somehow been cheated; for had I not, during all these past months, been admiring the sylph-like figure of this lady? She was a faker. No question about it. But do many other females practice this sort of deception, I wondered. I knew, of course, that in the days of stays and corsets it was usual for ladies to strap themselves up; yet for some reason I was under the impression that nowadays all they had to do was diet.

When the whole of the lower half of the dress had come away, I immediately turned my attention to the upper portion, working my way slowly upward from the lady's middle. Here, around the midriff, there was an area of naked flesh; then higher up upon the bosom itself and actually containing it, I came upon a contrivance made of some heavy black material edged with frilly lace. This, I knew very well, was the brassière—another formidable appliance upheld by an arrangement of black straps as skillfully and scientifically rigged as the supporting cables of a suspension bridge.

Dear me, I thought. One lives and learns.

But now at last the job was finished, and I stepped back again to take a final look at the picture. It was truly an astonishing sight! This woman, Janet de Pelagia, almost life size, standing there in her underwear—in a sort of drawing room, I suppose it was—with a great chandelier above her head and a red plush chair by her side; and she herself—this was the most disturbing part of all—looking so completely unconcerned, with the wide placid blue eyes, the faintly smiling, ugly-beautiful mouth. Also I noticed, with something of a shock, that she was exceedingly bow-legged, like a jockey. I tell you frankly, the whole thing embarrassed me. I felt as though I had no right to be in the room, certainly no right to stare. So after a while I went out and shut the door behind me. It seemed like the only decent thing to do.

Now, for the next and final step! And do not imagine simply because I have not mentioned it lately that my thirst for revenge had in any way diminished during the last few months. On the contrary, it had if anything increased; and with the last act about to be performed, I can tell you I found it hard to contain myself. That night, for example, I didn't even go to bed.

You see, I couldn't wait to get the invitations out. I sat up all night preparing them and addressing the envelopes. There were twenty-two of them in all, and I wanted each to be a personal note. "I'm having a little dinner on Friday night, the twenty-second, at eight. I do hope you can come along . . . I'm so looking forward to seeing you again. . . ."

The first, the most carefully phrased, was to Janet de Pelagia. In it I regretted not having seen her for so long . . . I had been abroad . . . It was time we got together again, etc., etc. The next was to Gladys Ponsonby. Then one to Hermione Lady Girdlestone, another to Princess Bicheno, Mrs. Cudbird, Sir Hubert Kaul, Mrs. Galbally, Peter Euan-Thomas, James Pisker, Sir Eustace Piegrome, Peter van Santen, Elizabeth

Moynihan, Lord Mulherrin, Bertram Sturt, Philip Cornelius, Jack Hill, Lady Akeman, Mrs. Icely, Humphrey King-Howard, Johnny O'Coffey, Mrs. Uvary, and the Dowager Countess of Waxworth.

It was a carefully selected list, containing as it did the most distinguished men, the most brilliant and influential women in the top crust of our society.

I was well aware that a dinner at my house was regarded as quite an occasion; everybody liked to come. And now, as I watched the point of my pen moving swiftly over the paper, I could almost see the ladies in their pleasure picking up their bedside telephones the morning the invitations arrived, shrill voices calling to shriller voices over the wires . . . "Lionel's giving a party . . . he's asked you too? My dear, how nice . . . his food is always *so* good . . . and *such* a lovely man, isn't he though, yes. . . ."

Is that really what they would say? It suddenly occurred to me that it might not be like that at all. More like this perhaps: "I agree, my dear, yes, not a bad old man . . . but a bit of a bore, don't you think? . . . What did you say? . . . dull? But desperately, my dear. You've hit the nail right on the head . . . did you ever hear what Janet de Pelagia once said about him? . . . Ah yes, I thought you'd heard that one . . . screamingly funny, don't you think? . . . poor Janet . . . how she stood it as long as she did I don't know. . . ."

Anyway, I got the invitations off, and within a couple of days everybody with the exception of Mrs. Cudbird and Sir Hubert Kaul, who were away, had accepted with pleasure.

At eight-thirty on the evening of the twenty-second, my large drawing room was filled with people. They stood about the room admiring the pictures, drinking their martinis, talking with loud voices. The women smelled strongly of scent, the men were pink-faced and carefully buttoned up in their dinner jackets. Janet de Pelagia was wearing the same black dress she had used for the portrait, and every time I caught sight of her,

a kind of huge bubble-vision—as in those absurd cartoons—would float up above my head, and in it I would see Janet in her underclothes, the black brassière, the pink elastic belt, the suspenders, the jockey's legs.

I moved from group to group, chatting amiably with them all, listening to their talk. Behind me I could hear Mrs. Galbally telling Sir Eustace Piegrome and James Pisker how the man at the next table to hers at Claridges the night before had had red lipstick on his white mustache. "Simply *plastered* with it," she kept saying, "and the old boy was ninety if he was a day. . . ." On the other side, Lady Girdlestone was telling somebody where one could get truffles cooked in brandy, and I could see Mrs. Icely whispering something to Lord Mulherrin while his Lordship kept shaking his head slowly from side to side like an old and dispirited metronome.

Dinner was announced, and we all moved out.

"My goodness!" they cried as they entered the dining room. "How dark and sinister!"

"I can hardly see a thing!"

"What divine little candles!"

"But Lionel, how romantic!"

There were six very thin candles set about two feet apart from each other down the center of the long table. Their small flames made a little glow of light around the table itself, but left the rest of the room in darkness. It was an amusing arrangement and apart from the fact that it suited my purpose well, it made a pleasant change. The guests soon settled themselves in their right places and the meal began.

They all seemed to enjoy the candlelight and things went famously, though for some reason the darkness caused them to speak much louder than usual. Janet de Pelagia's voice struck me as being particularly strident. She was sitting next to Lord Mulherrin, and I could hear her telling him about the boring time she had had at Cap Ferrat the week before. "Nothing but

Frenchmen," she kept saying. "Nothing but Frenchmen in the whole place. . . ."

For my part, I was watching the candles. They were so thin that I knew it would not be long before they burned down to their bases. Also I was mighty nervous —I will admit that—but at the same time intensely exhilarated, almost to the point of drunkenness. Every time I heard Janet's voice or caught sight of her face shadowed in the light of the candles, a little ball of excitement exploded inside me and I felt the fire of it running under my skin.

They were eating their strawberries when at last I decided the time had come. I took a deep breath and in a loud voice I said, "I'm afraid we'll have to have the lights on now. The candles are nearly finished. Mary," I called. "Oh Mary, switch on the lights will you please."

There was a moment of silence after my announcement. I heard the maid walking over to the door, then the gentle click of the switch and the room was flooded with a blaze of light. They all screwed up their eyes, opened them again, gazed about them.

At that point I got up from my chair and slid quietly from the room, but as I went I saw a sight that I shall never forget as long as I live. It was Janet, with both hands in midair, stopped, frozen rigid, caught in the act of gesticulating toward someone across the table. Her mouth had dropped open two inches and she wore the surprised, not-quite-understanding look of a person who precisely one second before has been shot dead right through the heart.

In the hall outside I paused and listened to the beginning of the uproar, the shrill cries of the ladies and the outraged unbelieving exclamations of the men; and soon there was a great hum of noise with everybody talking or shouting at the same time. Then—and this was the sweetest moment of all—I heard Lord Mulherrin's voice, roaring above the rest, "Here! Someone! Hurry! Give her some water quick!"

Out in the street the chauffeur helped me into my car, and soon we were away from London and bowling merrily along the Great North Road toward this, my other house, which is only ninety-five miles from Town anyway.

The next two days I spent in gloating. I mooned around in a dream of ecstasy, half drowned in my own complacency and filled with a sense of pleasure so great that it constantly gave me pins and needles all along the lower parts of my legs. It wasn't until this morning when Gladys Ponsonby called me on the phone that I suddenly came to my senses and realized I was not a hero at all but an outcast. She informed me—with what I thought was just a trace of relish—that everybody was up in arms, that all of them, all my old and loving friends were saying the most terrible things about me and had sworn never never to speak to me again. Except her, she kept saying. Everybody except her. And didn't I think it would be rather cozy, she asked, if she were to come down and stay with me a few days to cheer me up?

I'm afraid I was too upset by that time even to answer her politely. I put the phone down and went away to weep.

Then at noon today came the final crushing blow. The post arrived, and with it—I can hardly bring myself to write about it, I am so ashamed—came a letter, the sweetest, most tender little note imaginable from none other than Janet de Pelagia herself. She forgave me completely, she wrote, for everything I had done. She knew it was only a joke and I must not listen to the horrid things other people were saying about me. She loved me as she always had and always would to her dying day.

Oh, what a cad, what a brute I felt when I read this! The more so when I found that she had actually sent me by the same post a small present as an added sign of her affection—a half-pound jar of my favorite food of all, fresh caviar.

I can never under any circumstances resist good caviar. It is perhaps my greatest weakness. So although I naturally had no appetite whatsoever for food at dinner time this evening, I must confess I took a few spoonfuls of the stuff in an effort to console myself in my misery. It is even possible that I took a shade too much, because I haven't been feeling any too chipper this last hour or so. Perhaps I ought to go up right away and get myself some bicarbonate of soda. I can easily come back and finish this later, when I'm in better trim.

You know—now I come to think of it, I really do feel rather ill all of a sudden.

The Most Dangerous Game

by RICHARD CONNELL

"Off there to the right—somewhere—is a large island," said Whitney. "It's rather a mystery—"

"What island is it?" Rainsford asked.

"The old charts call it 'Ship-Trap Island,' " Whitney replied. "A suggestive name, isn't it? Sailors have a curious dread of the place. I don't know why. Some superstition—"

"Can't see it," remarked Rainsford, trying to peer through the dank tropical night that was palpable as it pressed its thick warm blackness in upon the yacht.

"You've good eyes," said Whitney, with a laugh, "and I've seen you pick off a moose moving in the brown fall bush at four hundred yards, but even you can't see four miles or so through a moonless Caribbean night."

"Nor four yards," admitted Rainsford. "Ugh! It's like moist velvet."

"It will be light enough in Rio," promised Whitney. "We should make it in a few days. I hope the jaguar guns have come from Purdey's. We should have some good hunting up the Amazon. Great sport, hunting."

"The best sport in the world," agreed Rainsford.

"For the hunter," amended Whitney. "Not for the jaguar."

"Don't talk rot, Whitney," said Rainsford. "You're a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how a jaguar feels?"

"Perhaps the jaguar does," observed Whitney.

"Bah! They've no understanding."

"Even so, I rather think they understand one thing at least—fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death."

"Nonsense," laughed Rainsford. "This hot weather is making you soft, Whitney. Be a realist. The world is made up of two classes—the hunters and the hunted. Luckily, you and I are hunters. Do you think we've passed that island yet?"

"I can't tell in the dark. I hope so."

"Why?" asked Rainsford.

"The place has a reputation—a bad one."

"Cannibals?" suggested Rainsford.

"Hardly. Even cannibals wouldn't live in such a God-forsaken place. But it's got into sailor lore, somehow. Didn't you notice that the crew's nerves seem a bit jumpy today?"

"They were a bit strange, now you mention it. Even Captain Nielsen—"

"Yes, even that tough-minded old Swede, who'd go up to the devil himself and ask him for a light. Those fishy blue eyes held a look I never saw there before. All I could get out of him was, 'This place has an evil name among seafaring men, sir.' Then he said to me, very gravely, 'Don't you feel anything?'—as if the air about us was actually poisonous. Now, you mustn't laugh when I tell you this—I did feel something like a sudden chill.

"There was no breeze. The sea was as flat as a plate-glass window. We were drawing near the island then. What I felt was a—a mental chill—a sort of sudden dread."

"Pure imagination," said Rainsford. "One super-

stitious sailor can taint the whole ship's company with his fear."

"Maybe. But sometimes I think sailors have an extra sense that tells them when they are in danger. Sometimes I think evil is a tangible thing—with wave lengths, just as sound and light have. An evil place can, so to speak, broadcast vibrations of evil. Anyhow, I'm glad we're getting out of this zone. Well, I think I'll turn in now, Rainsford."

"I'm not sleepy," said Rainsford. "I'm going to smoke another pipe up on the after deck."

"Good night, then, Rainsford. See you at breakfast."

"Right. Good night, Whitney."

There was no sound in the night as Rainsford sat there, but the muffled throb of the engine that drove the yacht swiftly through the darkness, and the swish and ripple of the wash of the propeller.

Rainsford, reclining in a steamer chair, indolently puffed on his favorite brier. The sensuous drowsiness of the night was on him. "It's so dark," he thought, "that I could sleep without closing my eyes; the night would be my eyelids—"

An abrupt sound startled him. Off to the right he heard it, and his ears, expert in such matters, could not be mistaken. Again he heard the sound, and again. Somewhere, off in the blackness, someone had fired a gun three times.

Rainsford sprang up and moved quickly to the rail, mystified. He strained his eyes in the direction from which the reports had come, but it was like trying to see through a blanket. He leaped upon the rail and balanced himself there, to get greater elevation; his pipe, striking a rope, was knocked from his mouth. He lunged for it; a short, hoarse cry came from his lips as he realized he had reached too far and had lost his balance. The cry was pinched off short as the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea closed over his head.

He struggled up to the surface and tried to cry out,

but the wash from the speeding yacht slapped him in the face and the salt water in his open mouth made him gag and strangle. Desperately he struck out with strong strokes after the receding lights of the yacht, but he stopped before he had swum fifty feet. A certain cool-headedness had come to him; it was not the first time he had been in a tight place. There was a chance that his cries could be heard by someone aboard the yacht, but that chance was slender, and grew more slender as the yacht raced on. He wrestled himself out of his clothes, and shouted with all his power. The lights of the yacht became faint and ever-vanishing fireflies; then they were blotted out entirely by the night.

Rainsford remembered the shots. They had come from the right, and doggedly he swam in that direction, swimming with slow, deliberate strokes, conserving his strength. For a seemingly endless time he fought the sea. He began to count his strokes desperately; he could do possibly a hundred more and then—

Rainsford heard a sound. It came out of the darkness, a high, screaming sound, the sound of an animal in an extremity of anguish and terror.

He did not recognize the animal that made the sound; he did not try to; with fresh vitality he swam toward the sound. He heard it again; then it was cut short by another noise, crisp, staccato.

"Pistol shot," muttered Rainsford, swimming on.

Ten minutes of determined effort brought another sound to his ears—the most welcome he had ever heard—the muttering and growling of the sea breaking on a rocky shore. He was almost on the rocks before he saw them; on a night less calm he would have been shattered against them. With his remaining strength he dragged himself from the swirling waters. Jagged crags appeared to jut up into the opaqueness; he forced himself upward, hand over hand. Gasping, his hands raw, he reached a flat place at the top. Dense jungle came down to the very edge of the cliffs. What

perils that tangle of trees and underbrush might hold for him did not concern Rainsford just then. All he knew was that he was safe from his enemy, the sea, and that utter weariness was on him. He flung himself down at the jungle edge and tumbled headlong into the deepest sleep of his life.

When he opened his eyes he knew from the position of the sun that it was late in the afternoon. Sleep had given him new vigor; a sharp hunger was picking at him. He looked about him, almost cheerfully.

"Where there are pistol shots, there are men. Where there are men, there is food," he thought. But what kind of men, he wondered, in so forbidding a place? An unbroken front of snarled and jagged jungle fringed the shore.

He saw no sign of a trail through the closely knit web of weeds and trees; it was easier to go along the shore, and Rainsford floundered along by the water. Not far from where he had landed, he stopped.

Some wounded thing, by the evidence a large animal, had thrashed about in the underbrush; the jungle weeds were crushed down and the moss was lacerated; one patch of weeds was stained crimson. A small, glittering object not far away caught Rainsford's eye and he picked it up. It was an empty cartridge.

"A twenty-two," he remarked. "That's odd. It must have been a fairly large animal, too. The hunter had his nerve to tackle it with a light gun. It's clear that the brute put up a fight. I suppose the first three shots I heard was when the hunter flushed his quarry and wounded it. The last shot was when he trailed it here and finished it."

He examined the ground closely and found what he had hoped to find—the print of hunting boots. They pointed along the cliff in the direction he had been going. Eagerly he hurried along, now slipping on a rotten log or a loose stone, but making headway; night was beginning to settle down on the island.

Bleak darkness was blacking out the sea and jungle

when Rainsford sighted the lights. He came upon them as he turned a crook in the coast line, and his first thought was that he had come upon a village, for there were many lights. But as he forged along he saw to his great astonishment that all the lights were in one enormous building—a lofty structure with pointed towers plunging upward into the gloom. His eyes made out the shadowy outlines of a palatial château; it was set on a high bluff, and on three sides of it cliffs dived down to where the sea licked greedy lips in the shadows.

"Mirage," thought Rainsford. But it was no mirage, he found, when he opened the tall spiked iron gate. The stone steps were real enough; the massive door with a leering gargoyle for a knocker was real enough; yet about it all hung an air of unreality.

He lifted the knocker, and it creaked up stiffly, as if it had never before been used. He let it fall, and it startled him with its booming loudness. He thought he heard footsteps within; the door remained closed. Again Rainsford lifted the heavy knocker, and let it fall. The door opened then, opened as suddenly as if it were on a spring, and Rainsford stood blinking in the river of glaring gold light that poured out. The first thing Rainsford's eyes discerned was the largest man Rainsford had ever seen—a gigantic creature, solidly made and black-bearded to the waist. In his hand the man held a long-barrel revolver, and he was pointing it straight at Rainsford's heart.

Out of the snarl of beard two small eyes regarded Rainsford.

"Don't be alarmed," said Rainsford, with a smile which he hoped was disarming. "I'm no robber. I fell off a yacht. My name is Sanger Rainsford of New York City."

The menacing look in the eyes did not change. The revolver pointed as rigidly as if the giant were a statue. He gave no sign that he understood Rainsford's words, or that he had even heard them. He was dressed in

uniform, a black uniform trimmed with gray astrakhan.

"I'm Sanger Rainsford of New York," Rainsford began again. "I fell off a yacht. I am hungry."

The man's only answer was to raise with his thumb the hammer of his revolver. Then Rainsford saw the man's free hand go to his forehead in a military salute, and he saw him click his heels together and stand at attention. Another man was coming down the broad marble steps, an erect, slender man in evening clothes. He advanced to Rainsford and held out his hand.

In a cultivated voice marked by a slight accent that gave it added precision and deliberateness, he said, "It is a very great pleasure and honor to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home."

Automatically Rainsford shook the man's hand.

"I've read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet, you see," explained the man. "I am General Zaroff."

Rainsford's first impression was that the man was singularly handsome; his second was that there was an original, almost bizarre quality about the general's face. He was a tall man past middle age, for his hair was a vivid white; but his thick eyebrows and pointed military mustache were as black as the night from which Rainsford had come. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheekbones, a sharp-cut nose, a spare, dark face, the face of a man used to giving orders, the face of an aristocrat. Turning to the giant in uniform, the general made a sign. The giant put away his pistol, saluted, withdrew.

"Ivan is an incredibly strong fellow," remarked the general, "but he has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. A simple fellow, but I'm afraid, like all his race, a bit of a savage."

"Is he Russian?"

"He is a Cossack," said the general, and his smile showed red lips and pointed teeth. "So am I.

"Come," he said, "we shouldn't be chatting here. We

can talk later. Now you want clothes, food, rest. You shall have them. This is a most restful spot."

Ivan had reappeared, and the general spoke to him with lips that moved but gave forth no sound.

"Follow Ivan, if you please, Mr. Rainsford," said the general. "I was about to have my dinner when you came. I'll wait for you. You'll find that my clothes will fit you, I think."

It was to a huge, beam-ceilinged bedroom with a canopied bed big enough for six men that Rainsford followed the silent giant. Ivan laid out an evening suit, and Rainsford, as he put it on, noticed that it came from a London tailor who ordinarily cut and sewed for none below the rank of duke.

The dining room to which Ivan conducted him was in many ways remarkable. There was a medieval magnificence about it; it suggested a baronial hall of feudal times with its oaken panels, its high ceiling, its vast refectory table where twoscore men could sit down to eat. About the hall were the mounted heads of many animals—lions, tigers, elephants, moose, bears; larger or more perfect specimens Rainsford had never seen. At the great table the general was sitting, alone.

"You'll have a cocktail, Mr. Rainsford," he suggested. The cocktail was surpassingly good; and, Rainsford noted, the table appointments were of the finest, the linen, the crystal, the silver, the china.

They were eating *borsch,* the rich, red soup with sour cream so dear to Russian palates. Half apologetically General Zaroff said, "We do our best to preserve the amenities of civilization here. Please forgive any lapses. We are well off the beaten track, you know. Do you think the champagne has suffered from its long ocean trip?"

"Not in the least," declared Rainsford. He was finding the general a most thoughtful and affable host, a true cosmopolite. But there was one small trait of the general's that made Rainsford uncomfortable. When-

ever he looked up from his plate he found the general studying him, appraising him narrowly.

"Perhaps," said General Zaroff, "you were surprised that I recognized your name. You see, I read all books on hunting published in English, French, and Russian. I have but one passion in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is the hunt."

"You have some wonderful heads here," said Rainsford as he ate a particularly well cooked filet mignon. "That Cape buffalo is the largest I ever saw."

"Oh, that fellow. Yes, he was a monster."

"Did he charge you?"

"Hurled me against a tree," said the general. "Fractured my skull. But I got the brute."

"I've always thought," said Rainsford, "that the Cape buffalo is the most dangerous of all big game."

For a moment the general did not reply; he was smiling his curious red-lipped smile. Then he said slowly, "No. You are wrong, sir. The Cape buffalo is not the most dangerous big game." He sipped his wine. "Here in my preserve on this island," he said in the same slow tone, "I hunt more dangerous game."

Rainsford expressed his surprise. "Is there big game on this island?"

The general nodded. "The biggest."

"Really?"

"Oh, it isn't here naturally, of course. I have to stock the island."

"What have you imported, General?" Rainsford asked. "Tigers?"

The general smiled. "No," he said. "Hunting tigers ceased to interest me some years ago. I exhausted their possibilities, you see. No thrill left in tigers, no real danger. I live for danger, Mr. Rainsford."

The general took from his pocket a gold cigarette case and offered his guest a long black cigarette with a silver tip; it was perfumed and gave off a smell like incense.

"We will have some capital hunting, you and I," said the general. "I shall be most glad to have your society."

"But what game—" began Rainsford.

"I'll tell you," said the general. "You will be amused, I know. I think I may say, in all modesty, that I have done a rare thing. I have invented a new sensation. May I pour you another glass of port, Mr. Rainsford?"

"Thank you, General."

The general filled both glasses, and said, "God makes some men poets. Some He makes kings, some beggars. Me He made a hunter. My hand was made for the trigger, my father said. He was a very rich man with a quarter of a million acres in the Crimea, and he was an ardent sportsman. When I was only five years old he gave me a little gun, specially made in Moscow for me, to shoot sparrows with. When I shot some of his prize turkeys with it, he did not punish me; he complimented me on my marksmanship. I killed my first bear in the Caucasus when I was ten. My whole life has been one prolonged hunt. I went into the army—it was expected of noblemen's sons—and for a time commanded a division of Cossack cavalry, but my real interest was always the hunt. I have hunted every kind of game in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed."

The general puffed at his cigarette.

"After the debacle in Russia I left the country, for it was imprudent for an officer of the Czar to stay there. Many noble Russians lost everything. I, luckily, had invested heavily in American securities, so I shall never have to open a tearoom in Monte Carlo or drive a taxi in Paris. Naturally, I continued to hunt—grizzlies in your Rockies, crocodiles in the Ganges, rhinoceroses in East Africa. It was in Africa that the Cape buffalo hit me and laid me up for six months. As soon as I recovered I started for the Amazon to hunt jaguars, for I had heard they were unusually cunning. They weren't." The Cossack sighed. "They were no match at all for a hunter with his wits about him, and a

high-powered rifle. I was bitterly disappointed. I was lying in my tent with a splitting headache one night when a terrible thought pushed its way into my mind. Hunting was beginning to bore me! And hunting, remember, had been my life. I have heard that in America businessmen often go to pieces when they give up the business that has been their life."

"Yes, that's so," said Rainsford.

The general smiled. "I had no wish to go to pieces," he said. "I must do something. Now, mine is an analytical mind, Mr. Rainsford. Doubtless that is why I enjoy the problems of the chase."

"No doubt, General Zaroff."

"So," continued the general, "I asked myself why the hunt no longer fascinated me. You are much younger than I am, Mr. Rainsford, and have not hunted as much, but you perhaps can guess the answer."

"What was it?"

"Simply this: hunting had ceased to be what you call 'a sporting proposition.' It had become too easy. I always got my quarry. Always. There is no greater bore than perfection."

The general lit a fresh cigarette.

"No animal had a chance with me any more. That is no boast; it is a mathematical certainty. The animal had nothing but his legs and his instinct. Instinct is no match for reason. When I thought of this it was a tragic moment for me, I can tell you."

Rainsford leaned across the table, absorbed in what his host was saying.

"It came to me as an inspiration what I must do," the general went on.

"And that was?"

The general smiled the quiet smile of one who has faced an obstacle and surmounted it with success. "I had to invent a new animal to hunt," he said.

"A new animal? You are joking."

"Not at all," said the general. "I never joke about hunting. I needed a new animal. I found one. So I

bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The island is perfect for my purposes—there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, swamps—"

"But the animal, General Zaroff?"

"Oh," said the general, "it supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. No other hunting compares with it for an instant. Every day I hunt, and I never grow bored now, for I have a quarry with which I can match my wits."

Rainsford's bewilderment showed in his face.

"I wanted the ideal animal to hunt," explained the general. "So I said, 'What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?' And the answer was, of course, 'It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason.' "

"But no animal can reason," objected Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "there is one that can."

"But you can't mean—" gasped Rainsford.

"And why not?"

"I can't believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a grisly joke."

"Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting."

"Hunting? Good God, Zaroff, what you speak of is murder."

The general laughed with entire good nature. He regarded Rainsford quizzically. "I refuse to believe that so modern and civilized a young man as you seem to be harbors romantic ideas about the value of human life. Surely your experiences in the war—" He stopped.

"Did not make me condone cold-blooded murder," finished Rainsford stiffly.

Laughter shook the general. "How extraordinarily droll you are!" he said. "One does not expect nowadays to find a young man of the educated class, even in America, with such a naïve, and, if I may say so, mid-Victorian point of view. It's like finding a snuffbox in

a limousine. Ah, well, doubtless you had Puritan ancestors. So many Americans appear to have had. I'll wager you'll forget your notions when you go hunting with me. You've a genuine new thrill in store for you, Mr. Rainsford."

"Thank you, I'm a hunter, not a murderer."

"Dear me," said the general, quite unruffled, "again that unpleasant word. But I think I can show you that your scruples are quite ill founded."

"Yes?"

"Life is for the strong, to be lived by the strong, and, if needs be, taken by the strong. The weak of the world were put here to give the strong pleasure. I am strong. Why should I not use my gift? If I wish to hunt, why should I not? I hunt the scum of the earth—sailors from tramp ships—lascars, blacks, Chinese, whites, mongrels —a thoroughbred horse or hound is worth more than a score of them."

"But they are men," said Rainsford hotly.

"Precisely," said the general. "That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They can reason, after a fashion. So they are dangerous."

"But where do you get them?"

The general's left eyelid fluttered down in a wink. "This island is called Ship-Trap," he answered. "Sometimes an angry god of the high seas sends them to me. Sometimes, when Providence is not so kind, I help Providence a bit. Come to the window with me."

Rainsford went to the window and looked out toward the sea.

"Watch! Out there!" exclaimed the general, pointing into the night. Rainsford's eyes saw only blackness, and then, as the general pressed a button, far out to sea Rainsford saw the flash of lights.

The general chuckled. "They indicate a channel," he said, "where there's none: giant rocks with razor edges crouch like a sea monster with wide-open jaws. They can crush a ship as easily as I crush this nut." He dropped a walnut on the hardwood floor and

brought his heel grinding down on it. "Oh, yes," he said casually, as if in answer to a question, "I have electricity. We try to be civilized here."

"Civilized? And you shoot down men?"

A trace of anger was in the general's black eyes, but it was there for but a second, and he said, in his most pleasant manner: "Dear me, what a righteous young man you are! I assure you I do not do the thing you suggest. That would be barbarous. I treat these visitors with every consideration. They get plenty of good food and exercise. They get into splendid physical condition. You shall see for yourself tomorrow."

"What do you mean?"

"We'll visit my training school," smiled the general. "It's in the cellar. I have about a dozen pupils down there now. They're from the Spanish bark *San Lucar* that had the bad luck to go on the rocks out there. A very inferior lot, I regret to say. Poor specimens and more accustomed to the deck than to the jungle."

He raised his hand, and Ivan, who served as waiter, brought thick Turkish coffee. Rainsford, with an effort, held his tongue in check.

"It's a game, you see," pursued the general blandly. "I suggest to one of them that we go hunting. I give him a supply of food and an excellent hunting knife. I give him three hours' start. I am to follow, armed only with a pistol of the smallest caliber and range. If my quarry eludes me for three whole days, he wins the game. If I find him—" the general smiled—"he loses."

"Suppose he refuses to be hunted?"

"Oh," said the general, "I give him his option, of course. He need not play that game if he doesn't wish to. If he does not wish to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan. Ivan once had the honor of serving as official knouter to the Great White Czar, and he has his own ideas of sport. Invariably, Mr. Rainsford, invariably they choose the hunt."

"And if they win?"

The smile on the general's face widened. "To date I have not lost," he said.

Then he added, hastily, "I don't wish you to think me a braggart, Mr. Rainsford. Many of them afford only the most elementary sort of problem. Occasionally I strike a tartar. One almost did win. I eventually had to use the dogs."

"The dogs?"

"This way, please. I'll show you."

The general steered Rainsford to a window. The lights from the windows sent a flickering illumination that made grotesque patterns on the courtyard below, and Rainsford could see moving about there a dozen or so huge black shapes; as they turned toward him, their eyes glittered greenly.

"A rather good lot, I think," observed the general. "They are let out at seven every night. If anyone should try to get into my house—or out of it—something extremely regrettable would occur to him." He hummed a snatch of song from the Folies Bergère.

"And now," said the general, "I want to show you my new collection of heads. Will you come with me to the library?"

"I hope," said Rainsford, "that you will excuse me tonight, General Zaroff. I'm really not feeling at all well."

"Ah, indeed?" the general inquired solicitously. "Well, I suppose that's only natural, after your long swim. You need a good, restful night's sleep. Tomorrow you'll feel like a new man, I'll wager. Then we'll hunt, eh? I've one rather promising prospect—"

Rainsford was hurrying from the room.

"Sorry you can't go with me tonight," called the general. "I expect rather fair sport—a big, strong black. He looks resourceful— Well, good night, Mr. Rainsford; I hope that you have a good night's rest."

The bed was good and the pajamas of the softest silk, and he was tired in every fiber of his being, but never-

theless Rainsford could not quiet his brain with the opiate of sleep. He lay, eyes wide open. Once he thought he heard stealthy steps in the corridor outside his room. He sought to throw open the door; it would not open. He went to the window and looked out. His room was high up in one of the towers. The lights of the château were out now, and it was dark and silent, but there was a fragment of sallow moon, and by its wan light he could see, dimly, the courtyard; there, weaving in and out in the pattern of shadow, were black, noiseless forms; the hounds heard him at the window and looked up, expectantly, with their green eyes. Rainsford went back to the bed and lay down. By many methods he tried to put himself to sleep. He had achieved a doze when, just as morning began to come, he heard, far off in the jungle, the faint report of a pistol.

General Zaroff did not appear until luncheon. He was dressed faultlessly in the tweeds of a country squire. He was solicitous about the state of Rainsford's health.

"As for me," sighed the general, "I do not feel so well. I am worried, Mr. Rainsford. Last night I detected traces of my old complaint."

To Rainsford's questioning glance the general said, "Ennui. Boredom."

Then, taking a second helping of crepes suzette, the general explained, "The hunting was not good last night. The fellow lost his head. He made a straight trail that offered no problems at all. That's the trouble with these sailors; they have dull brains to begin with, and they do not know how to get about in the woods. They do excessively stupid and obvious things. It's most annoying. Will you have another glass of Chablis, Mr. Rainsford?"

"General," said Rainsford firmly, "I wish to leave this island at once."

The general raised his thickets of eyebrows; he seemed hurt. "But, my dear fellow," the general pro-

tested, "you've only just come. You've had no hunting—"

"I wish to go today," said Rainsford. He saw the dead black eyes of the general on him, studying him. General Zaroff's face suddenly brightened.

He filled Rainsford's glass with venerable Chablis from a dusty bottle.

"Tonight," said the general, "we will hunt—you and I."

Rainsford shook his head. "No, General," he said. "I will not hunt."

The general shrugged his shoulders and delicately ate a hothouse grape. "As you wish, my friend," he said. "The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting than Ivan's?"

He nodded toward the corner to where the giant stood, scowling, his thick arms crossed on his hogshead of chest.

"You don't mean—" cried Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "have I not told you I always mean what I say about hunting? This is really an inspiration. I drink to a foeman worthy of my steel—at last."

The general raised his glass, but Rainsford sat staring at him.

"You'll find this game worth playing," the general said enthusiastically. "Your brain against mine. Your woodcraft against mine. Your strength and stamina against mine. Outdoor chess! And the stake is not without value, eh?"

"And if I win—" began Rainsford huskily.

"I'll cheerfully acknowledge myself defeated if I do not find you by midnight of the third day," said General Zaroff. "My sloop will place you on the mainland near a town."

The general read what Rainsford was thinking.

"Oh, you can trust me," said the Cossack. "I will give

you my word as a gentleman and a sportsman. Of course you, in turn, must agree to say nothing of your visit here."

"I'll agree to nothing of the kind," said Rainsford.

"Oh," said the general, "in that case— But why discuss it now? Three days hence we can discuss it over a bottle of Veuve Clicquot, unless—"

The general sipped his wine.

Then a businesslike air animated him. "Ivan," he said to Rainsford, "will supply you with hunting clothes, food, a knife. I suggest you wear moccasins; they leave a poorer trail. I suggest too that you avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island. We call it Death Swamp. There's quicksand there. One foolish fellow tried it. The deplorable part of it was that Lazarus followed him. You can imagine my feelings, Mr. Rainsford. I loved Lazarus; he was the finest hound in my pack. Well, I must beg you to excuse me now. I always take a siesta after lunch. You'll hardly have time for a nap, I fear. You'll want to start, no doubt. I shall not follow till dusk. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day, don't you think? *Au revoir,* Mr. Rainsford, *au revoir.*"

General Zaroff, with a deep, courtly bow, strolled from the room.

From another door came Ivan. Under one arm he carried khaki hunting clothes, a haversack of food, a leather sheath containing a long-bladed hunting knife; his right hand rested on a cocked revolver thrust in the crimson sash about his waist. . . .

Rainsford had fought his way through the bush for two hours. "I must keep my nerve. I must keep my nerve," he said through tight teeth.

He had not been entirely clear-headed when the château gates snapped shut behind him. His whole idea at first was to put distance between himself and General Zaroff, and, to this end, he had plunged along, spurred on by the sharp rowels of something very like

panic. Now he had got a grip on himself, he had stopped, and was taking stock of himself and the situation.

He saw that straight flight was futile; inevitably it would bring him face to face with the sea. He was in a picture with a frame of water, and his operations, clearly, must take place within that frame.

"I'll give him a trail to follow," muttered Rainsford, and he struck off from the rude path he had been following into the trackless wilderness. He executed a series of intricate loops; he doubled on his trail again and again, recalling all the lore of the fox hunt, and all the dodges of the fox. Night found him leg-weary, with hands and face lashed by the branches, on a thickly wooded ridge. He knew it would be insane to blunder on through the dark, even if he had the strength. His need for rest was imperative and he thought, "I have played the fox, now I must play the cat of the fable." A big tree with a thick trunk and outspread branches was nearby, and, taking care to leave not the slightest mark, he climbed up into the crotch, and stretched out on one of the broad limbs, after a fashion, rested. Rest brought him new confidence and almost a feeling of security. Even so zealous a hunter as General Zaroff could not trace him there, he told himself; only the devil himself could follow that complicated trail through the jungle after dark. But, perhaps, the general was a devil—

An apprehensive night crawled slowly by like a wounded snake, and sleep did not visit Rainsford, although the silence of a dead world was on the jungle. Toward morning when a dingy gray was varnishing the sky, the cry of some startled bird focused Rainsford's attention in that direction. Something was coming through the bush, coming slowly, carefully, coming by the same winding way Rainsford had come. He flattened himself down on the limb, and through a screen of leaves almost as thick as tapestry, he watched. The thing that was approaching him was a man.

It was General Zaroff. He made his way along with his eyes fixed in utmost concentration on the ground before him. He paused, almost beneath the tree, dropped to his knees and studied the ground. Rainsford's impulse was to hurl himself down like a panther, but he saw that the general's right hand held something small and metallic—an automatic pistol.

The hunter shook his head several times, as if he were puzzled. Then he straightened up and took from his case one of his black cigarettes; its pungent incense-like smoke floated up to Rainsford's nostrils. Rainsford held his breath. The general's eyes had left the ground and were traveling inch by inch up the tree. Rainsford froze there, every muscle tensed for a spring. But the sharp eyes of the hunter stopped before they reached the limb where Rainsford lay; a smile spread over his brown face. Very deliberately he blew a smoke ring into the air; then he turned his back on the tree and walked carelessly away, back along the trail he had come. The swish of the underbrush against his hunting boots grew fainter and fainter.

The pent-up air burst hotly from Rainsford's lungs. His first thought made him feel sick and numb. The general could follow a trail through the woods at night; he could follow an extremely difficult trail; he must have uncanny powers; only by the merest chance had the Cossack failed to see his quarry.

Rainsford's second thought was even more terrible. It sent a shudder of cold horror through his whole being. Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back?

Rainsford did not want to believe what his reason told him was true, but the truth was as evident as the sun that had by now pushed through the morning mist. The general was playing with him! The general was saving him for another day's sport! The Cossack was the cat; he was the mouse. Then it was that Rainsford knew the full meaning of terror.

"I will not lose my nerve. I will not."

He slid down from the tree, and struck off again into the woods. His face was set and he forced the machinery of his mind to function. Three hundred yards from his hiding place he stopped where a huge dead tree leaned precariously on a smaller, living one. Throwing off his sack of food, Rainsford took his knife from its sheath and began to work with all his energy.

The job was finished at last, and he threw himself down behind a fallen log a hundred feet away. He did not have to wait long. The cat was coming again to play with the mouse.

Following the trail with the sureness of a bloodhound came General Zaroff. Nothing escaped those searching black eyes, no crushed blade of grass, no bent twig, no mark, no matter how faint, in the moss. So intent was the Cossack on his stalking that he was upon the thing Rainsford had made before he saw it. His foot touched the protruding bough that was the trigger. Even as he touched it, the general sensed his danger and leaped back with the agility of an ape. But he was not quite quick enough; the dead tree, delicately adjusted to rest on the cut living one, crashed down and struck the general a glancing blow on the shoulder as it fell; but for his alertness, he must have been smashed beneath it. He staggered, but he did not fall; nor did he drop his revolver. He stood there, rubbing his injured shoulder, and Rainsford, with fear again gripping his heart, heard the general's mocking laugh ring through the jungle.

"Rainsford," called the general, "if you are within sound of my voice, as I suppose you are, let me congratulate you. Not many men know how to make a Malay man-catcher. Luckily for me, I too have hunted in Malacca. You are proving interesting, Mr. Rainsford. I am going now to have my wound dressed; it's only a slight one. But I shall be back. I shall be back."

When the general, nursing his bruised shoulder, had gone, Rainsford took up his flight again. It was flight now, a desperate, hopeless flight, that carried him on

for some hours. Dusk came, then darkness, and still he pressed on. The ground grew softer under his moccasins; the vegetation grew ranker; denser; insects bit him savagely. Then, as he stepped forward, his foot sank into the ooze. He tried to wrench it back, but the muck sucked viciously at his foot as if it were a giant leech. With a violent effort, he tore his foot loose. He knew where he was now. Death Swamp and its quicksand.

His hands were tight closed as if his nerve were something tangible that someone in the darkness was trying to tear from his grip. The softness of the earth had given him an idea. He stepped back from the quicksand a dozen feet or so and, like some huge prehistoric beaver, he began to dig.

Rainsford had dug himself in in France when a second's delay meant death. That had been a placid pastime compared to his digging now. The pit grew deeper; when it was above his shoulders, he climbed out and from some hard saplings cut stakes and sharpened them to a fine point. These stakes he planted in the bottom of the pit with the points sticking up. With flying fingers he wove a rough carpet of weeds and branches and with it he covered the mouth of the pit. Then, wet with sweat and aching with tiredness, he crouched behind the stump of a lightning-charred tree.

He knew his pursuer was coming; he heard the paddling sound of feet on the soft earth, and the night breeze brought him the perfume of the general's cigarette. It seemed to Rainsford that the general was coming with unusual swiftness; he was not feeling his way along, foot by foot. Rainsford, crouching there, could not see the general, nor could he see the pit. He lived a year in a minute. Then he felt an impulse to cry aloud with joy, for he heard the sharp crackle of the breaking branches as the cover of the pit gave way; he heard the sharp scream of pain as the pointed stakes found their mark. He leaped up from his place

of concealment. Then he cowered back. Three feet from the pit a man was standing, with an electric torch in his hand.

"You've done well, Rainsford," the voice of the general called. "Your Burmese tiger pit has claimed one of my best dogs. Again you score. I think, Mr. Rainsford, I'll see what you can do against my whole pack. I'm going home for a rest now. Thank you for a most amusing evening."

At daybreak Rainsford, lying near the swamp, was awakened by a sound that made him know that he had new things to learn about fear. It was a distant sound, faint and wavering, but he knew it. It was the baying of a pack of hounds.

Rainsford knew he could do one of two things. He could stay where he was and wait. That was suicide. He could flee. That was postponing the inevitable. For a moment he stood there, thinking. An idea that held a wild chance came to him, and, tightening his belt, he headed away from the swamp.

The baying of the hounds drew nearer, then still nearer, nearer, ever nearer. On a ridge Rainsford climbed a tree. Down a water-course, not a quarter of a mile away, he could see the bush moving. Straining his eyes he saw the lean figure of General Zaroff; just ahead of him Rainsford made out another figure whose wide shoulders surged through the tall jungle weeds; it was the giant Ivan, and he seemed pulled forward by some unseen force; Rainsford knew that Ivan must be holding the pack in leash.

They would be on him any minute now. His mind worked frantically. He thought of a native trick he had learned in Uganda. He slid down the tree. He caught hold of a springy young sapling and to it he fastened his hunting knife, with the blade pointing down the trail; with a bit of wild grapevine he tied back the sapling. Then he ran for his life. The hounds raised their voices as they hit the fresh scent. Rainsford knew now how an animal at bay feels.

He had to stop to get his breath. The baying of the hounds stopped abruptly, and Rainsford's heart stopped too. They must have reached the knife.

He shinned excitedly up a tree and looked back. His pursuers had stopped. But the hope that was in Rainsford's brain when he climbed died, for he saw in the shallow valley that General Zaroff was still on his feet. But Ivan was not. The knife, driven by the recoil of the spring tree, had not wholly failed.

Rainsford had hardly tumbled to the ground when the pack took up the cry again.

"Nerve, nerve, nerve!" he panted, as he dashed along. A blue gap showed between the trees dead ahead. Ever nearer drew the hounds. Rainsford forced himself on toward the gap. He reached it. It was the shore of the sea. Across a cove he could see the gloomy gray stone of the château. Twenty feet below him the sea rumbled and hissed. Rainsford hesitated. He heard the hounds. Then he leaped far out into the sea. . . .

When the general and his pack reached the place by the sea, the Cossack stopped. For some minutes he stood regarding the blue-green expanse of water. He shrugged his shoulders. Then he sat down, took a drink of brandy from a silver flash, lit a perfumed cigarette, and hummed a bit from *Madame Butterfly*.

General Zaroff had an exceedingly good dinner in his great paneled dining hall that evening. With it he had a bottle of Pol Roger and half a bottle of Chambertin. Two slight annoyances kept him from perfect enjoyment. One was the thought that it would be difficult to replace Ivan; the other was that his quarry had escaped him; of course, the American hadn't played the game—so thought the general as he tasted his after-dinner liqueur. In his library he read, to soothe himself, from the works of Marcus Aurelius. At ten he went up to his bedroom. He was deliciously tired, he said to himself, as he locked himself in. There was a little moonlight, so, before turning on his light,

he went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. He could see the great hounds, and he called, "Better luck another time," to them. Then he switched on the light.

A man, who had been hiding in the curtains of the bed, was standing there.

"Rainsford!" screamed the general. "How in God's name did you get here?"

"Swam," said Rainsford. "I found it quicker than walking through the jungle."

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. "I congratulate you," he said. "You have won the game."

Rainsford did not smile. "I am still a beast at bay," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."

The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford. . . ."

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.

The Lady on the Grey

by JOHN COLLIER

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

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

He had an intimate by the name of Bates, who was another of the same breed and the same kidney. Bates

was equally long and lean, and equally hard up, and he had the same wind-flushed bony face, the same shabby arrogance, and the same seignorial approach to the little girls in the cottages and cowsheds.

Neither of these blades ever wrote a letter, but each generally knew where the other was to be found. The ticket collector, respectfully blind as he snipped Ringwood's third-class ticket in a first-class compartment, would mention that Mr. Bates had traveled that way only last Tuesday, stopping off at Killorglin for a week or two after the snipe. The chambermaid, coy in the clammy bedroom of a fishing inn, would find time to tell Bates that Ringwood had gone on up to Lough Corrib for a go at the pike. Policemen, priests, bagmen, game-keepers, even the tinkers on the roads, would pass on this verbal *pateran*. Then, if it seemed his friend was on to a good thing, the other would pack up his battered kit bag, put rods and guns into their cases, and drift off to join in the sport.

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

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

At this thought, he grinned from the tip of his long

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

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

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

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

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

"How's that?" said Ringwood.

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

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

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

During the next day or two he employed his time in strolling up and down all the lanes and bypaths in the neighborhood, in the hope of discovering these

beauties, or else some other. He was not particular as to which it should be, but on the whole he would have preferred a cottage girl, because he had no wish to waste time on elaborate approaches.

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

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

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

A grey horse is no great matter, especially when one is so urgently in need of a cup of milk, but this grey horse differed from all others of its species and color in two respects. First, it was no sort of a horse at all, neither hack nor hunter, and it picked up its feet in a queer way, and yet it had an arch to its neck and a small head and a wide nostril that were not entirely without distinction. And, second—and this distracted Ringwood from all curiosity as to breed and blood

line—this grey horse carried on its back a girl who was obviously and certainly the most beautiful girl he had ever seen in his life.

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

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

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

He watched the horse and rider go on through the wintry twilight, and he saw her turn in at a broken gateway just a little way along the road. Just as she passed through, she turned her head and whistled, and Ringwood noticed that her dog had stopped by him, and was sniffing about his legs. For a moment he thought it was a smallish wolfhound, but then he saw it was just a tall, lean, hairy lurcher. He watched it run limping after her, with its tail down, and it struck him that the poor creature had had an appalling thrashing not so long ago; he had noticed the marks where the hair was thin on its ribs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He had an impulse to ask if the beautiful Miss Murrough had anything in the shape of a father or a brother at the tower, but his principle was "least said soonest mended," especially in little affairs of this sort.

So he sat by the fire, recapturing and savoring the look the girl had given him, and he decided he needed only the barest excuse to present himself at the tower.

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

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

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

"I thought you would come," said she.

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

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

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

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

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

Ringwood always paid a compliment to a lady's

Pardon this interruption, but...

if you smoke and you're interested in tar levels

you may find the information on the back of this page worthwhile.

A comparison of 57 popular cigarette brands with Kent Golden Lights.

FILTER BRANDS (KING SIZE)

REGULAR	MG TAR	MG NIC
Kent Golden Lights	**8**	**0.6**
Parliament	10	0.6
Vantage	11	0.7
Marlboro Lights	12	0.7
Doral	12	0.8
Multifilter	12	0.8
Winston Lights	12	0.9
Raleigh Lights	14	1.0
Viceroy Extra Milds	14	1.0
Viceroy	16	1.0
Raleigh	16	1.1
Marlboro	17	1.0
Tareyton	17	1.2
Lark	18	1.1
Pall Mall Filters	18	1.2
Camel Filters	18	1.2
L & M	18	1.1
Winston	19	1.2

MENTHOL	MG TAR	MG NIC
Kent Golden Lights Menthol	**8**	**0.7**
Kool Super Lights	9	0.8
Multifilter Menthol	11	0.7
Vantage Menthol	11	0.8
Salem Lights	11	0.8
Doral Menthol	11	0.8
Belair	13	1.0
Marlboro Menthol	14	0.8
Alpine	14	0.8
Kool Milds	14	0.9
Kool	17	1.3
Salem	18	1.2

FTC Method

FILTER BRANDS (100's)

REGULAR	MG TAR	MG NIC
Kent Golden Lights 100's	**10**	**0.9**
Benson & Hedges 100's Lights	11	0.8
Vantage 100's	11	0.9
Merit 100's	12	0.9
Parliament 100's	12	0.7
Eve 100's	16	1.0
Virginia Slims 100's	16	0.9
Tareyton 100's	16	1.2
Marlboro 100's	17	1.0
Silva Thins	17	1.3
Benson & Hedges 100's	17	1.0
L & M 100's	17	1.1
Raleigh 100's	17	1.2
Viceroy 100's	18	1.3
Lark 100's	18	1.1
Pall Mall 100's	19	1.4
Winston 100's	19	1.3

MENTHOL	MG TAR	MG NIC
Kent Golden Lights 100's Menthol	**10**	**0.9**
Benson & Hedges 100's Lights Menthol	11	0.8
Merit 100's Menthol	12	0.9
Virginia Slims 100's Menthol	16	0.9
Pall Mall 100's Menthol	16	1.2
Eve 100's Menthol	16	1.0
Silva Thins Menthol	16	1.1
Benson & Hedges 100's Menthol	17	1.0
L & M 100's Menthol	18	1.1
Kool 100's	18	1.3
Belair 100's	18	1.3
Winston 100's Menthol	18	1.2
Salem 100's	18	1.3

FTC Method

Of All Brands Sold: Lowest tar: 0.5 mg. "tar," 0.05 mg. nicotine; **Kent Golden Lights: Kings Regular** 8 mg. "tar," 0.6 mg. nicotine. **Kings Menthol** 8 mg. "tar," 0.7 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette, FTC Report August 1977. **100's Regular and Menthol**—10 mg. "tar," 0.9 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC Method.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

dog, and in fact the creature really was whining and whimpering in the most extraordinary fashion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, through its heart," said she.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Always?" said she.

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

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

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

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

The room was now quite dark, and the fire had

sunk to a dim glow. He blinked, and shook his ears, trying to shake some sense into his head. Suddenly he heard Bates talking to him, muttering as if he, too, was half asleep, or half drunk more likely. "You *would* come here," said Bates. "I tried hard enough to stop you."

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

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

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

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

The Waxwork

by A. M. BURRAGE

While the uniformed attendants of Marriner's Waxworks were ushering the last stragglers through the great glass-paneled double doors, the manager sat in his office interviewing Raymond Hewson.

The manager was a youngish man, stout, blond and of medium height. He wore his clothes well and contrived to look extremely smart without appearing overdressed. Raymond Hewson looked neither. His clothes, which had been good when new and which were still carefully brushed and pressed, were beginning to show signs of their owner's losing battle with the world. He was a small, spare, pale man, with lank, errant brown hair, and although he spoke plausibly and even forcibly he had the defensive and somewhat furtive air of a man who was used to rebuffs. He looked what he was, a man gifted somewhat above the ordinary, who was a failure through his lack of self-assertion.

The manager was speaking.

"There is nothing new in your request," he said. "In fact we refuse it to different people—mostly young

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bloods who have tried to make bets—about three times a week. We have nothing to gain and something to lose by letting people spend the night in our Murderers' Den. If I allowed it, and some young idiot lost his senses, what would be my position? But your being a journalist somewhat alters the case."

Hewson smiled.

"I suppose you mean that journalists have no senses to lose."

"No, no," laughed the manager, "but one imagines them to be responsible people. Besides, here we have something to gain; publicity and advertisement."

"Exactly," said Hewson, "and there I thought we might come to terms."

The manager laughed again.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I know what's coming. You want to be paid twice, do you? It used to be said years ago that Madame Tussaud's would give a man a hundred pounds for sleeping alone in the Chamber of Horrors. I hope you don't think that we have made any such offer. Er—what is your paper, Mr. Hewson?"

"I am free-lancing at present," Hewson confessed, "working on space for several papers. However, I should find no difficulty in getting the story printed. The *Morning Echo* would use it like a shot. 'A Night with Marriner's Murderers.' No live paper could turn it down."

The manager rubbed his chin.

"Ah! And how do you propose to treat it?"

"I shall make it gruesome, of course; gruesome with just a saving touch of humor."

The other nodded and offered Hewson his cigarette case.

"Very well, Mr. Hewson," he said. "Get your story printed in the *Morning Echo,* and there will be a five-pound note waiting for you here when you care to come and call for it. But first of all, it's no small ordeal that you're proposing to undertake. I'd like to be quite sure about you, and I'd like you to be quite sure about

yourself. I own I shouldn't care to take it on. I've seen those figures dressed and undressed, I know all about the process of their manufacture, I can walk about in company downstairs as unmoved as if I were walking among so many skittles, but I should hate having to sleep down there alone among them."

"Why?" asked Hewson.

"I don't know. There isn't any reason. I don't believe in ghosts. If I did, I should expect them to haunt the scene of their crimes or the spot where the bodies were laid, instead of a cellar which happens to contain their waxwork effigies. It's just that I couldn't sit alone among them all night, with their seeming to stare at me in the way they do. After all, they represent the lowest and most appalling types of humanity, and—although I would not own it publicly—the people who come to see them are not generally charged with the very highest motives. The whole atmosphere of the place is unpleasant, and if you are susceptible to atmosphere I warn you that you are in for a very uncomfortable night."

Hewson had known that from the moment when the idea had first occurred to him. His soul sickened at the prospect, even while he smiled casually upon the manager. But he had a wife and family to keep, and for the past month he had been living on paragraphs, eked out by his rapidly dwindling store of savings. Here was a chance not to be missed—the price of a special story in the *Morning Echo,* with a five-pound note to add to it. It meant comparative wealth and luxury for a week, and freedom from the worst anxieties for a fortnight. Besides, if he wrote the story well, it might lead to an offer of regular employment.

"The way of transgressors—and newspaper men—is hard," he said. "I have already promised myself an uncomfortable night because your murderers' den is obviously not fitted up as a hotel bedroom. But I don't think your waxworks will worry me much."

"You're not superstitious?"

"Not a bit," Hewson laughed.

"But you're a journalist; you must have a strong imagination."

"The news editors for whom I've worked have always complained that I haven't any. Plain facts are not considered sufficient in our trade, and the papers don't like offering their readers unbuttered bread."

The manager smiled and rose.

"Right," he said. "I think the last of the people have gone. Wait a moment. I'll give orders for the figures downstairs not to be draped, and let the night people know that you'll be here. Then I'll take you down and show you round."

He picked up the receiver of a house telephone, spoke into it and presently replaced it.

"One condition I'm afraid I must impose on you," he remarked. "I must ask you not to smoke. We had a fire scare down in the Murderers' Den this evening. I don't know who gave the alarm, but whoever it was it was a false one. Fortunately there were very few people down there at the time, or there might have been a panic. And now, if you're ready, we'll make a move."

Hewson followed the manager through half a dozen rooms where attendants were busy shrouding the kings and queens of England, the generals and prominent statesmen of this and other generations, all the mixed herd of humanity whose fame or notoriety had rendered them eligible for this kind of immortality. The manager stopped once and spoke to a man in uniform, saying something about an armchair in the Murderers' Den.

"It's the best we can do for you, I'm afraid," he said to Hewson. "I hope you'll be able to get some sleep."

He led the way through an open barrier and down ill-lit stone stairs which conveyed a sinister impression of giving access to a dungeon. In a passage at the bottom were a few preliminary horrors, such as relics of the Inquisition, a rack taken from a medieval castle, branding irons, thumbscrews, and other mementos of

man's one-time cruelty to man. Beyond the passage was the Murderers' Den.

It was a room of irregular shape with a vaulted roof, and dimly lit by electric lights burning behind inverted bowls of frosted glass. It was, by design, an eerie and uncomfortable chamber—a chamber whose atmosphere invited its visitors to speak in whispers. There was something of the air of a chapel about it, but a chapel no longer devoted to the practice of piety and given over now for base and impious worship.

The waxwork murderers stood on low pedestals with numbered tickets at their feet. Seeing them elsewhere, and without knowing whom they represented, one would have thought them a dull looking crew, chiefly remarkable for the shabbiness of their clothes, and as evidence of the changes of fashion even among the unfashionable.

Recent notorieties rubbed dusty shoulders with the old "favorites." Thurtell, the murderer of Weir, stood as if frozen in the act of making a shopwindow gesture to young Bywaters. There was Lefroy, the poor half-baked little snob who killed for gain so that he might ape the gentleman. Within five yards of him sat Mrs. Thompson, that erotic romanticist, hanged to propitiate British middle-class matronhood. Charles Peace, the only member of that vile company who looked uncompromisingly and entirely evil, sneered across a gangway at Norman Thorne. Browne and Kennedy, the two most recent additions, stood between Mrs. Dyer and Patrick Mahon.

The manager, walking around with Hewson, pointed out several of the more interesting of these unholy notabilities.

"That's Crippen; I expect you recognize him. Insignificant little beast who looks as if he couldn't tread on a worm. That's Armstrong. Looks like a decent, harmless country gentleman, doesn't he? There's old Vaquier; you can't miss him because of his beard. And of course this—"

"Who's that?" Hewson interrupted in a whisper, pointing.

"Oh, I was coming to him," said the manager in a light undertone. "Come and have a good look at him. This is our star turn. He's the only one of the bunch that hasn't been hanged."

The figure which Hewson had indicated was that of a small, slight man not much more than five feet in height. It wore little waxed mustaches, large spectacles, and a caped coat. There was something so exaggeratedly French in its appearance that it reminded Hewson of a stage caricature. He could not have said precisely why the mild-looking face seemed to him so repellent, but he had already recoiled a step and, even in the manager's company, it cost him an effort to look again.

"But who is he?" he asked.

"That," said the manager, "is Dr. Bourdette."

Hewson shook his head doubtfully.

"I think I've heard the name," he said, "but I forget in connection with what."

The manager smiled.

"You'd remember better if you were a Frenchman," he said. "For some long while that man was the terror of Paris. He carried on his work of healing by day, and of throat-cutting by night, when the fit was on him. He killed for the sheer devilish pleasure it gave him to kill, and always in the same way—with a razor. After his last crime he left a clue behind him which set the police upon his track. One clue led to another, and before very long they knew that they were on the track of the Parisian equivalent of our Jack the Ripper, and had enough evidence to send him to the madhouse or the guillotine on a dozen capital charges.

"But even then our friend here was too clever for them. When he realized that the toils were closing about him he mysteriously disappeared, and ever since the police of every civilized country have been looking for him. There is no doubt that he managed to make

away with himself, and by some means which has prevented his body coming to light. One or two crimes of a similar nature have taken place since his disappearance, but he is believed almost for certain to be dead, and the experts believe these recrudescences to be the work of an imitator. It's queer, isn't it, how every notorious murderer has imitators?"

Hewson shuddered and fidgeted with his feet.

"I don't like him at all," he confessed. "Ugh! What eyes he's got!"

"Yes, this figure's a little masterpiece. You find the eyes bite into you? Well, that's excellent realism, then, for Bourdette practised mesmerism, and was supposed to mesmerize his victims before dispatching them. Indeed, had he not done so, it is impossible to see how so small a man could have done his ghastly work. There were never any signs of a struggle."

"I thought I saw him move," said Hewson with a catch in his voice.

The manager smiled.

"You'll have more than one optical illusion before the night's out, I expect. You shan't be locked in. You can come upstairs when you've had enough of it. There are watchmen on the premises, so you'll find company. Don't be alarmed if you hear them moving about. I'm sorry I can't give you any more light, because all the lights are on. For obvious reasons we keep this place as gloomy as possible. And now I think you had better return with me to the office and have a tot of whisky before beginning your night's vigil."

The member of the night staff who placed the armchair for Hewson was inclined to be facetious.

"Where will you have it, sir?" he asked, grinning. "Just 'ere, so as you can 'ave a little talk with Crippen when you're tired of sitting still? Or there's old Mother Dyer over there, making eyes and looking as if she could do with a bit of company. Say where, sir."

Hewson smiled. The man's chaff pleased him if only

because, for the moment at least, it lent the proceedings a much desired air of the commonplace.

"I'll place it myself, thanks," he said. "I'll find out where the drafts come from first."

"You won't find any down here. Well, good night, sir. I'm upstairs if you want me. Don't let 'em sneak up be'ind you and touch your neck with their cold and clammy 'ands. And you look out for that old Mrs. Dyer; I b'lieve she's taken a fancy to you."

Hewson laughed and wished the man good night. It was easier than he had expected. He wheeled the arm-chair—a heavy one upholstered in plush—a little way down the central gangway, and deliberately turned it so that its back was toward the effigy of Dr. Bourdette. For some undefined reason he liked Dr. Bourdette a great deal less than his companions. Busying himself with arranging the chair he was almost lighthearted, but when the attendant's footfalls had died away and a deep hush stole over the chamber he realized that he had no slight ordeal before him.

The dim unwavering light fell on the rows of figures which were so uncannily like human beings that the silence and the stillness seemed unnatural and even ghastly. He missed the sound of breathing, the rustling of clothes, the hundred and one minute noises one hears when even the deepest silence has fallen upon a crowd. But the air was as stagnant as water at the bottom of a standing pond. There was not a breath in the chamber to stir a curtain or rustle a hanging drapery or start a shadow. His own shadow, moving in response to a shifted arm or leg, was all that could be coaxed into motion. All was still to the gaze and silent to the ear. "It must be like this at the bottom of the sea," he thought, and wondered how to work the phrase into his story on the morrow.

He faced the sinister figures boldly enough. They were only waxworks. So long as he let that thought dominate all others he promised himself that all would be well. It did not, however, save him long from the

discomfort occasioned by the waxen stare of Dr. Bourdette, which, he knew, was directed upon him from behind. The eyes of the little Frenchman's effigy haunted and tormented him, and he itched with the desire to turn and look.

"Come!" he thought, "my nerves have started already. If I turn and look at that dressed-up dummy it will be an admission of funk."

And then another voice in his brain spoke to him.

"It's because you're afraid that you won't turn and look at him."

The two voices quarreled silently for a moment or two, and at last Hewson slewed his chair round a little and looked behind him.

Among the many figures standing in stiff, unnatural poses, the effigy of the dreadful little doctor stood out with a queer prominence, perhaps because a steady beam of light beat straight down upon it. Hewson flinched before the parody of mildness which some fiendishly skilled craftsman had managed to convey in wax, met the eyes for one agonized second, and turned again to face the other direction.

"He's only a waxwork like the rest of you," Hewson muttered defiantly. "You're all only waxworks."

They were only waxworks, yes, but waxworks don't move. Not that he had seen the least movement anywhere, but it struck him that, in the moment or two while he had looked behind him, there had been the least, subtle change in the grouping of the figures in front. Crippen, for instance, seemed to have turned at least one degree to the left. Or, thought Hewson, perhaps the illusion was due to the fact that he had not slewed his chair back into its exact original position. And there were Field and Grey, too; surely one of them had moved his hands. Hewson held his breath for a moment, and then drew his courage back to him as a man lifts a weight. He remembered the words of more than one news editor and laughed savagely to himself.

"And they tell me I've got no imagination!" he said beneath his breath.

He took a notebook from his pocket and wrote quickly.

"Mem.—Deathly silence and unearthly stillness of figures. Like being bottom of sea. Hypnotic eyes of Dr. Bourdette. Figures seem to move when not being watched."

He closed the book suddenly over his fingers and looked round quickly and awfully over his right shoulder. He had neither seen nor heard a movement, but it was as if some sixth sense had made him aware of one. He looked straight into the vapid countenance of Lefroy which smiled vacantly back as if to say, "It wasn't I!"

Of course it wasn't he, or any of them; it was his own nerves. Or was it? Hadn't Crippen moved again during that moment when his attention was directed elsewhere? You couldn't trust that little man! Once you took your eyes off him he took advantage of it to shift his position. That was what they were all doing, if he only knew it, he told himself; and half rose out of his chair. This was not quite good enough! He was going. He wasn't going to spend the night with a lot of waxworks which moved while he wasn't looking.

. . . Hewson sat down again. This was very cowardly and very absurd. They *were* only waxworks and they *couldn't* move; let him hold that thought and all would yet be well. Then why all that silent unrest about him?—a subtle something in the air which did not quite break the silence and happened, whichever way he looked, just beyond the boundaries of his vision.

He swung round quickly to encounter the mild but baleful stare of Dr. Bourdette. Then, without warning, he jerked his head back to stare straight at Crippen. Ha! he'd nearly caught Crippen that time! "You'd better be careful, Crippen—and all the rest of you! If I

do see one of you move I'll smash you to pieces! Do you hear?"

He ought to go, he told himself. Already he had experienced enough to write his story, or ten stories, for the matter of that. Well, then, why not go? The *Morning Echo* would be none the wiser as to how long he had stayed, nor would it care so long as his story was a good one. Yes, but that night watchman upstairs would chaff him. And the manager—one never knew—perhaps the manager would quibble over that five-pound note which he needed so badly. He wondered if Rose were asleep or if she were lying awake and thinking of him. She'd laugh when he told her that he had imagined . . .

This was a little too much! It was bad enough that the waxwork effigies of murderers should move when they weren't being watched, but it was intolerable that they should *breathe*. Somebody was breathing. Or was it his own breath which sounded to him as if it came from a distance? He sat rigid, listening and straining, until he exhaled with a long sigh. His own breath after all, or—if not, Something had divined that he was listening and had ceased breathing simultaneously.

Hewson jerked his head swiftly around and looked all about him out of haggard and haunted eyes. Everywhere his gaze encountered the vacant waxen faces, and everywhere he felt that by just some least fraction of a second had he missed seeing a movement of hand or foot, a silent opening or compression of lips, a flicker of eyelids, a look of human intelligence now smoothed out. They were like naughty children in a class, whispering, fidgeting and laughing behind their teacher's back, but blandly innocent when his gaze was turned upon them.

This would not do! This distinctly would not do! He must clutch at something, grip with his mind upon something which belonged essentially to the workaday world, to the daylight London streets. He was Raymond Hewson, an unsuccessful journalist, a living and

breathing man, and these figures grouped around him were only dummies, so they could neither move nor whisper. What did it matter if they were supposed to be lifelike effigies of murderers? They were only made of wax and sawdust, and stood there for the entertainment of morbid sightseers and orange-sucking trippers. That was better! Now what was that funny story which somebody had told him in the Falstaff yesterday? . . .

He recalled part of it, but not all, for the gaze of Dr. Bourdette, urged, challenged, and finally compelled him to turn.

Hewson half turned, and then swung his chair so as to bring him face to face with the wearer of those dreadful hypnotic eyes. His own eyes were dilated, and his mouth, at first set in a grin of terror, lifted at the corners in a snarl. Then Hewson spoke and woke a hundred sinister echoes.

"You moved, damn you!" he cried. "Yes, you did, damn you! I saw you!"

Then he sat quite still, staring straight before him, like a man found frozen in the Arctic snows.

Dr. Bourdette's movements were leisurely. He stepped off his pedestal with the mincing care of a lady alighting from a bus. The platform stood about two feet from the ground, and above the edge of it a plush-covered rope hung in arclike curves. Dr. Bourdette lifted up the rope until it formed an arch for him to pass under, stepped off the platform and sat down on the edge facing Hewson. Then he nodded and smiled and said, "Good evening.

"I need hardly tell you," he continued, in perfect English in which was traceable only the least foreign accent, "that not until I overheard the conversation between you and the worthy manager of this establishment, did I suspect that I should have the pleasure of a companion here for the night. You cannot move or speak without my bidding, but you can hear me perfectly well. Something tells me that you are—shall I say nervous? My dear sir, have no illusions. I am not

one of these contemptible effigies miraculously come to life: I am Dr. Bourdette himself."

He paused, coughed and shifted his legs.

"Pardon me," he resumed, "but I am a little stiff. And let me explain. Circumstances with which I need not fatigue you, have made it desirable that I should live in England. I was close to this building this evening when I saw a policeman regarding me a thought too curiously. I guessed that he intended to follow and perhaps ask me embarrassing questions, so I mingled with the crowd and came in here. An extra coin bought my admission to the chamber in which we now meet, and an inspiration showed me a certain means of escape.

"I raised a cry of fire, and when all the fools had rushed to the stairs I stripped my effigy of the caped coat which you behold me wearing, donned it, hid my effigy under the platform at the back, and took its place on the pedestal.

"I own that I have since spent a very fatiguing evening, but fortunately I was not always being watched and had opportunities to draw an occasional deep breath and ease the rigidity of my pose. One small boy screamed and exclaimed that he saw me moving. I understood that he was to be whipped and put straight to bed on his return home, and I can only hope that the threat has been executed to the letter.

"The manager's description of me, which I had the embarrassment of being compelled to overhear, was biased but not altogether inaccurate. Clearly I am not dead, although it is as well that the world thinks otherwise. His account of my hobby, which I have indulged for years, although, through necessity, less frequently of late, was in the main true although not intelligently expressed. The world is divided between collectors and noncollectors. With the noncollectors we are not concerned. The collectors collect anything, according to their individual tastes, from money to cigarette cards, from moths to matchboxes. I collect throats."

He paused again and regarded Hewson's throat with interest mingled with disfavor.

"I am obliged to the chance which brought us together tonight," he continued, "and perhaps it would seem ungrateful to complain. From motives of personal safety my activities have been somewhat curtailed of late years, and I am glad of this opportunity of gratifying my somewhat unusual whim. But you have a skinny neck, sir, if you will overlook a personal remark. I should never have selected you from choice. I like men with thick necks . . . thick red necks. . . ."

He fumbled in an inside pocket and took out something which he tested against a wet forefinger and then proceeded to pass gently to and fro across the palm of his left hand.

"This is a little French razor," he remarked blandly. "They are not much used in England, but perhaps you know them? One strops them on wood. The blade, you will observe, is very narrow. They do not cut very deep, but deep enough. In just one little moment you shall see for yourself. I shall ask you the little civil question of all the polite barbers: Does the razor suit you, sir?"

He rose up, a diminutive but menacing figure of evil, and approached Hewson with the silent, furtive step of a hunting panther.

"You will have the goodness," he said, "to raise your chin a little. Thank you, and a little more. Just a little more. Ah, thank you! . . . *Merci, m'sieur . . . Ah, merci . . . merci. . . .*"

Over one end of the chamber was a thick skylight of frosted glass which, by day, let in a few sickly and filtered rays from the floor above. After sunrise these began to mingle with the subdued light from the electric bulbs, and this mingled illumination added a certain ghastliness to a scene which needed no additional touch of horror.

The waxwork figures stood apathetically in their places, waiting to be admired or execrated by the

crowds who would presently wander fearfully among them. In their midst, in the center gangway, Hewson sat still, leaning far back in his armchair. His chin was uptilted as if he were waiting to receive attention from a barber, and although there was not a scratch upon his throat, nor anywhere upon his body, he was cold and dead. His previous employers were wrong in having him credited with no imagination.

Dr. Bourdette on his pedestal watched the dead man unemotionally. He did not move, nor was he capable of motion. But then, after all, he was only a waxwork.

The Dumb Wife

by THOMAS BURKE

Dark is this tale of love with woe as dark as the brooding arches that shut out light from the streets about the waterside. In these streets it is always chilly afternoon, gray hued and empty of happy noise and welcoming windows. Here the narrow curbs make boundaries for the puckered lives of their people; and feet fall without echo upon their stones.

Yet, though all else perish here, beauty and love and sacrifice survive. In these waste places below London River mean iniquities propagate and flourish, and curl their soiling arms about all that would be brave and beautiful. Yet beauty persists. Even in the heart of darkness love takes root and spreads therein its eternal enchantments of gardens and moonrise and April airs and song.

In one of these infelicitous streets, some distance from the main Chinese quarter, stood a small Chinese laundry. At an upper window of this laundry sat, for many years, a woman of semi-Oriental features. Day by day, month by month, she sat there, the object of that pity which those deep in misfortune bestow so

largely upon others in misfortune. Part of her story was known. She was the wife of the owner of the laundry, Ng Yong; and she was dumb.

Throughout the hours of light she sat at her window, her naturally placid face now coldly blank by her affliction; staring at nothing, hearing nothing; silent and still; a piece of Chinese carving. And deep in her narrow eyes lay a crouching horror, so that strangers, passing that window, quickened their steps to the friendly main road. What passed each day behind that rigid face may not be known; can only be conjectured. What hate—what fear—what resolution of vengeance and escape—what vacillation—what dark ideas and darker memories gathered there—these things are not to be told.

Upon recurring occasions she would, without warning, shed her impassivity, and a scene would follow. She would run to the door and strive for speech to the point of paroxysm, and utter anomalous noises, and make wild gestures in the direction of West India Dock. Then her husband would hasten to her. He would take her in hand, sadly, and lead her, with kind firmness, back to seclusion; and the neighbors would murmur in sympathy with him and his forbearance under his trials.

He had early explained to them the misfortune that had befallen his house, and they had often aided him in quieting the sufferer. On her rare walks he went always with her, the ministering husband; and when she turned and turned from street to street, as though in search of one desired spot, and stopped passers-by with her pleading face and working jaws, he would make forlorn play with his hands, and strangers would draw away, and those who knew would gather about him. This much was known. Here is the full story.

When Moy Toon was born in Poplar of an English mother and a Chinese father there was no warm place for her with her father's people, and none at all with her mother's. Her father's people, however, finding her

lying about unclaimed, and holding something of grace within them, did provide her with bare necessities. Left motherless in her early years, she was received into a teahouse in the colony to do the rough work. In this teahouse she spent many tedious years whose days she scarcely counted. She had little capacity for thought; felt little; asked little; was as content as the slave born in slavery and untaught. Her birth had given her a larger share of Oriental compliance than of Western skepticism and challenge. Things were what they were, and she accepted them. She grew up in the promiscuous company of the docks. Of moral training she had little, and no learning beyond that given of custom to the Chinese woman of the coolie class. So she passed her young years in a kind of somnambulism.

Then one night there came to the teahouse, in the fourth stage of inebriety, a young second mate. She had seen him many times about the streets; and, in her aimless way, had admired his happy stride and clear, sea-brightened face. On this occasion the wavering charm of the girl, unsettled between English mobility and Eastern gravity, captivated his beer-bound senses, and he made proposals to her. He had but to invite, and she went, her warped spirit mildly pleased at the attention from this man-wonder.

Well, that night was the first of many. He made a fuss of her, and called her Baby Doll and other babbling names, and brought cheap gifts for her. On his next time ashore he again sought her out, and pleased himself with her simple company. Some months later he made a definite parting from her, telling her only that he was about to marry and settle down in another part of London; and she saw him no more. She took her dismissal placidly, without rancor, as she took all things, whether blows or endearments, and asked nothing of him.

Later came the baby. The restaurant keeper was a little chagrined at this clumsy misdemeanor, but he gave her rough attention, and the child was placed with

an old woman, known to the Chinese colony, who lived at Blackwall. Now Moy Toon became quite silly about that baby. It was her living memory of the one adventure of her life, and she worshiped it. At first she clung to it defiantly, as a gesture of disdain against those about her who so lightly esteemed her wonderful achievement of motherhood. But in a more sober moment she saw that in their advice lay her best course. With the child, she could not hope to earn even the scanty living that her abilities and known story permitted her to command today; and she had no taste for the life which other girls of her birth and class affected. She had had her one adventure, and desired, for the child's sake, to walk securely. She preferred the rough comfort of the teahouse to the dolorous enterprise of the streets. She knew that the child would receive, under other protection, at least the essentials of life, which she herself could not faithfully promise him. So she let wisdom beat down her sentiment, and surrendered the child, with the condition that she should see it from time to time as she wished.

For six years, then, she followed her arid course, mother and no mother, accepting, without question or conjecture, the untowardness of her circumstance; rather giving thanks that her course was broken, week by week, by visits to the boy. Often during these years her pillow shook to the vibrations of her sobbing breast, as she recalled the young strength and delicate small ways of him, and reached vain arms through the darkness to the child she might not openly claim. In the rough-and-tumble of the dockside alleys he had grown into a wiry, alert urchin, big and bold for his age; and delicious afternoons she spent with him, dressing him in a travesty of seaman's uniform—reefer jacket and gilt buttons, with peaked cap and much cheap braid about it—and calling him "Mother's Sailor Boy"; afternoons that compensated for the lonely nights.

Then old Ng Yong appeared. He had bought the

laundry business of a compatriot who was returning to his own country, and he was doing very well with it. But, looking round the fittings of the house, which he had bought with the business, he felt that something was lacking, and discovered that it lacked a woman. He felt that a woman would be an agreeable piece of furniture, and would finish off the establishment. He looked about for one, and at the teahouse of the Hundred Gilded Dragons he found Moy Toon. Moy Toon seemed to him to be just the article. He inquired of the keeper of the house concerning her, and found that she was available, and was in the gift of the keeper.

Now Ng Yong was very strict on the sanctity of womanhood (from the prospective purchaser's point of view) and put to the keeper voluminous questions upon her life and behavior. These the man behind the Gilded Dragons answered freely: not entirely truthfully, but freely, with an engaging air of candor. When Ng Yong demanded assurances of the unblemished character of the goods, these also he freely gave. No gentleman of commerce has yet been known to cry down his wares; and he knew that the disclosure of a certain adventure would appreciably lower the price of the article to that of shop-soiled.

Moy Toon was privately told of the opening of negotiations, and was shown, by reports of Ng Yong's prosperity, how largely her situation should be uplifted by an alliance with him, and how necessary it was that the existence of the boy should be kept secret. It was urged upon her that she should renounce forever any further part in him; but to that she answered nothing. To the proposed union she offered no objection. Ng Yong was old, but she was not repelled on that ground: she was sufficiently Chinese to regard the difference in ages as fitting. She saw here a chance of helping herself, and, indirectly, the boy, and was prepared to take it without a second thought. She never doubted her ability to keep her own secret.

So, some nights later, she was inspected and ques-

tioned by Ng Yong, who expressed himself as satisfied with her person and with her demeanor of modesty. But he did not let the serious occasion of wife-taking pass without administering a sharp lecture on wifely deportment. He sat before her in the kitchen of the teahouse, his fleshy hands splayed upon his knees, his old head wagging, the secrets of his eyes shaded from the groping minds of his fellows. Ng Yong's wife, he told her, must be obedient; must give unquestioning and unceasing service to her lord; must give ready and regular attention to household duties; must sever all connection with the people about the teahouse; and, above all, must be honest and faithful. She must be all his and his alone. He quoted passages from the Four Books concerning the Virtuous Wife, and the others; and his voice dropped to a muttered monotone as he spoke of the punishment befitting the wife who failed in the first law.

To this homily Moy Toon listened perfunctorily, and answered casually, with modest and low-toned responses. So the business proceeded, through many evenings of bargaining, until at last a middle price was agreed, the money paid to the Gilded Dragons, and Moy Toon lifted over the threshold of Ng Yong.

All that he required of her in service and obedience she gave him. But she would not renounce her boy. Her heart had not been asked of her, and that she kept; and in it, guarded from all profane contact, rested the boy. He was her joss, and through him and before him she worshiped. For the rest, she served Ng Yong well. She had no desire to do else. She was scrupulous in anticipating his wishes, studious in attending the house, and looked at no other man.

Of this she had but little chance, for her husband was ever about her. Maybe her demeanor of modesty had not wholly convinced him. He watched her with vigilant eyes; never was she free from him; and even when she was out on shopping business she felt that she was under his regard.

Her meetings with her boy became, therefore, matters of delicacy. To go to the house in Canning Town, each Thursday, as she had done these six years, would at once arouse suspicion. He would note these regular, recurring disappearances; he would question her and perhaps not be satisfied by her answers; he would follow her or have her followed, and discover her secret; and then the pavement would receive her, and she and the boy would starve.

She considered carefully new arrangements, and decided that future meetings must be haphazard, snatched at odd moments, and a different rendezvous must be appointed for each meeting. Discretion warned her to follow the Dragon's advice and abandon wholly these meetings. She was safe now and comfortable, and her daily life was well set. Better to take the chance of seeing the boy at a distance, without speech, or of getting word of his welfare from independent parties, than to risk all her present security and well-being for the idle whim of fondling him and talking with him. For discovery meant banishment from the house of Ng Yong and consequent privation and misery. Beyond that her mind did not travel. Of the words of his homily on wifely decorum she remembered nothing: they had gone, as the phrase is, in at one ear and out at the other. He would be angry and kick her out, and she and the boy would suffer. And suffering of any kind she could not face. She hated it and feared it.

Yet, upon a night in the first month of marriage, as she lay awake, she thought of the boy, and fancied his small arms about her, and his voice whispering childish prayers for pennies in her ear. Her boy. Next morning she managed to pass the word, through many channels, to the woman who had charge of him, that she should bring him, the following afternoon, to Tunnel Gardens. There she could sit with him and the woman, and hear him talk; and if Ng Yong or any friend of his should see her thus engaged, she could

reply, quite suitably, that the woman and the boy were strangers; that the child at play had attracted her and she had spoken to him and his mother. No harm in that. So it was done, without misadventure.

For the next meeting, a fortnight later, she appointed a sweet-stuff shop near Blackwall, where the boy was fed with cakes and ginger beer. She spent an hour with him here, and when she returned, Ng Yong, who was customarily superintending the laundry at that hour, was awaiting her upstairs. He told her that she had been long gone; and she answered that she had gone to the cheaper market at Shadwell, and had been delayed because the road was under repair. He looked strangely and closely at her, but she caught nothing of the look. Her eyes were full of her boy—how bonny he was looking and how pert of manner.

The next meeting she fixed, after some thought, for a morning in a disused cellar in a remote corner near West India Dock. She had discovered this cellar some years ago, and it was today much as it was then. She and her sailor had spent some hours there one wet evening of summer, when he had been unable to find other temporary accommodation. It was easily entered, and, as it held nothing that could be stolen, was never under observation. It had lain abandoned since the river first entered it and swamped its contents. Repairs had been attempted, but the river persisted; and at every high tide it was waist deep in water. It was entered from a narrow passage by a flight of broken steps so hidden that none could without guidance discover them.

Hither, then, the boy was brought. The cellar, lit by Moy Toon's electric torch, did not daunt him. He was a lad of his father's spirit, she told herself, for he was delighted with the adventure, and trotted about the place, prying here and there, and nourishing his mother's heart with smiles. She stood by him, blooming with pride and encouraging his tricks, careless of all save the small circle in which he moved. But in the

midst of his gamboling the woman who had brought him lifted a nervous finger. "Listen! Quiet!"

He stopped suddenly, and Moy Toon gathered him against her skirt. They listened.

"Oo—er!" croaked the woman. "Someone comin'. I was afraid we'd get into trouble comin' 'ere. What'll we do? Where shall we go? Oo—er. I'm gointer get outer this. It's your affair. I ain't in it. I ain't gointer be mixed up in no—"

With a whirl of worried skirts and cumbrous boots, she pounded up the steps. Moy Toon, below, heard a sound as of a dull impact, and a shrill "Oo—er!" followed by "Look out, gel!"

It was a moment of panic. The woman had seen something to affright her, and Moy Toon's first instinct was the boy. At that moment she was without power of thought. She saw three feet from her an alcove in which the boy had been exploring. It was guarded by a heavy door with a great iron hasp and lock. She grabbed the boy by the arm, and put her mouth to his ear. "In there, darling. Quick—in there. Don't make a sound. It's for Mummy."

The boy understood and hopped into the alcove. She swept the door upon him and snapped it closed. She turned from it to reach the torch and extinguish it; and turned to see Ng Yong descending the last step to the cellar, with hand outstretched in command which she instinctively obeyed. He reached the bottom, and stood motionless, looking about him, right and left. The sudden shock of his arrival, and the closing of the door, had left her breathless, incapable of act or word. She leaned against the wall, panting, her slow mind rolling round one idea: "What did he see? What did he see?" Through his silence she prayed for him to speak.

At last he spoke, quietly. "So this is where you meet your lover? Let us see him."

"Lover? Me? No, I don't. Oh no—no—I don't. What d'you mean?"

She knew that she was speaking stupidly, unconvincingly, but delight at his mistake about a lover made her careless. Inside herself she laughed. If she had to suffer his wrath, she would suffer; but at least the boy was safe, while the lover idea remained.

"Where is your lover?"

"Lover? Ha-ha! I ain't got no lover."

"What then would you be doing here?"

"But—I mean—don't be silly! Lover? I come 'ere to—"

"So you come to this place—this place—to gossip with old women, huh? Bring out your lover."

"But I ain't—" She saw suddenly that her best plan, for the boy's sake, was to hold the idea of a lover, to develop it.

"Well, I mean, suppose I—"

He raised a hand. "Look at me!"

The instinct of obedience raised her eyes, and she looked full at him, and what she saw in his face turned her sick. She gibbered.

"But I ain't—I ain't—"

"You—you to whom I gave my trust. Oh, child of a dog!"

"But I mean—I—"

A snarl broke from his lips. His hand dipped to his inner pocket. She watched it, with foolish eyes, fumbling under his canvas coat. She saw it come out, holding a long curved knife, the blade dulled by long disuse. He held it by the ivory hilt, directed the point upon her, horizontally, and slowly, quietly approached her. Like dropping water, the words of his homily on the Virtuous Wife dropped through her mind.

"You have chosen your place well. We are safe here. I told you how I would punish unfaithfulness."

With each step forward he took, she took one backward, shrinking from him. He followed her. She drew back, shuddering, arms extended, pressing herself against the wall as if she would force herself into it. He followed her. Pat-pat, pat-pat, they moved softly along

the damp floor. She continued to step slow paces backward, eyes fixed on him. He followed her. He followed her until she had reached the far wall, where an iron grating gave out to the river. There she stood, mouthing at him, cornered; fascinated, rabbit-like, by the dull tongue of steel that slowly floated toward her breast. Nearer and nearer it came. She felt the touch of it upon her corsage; then the prick of it upon her skin; and at this she opened wide her throat to scream: "Mercy! Mercy! I ain't got no lover!"

But, though she opened her throat, none of these words came. Her mouth opened and shut, and her teeth came together and flew apart; but no sound could she utter. The knife rose and fluttered half an inch from her throat. Then Ng Yong dropped it to his waist, and drew back. He looked long at her before he spoke again. "Where is this lover?"

Her lips moved, and she made meaningless noises, and shook her head and prayed with her hands. Ng Yong replaced the knife in his coat, and nodded gravely. The shock of discovery and the threatened punishment had taken punishment from his hands. His wife was punished by an instrument keener than any blade of steel. She was struck dumb.

He took her by the arm. She shrank from the touch, and he smiled upon her. He drew her to the steps leading to the alley. As he led her away, she struggled, and pointed to the great door of the alcove, and made low noises: "Myw! Myw!"

Ng Yong, too, looked at the door, and gave a smile of understanding. With easy force he compelled her up the steps. She beat against his bent arm, and strove with hands and lips, as one explaining. But he led her away, quietly, down that narrow passage, so that none noted their going until they reached the main road. And he led her home, and told sympathetic inquirers how his wife had suffered a sad shock from a street accident, which had deprived her of speech and made her foolish of mind.

Couching at the Door

by D. K. BROSTER

The first inkling which Augustine Marchant had of the matter was on one fine summer morning about three weeks after his visit to Prague, that is to say, in June 1898. He was reclining, as his custom was when writing his poetry, on the very comfortable sofa in his library at Abbot's Medding, near the French windows, one of which was open to the garden. Pausing for inspiration—he was nearly at the end of his poem, *Salutation to All Unbeliefs*—he let his eyes wander round the beautifully appointed room, with its cloisonné and Satsuma, Buhl and first editions, and then alowed them to stray toward the sunlight outside. And so, between the edge of the costly Herat carpet and the sill of the open window, across the strip of polished oak flooring, he observed what he took to be a small piece of dark fluff blowing in the draft; and instantly made a note to speak to his housekeeper about the parlormaid. There was slackness somewhere; and in Augustine Marchant's house no one was allowed to be slack but himself.

There had been a time when the poet would not for

a moment have been received, as he was now, in country and even county society—those days, even before the advent of *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy,* when he had lived in London, writing the plays and poems which had so startled and shocked all but the "decadent" and the "advanced," *Pomegranates of Sin, Queen Theodora and Queen Marozia, The Nights of the Tour de Nesle, Amor Cypriacus* and the rest. But when, as the nineties began to wane, he inherited Abbot's Medding from a distant cousin and came to live there, being then at the height of an almost international reputation, Wiltshire society at first tolerated him for his kinship with the late Lord Medding, and then, placated by the excellence of his dinners and further mollified by the patent staidness of his private life, decided that, in his personal conduct at any rate, he must have turned over a new leaf. Perhaps indeed he had never been as bad as he was painted, and if his writings continued to be no less scandalously free and freethinking than before, and needed to be just as rigidly kept out of the hands of daughters, well, no country gentleman in the neighborhood was obliged to read them!

And indeed Augustine Marchant in his fifty-first year was too keenly alive to the value of the good opinion of county society to risk shocking it by any overt doings of his. He kept his license for his pen. When he went abroad, as he did at least twice a year—but that was another matter altogether. The nose of Mrs. Grundy was not sharp enough to smell out his occupations in Warsaw or Berlin or Naples, her eyes longsighted enough to discern what kind of society he frequented even so near home as Paris. At Abbot's Medding his reputation for being "wicked" was fast declining into just enough of a sensation to titillate a croquet party. He had charming manners, could be witty at moments (though he could not keep it up), still retained his hyacinthine locks (by means of hair restorers), wore his excellently cut velvet coats and flow-

ing ties with just the right air—half poet, half man of the world—and really had, at Abbot's Medding, no dark secret to hide beyond the fact, sedulously concealed by him for five-and-twenty years, that he had never been christened Augustine. Between Augustus and Augustine, what a gulf! But he had crossed it, and his French poems (which had to be smuggled into his native land) were signed Augustin—Augustin Lemarchant.

Removing his gaze from the objectionable evidence of domestic carelessness upon the floor Mr. Marchant now fixed it meditatively upon the ruby-set end of the gold pencil which he was using. Rossell & Ward, his publishers, were about to bring out an edition de luxe of *Queen Theodora and Queen Marozia* with illustrations by a hitherto unknown young artist—if they were not too daring. It would be a sumptuous affair in a limited edition. And as he thought of this the remembrance of his recent stay in Prague returned to the poet. He smiled to himself, as a man smiles when he looks at a rare wine, and thought, "Yes, if these blunt-witted Pharisees round Abbot's Medding only knew!" It was a good thing that the upholders of British petty morality were seldom great travelers; a dispensation of . . . ahem, Providence!

Twiddling his gold pencil between plump fingers, Augustine Marchant returned to his ode, weighing one epithet against another. Except in summer he was no advocate of open windows, and even in summer he considered that to get the most out of that delicate and precious instrument, his brain, his feet must always be kept thoroughly warm; he had therefore cast over them, before settling into his semi-reclining position, a beautiful rose-colored Indian *sari* of the purest and thickest silk, leaving the ends trailing on the floor. And he became aware, with surprise and annoyance, that the piece of brown fluff or whatever it was down there, traveling in the draft from the window, had reached

the nearest end of the *sari* and was now, impelled by the same current, traveling up it.

The master of Abbot's Medding reached out for the silver handbell on the table by his side. There must be more breeze coming in than he had realized, and he might take cold, a catastrophe against which he guarded himself as against the plague. Then he saw that the upward progress of the dark blot—it was about the size of a farthing—could not by any possibility be assigned to any other agency than its own. It was *climbing* up—some horrible insect, plainly, some disgusting kind of almost legless and very hairy spider, round and vague in outline. The poet sat up and shook the *sari* violently. When he looked again the invader was gone. He had obviously shaken it on to the floor, and on the floor somewhere it must still be. The idea perturbed him, and he decided to take his writing out to the summerhouse, and give orders later that the library was to be thoroughly swept out.

Ah! it was good to be out of doors and in a pleasance so delightfully laid out, so exquisitely kept, as his! In the basin of the fountain the sea nymphs of rosy-veined marble clustered round a Thetis as beautiful as Aphrodite herself; the lightest and featheriest of acacia trees swayed near. And as the owner of all this went past over the weedless turf he repeated snatches of Verlaine to himself about *"sveltes jets d'eau"* and *"sanglots d'extase."*

Then, turning his head to look back at the fountain, he became aware of a little dark-brown object about the size of a halfpenny running toward him over the velvet-smooth sward. . . .

He believed afterward that he must first have had a glimpse of the truth at that instant in the garden, or he would not have acted so instinctively as he did and so promptly. For a moment later he was standing at the edge of the basin of Thetis, his face blanched in the sunshine, his hand firmly clenched. Inside that

closed hand something feather-soft pulsated. . . . Holding back as best he could the disgust and the something more which clutched at him, Augustine Marchant stooped and plunged his whole fist into the bubbling water, and let the stream of the fountain whirl away what he had picked up. Then with uncertain steps he went and sat down on the nearest seat and shut his eyes. After a while he took out his lawn handkerchief and carefully dried his hand with the intaglio ring, dried it and then looked curiously at the palm. "I did not know I had so much courage," he was thinking; "so much courage and good sense!" . . . It would doubtless drown very quickly.

Burrows, his butler, was coming over the lawn. "Mr. and Mrs. Morrison have arrived, sir."

"Ah, yes; I had forgotten for the moment." Augustine Marchant got up and walked toward the house and his guests, throwing back his shoulders and practicing his famous enigmatic smile, for Mrs. Morrison was a woman worth impressing.

(But what had it been exactly? Why, just what it had looked—a tuft of fur blowing over the grass, a tuft of fur! Sheer imagination that it had moved in his closed hand with a life of its own. . . . Then why had he shut his eyes as he stooped and made a grab at it? Thank God, thank God, it was nothing now but a drenched smear swirling round the nymphs of Thetis!)

"Ah, dear lady, you must forgive me! Unpardonable of me not to be in to receive you!" He was in the drawing room now, fragrant with its banks of hothouse flowers, bending over the hand of the fashionably attired guest on the sofa with a flyaway hat perched at a rakish angle on her gold-brown hair.

"Your man told us that you were writing in the garden," said her goggle-eyed husband reverentially.

"*Cher maître,* it is we who ought not to be interrupting your rendezvous with the Muse," returned Mrs. Morrison in her sweet, high voice. "Terrible to bring you from such company into that of mere visitors!"

Running his hand through his carefully tended locks the *cher maître* replied, "Between a visit from the Muse and one from Beauty's self no true poet would hesitate!—Moreover, luncheon awaits us, and I trust it is a good one."

He liked faintly to shock fair admirers by admitting that he cared for the pleasures of the table; it was quite safe to do so, since none of them had sufficient acumen to see that it was true.

The luncheon was excellent, for Augustine kept an admirable cook. Afterward he showed his guests over the library—yes, even though it had not received the sweeping which would not be necessary now—and round the garden; and in the summerhouse was prevailed upon to read some of *Amor Cypriacus* aloud. And Mrs. Frances (nowadays Francesca) Morrison was thereafter able to recount to envious friends how the Poet himself had read her stanza after stanza from that most *daring* poem of his; and how poor Fred, fanning himself meanwhile with his straw hat—not from the torridity of the verse but because of the afternoon heat—said afterward that he had not understood a single word. A good thing, perhaps. . . .

When they had gone Augustine Marchant reflected rather cynically, "All that was just so much bunkum when I wrote it." For ten years ago, in spite of those audacious, glowing verses, he was an ignorant neophyte. Of course, since then . . . He smiled, a private, sly, self-satisfied smile. It was certainly pleasant to know oneself no longer a fraud!

Returning to the summerhouse to fetch his poems he saw what he took to be Mrs. Morrison's fur boa lying on the floor just by the basket chair which she had occupied. Odd of her not to have missed it on departure—a tribute to his verses perhaps. His housekeeper must send it after her by post. But just at that moment his head gardener approached, desiring some instructions, and when the matter was settled, and Augustine Marchant turned once more to enter the summerhouse, he

found that he had been mistaken about the dropped boa, for there was nothing on the floor.

Besides, he remembered now that Mrs. Morrison's boa had been a rope of gray feathers, not of dark fur. As he took up *Amor Cypriacus* he asked himself lazily what could have led him to imagine a woman's boa there at all, much less a fur one.

Suddenly he knew why. A lattice in the house of memory had opened, and he remained rigid, staring out at the jets of the fountain rising and falling in the the afternoon sun. Yes; of that glamorous, wonderful, abominable night in Prague, the part he least wished to recall was connected—incidentally but undeniably—with a fur boa—a long boa of dark fur. . . .

He had to go up to town next day to a dinner in his honor. There and then he decided to go up that same night, by a late train, a most unusual proceeding, and most disturbing to his valet, who knew that it was doubtful whether he could at such short notice procure him a first-class carriage to himself. However, Augustine Marchant went, and even, to the man's amazement, deliberately chose a compartment with another occupant when he might, after all, have had an empty one.

The dinner was brilliant; Augustine had never spoken better. Next day he went round to the little street not far from the British Museum where he found Lawrence Storey, his new illustrator, working feverishly at his drawings for *Queen Theodora and Queen Marozia,* and quite overwhelmed at the honor of a personal visit. Augustine was very kind to him, and, while offering a few criticisms, highly praised his delineation of those two Messalinas of tenth-century Rome, their long supple hands, their heavy eyes, their full, almost repellent mouths. Storey had followed the same type for mother and daughter, but with a subtle difference.

"They were certainly two most evil women, especially the younger," he observed ingenuously. "But I suppose

that, from an artistic point of view, that doesn't matter nowadays!"

Augustine, smoking one of his special cigarettes, made a delicate little gesture. "My dear fellow, Art has nothing whatever to do with what is called 'morality'; happily we know that at last! Show me how you thought of depicting the scene where Marozia orders the execution of her mother's papal paramour. Good, very good! Yes, the lines there, even the fall of that loose sleeve from the extended arm, express with clarity what I had in mind. You have great gifts!"

"I have tried to make her look wicked," said the young man, reddening with pleasure. "But," he added deprecatingly, "it is very hard for a ridiculously inexperienced person like myself to have the right artistic vision. For to you, Mr. Marchant, who have penetrated into such wonderful arcana of the forbidden, it would be foolish to pretend to be other than I am."

"How do you know that I have penetrated into any such arcana?" inquired the poet, half-shutting his eyes and looking (though not to the almost worshiping gaze of young Storey) like a great cat being stroked.

"Why, one has only to read you!"

"You must come down and stay with me soon," were Augustine Marchant's parting words. (He would give the boy a few days' good living, for which he would be none the worse; let him drink some decent wine.) "How soon do you think you will be able to finish the rough sketches for the rest, and the designs for the *culs de lampe?* A fortnight or three weeks? Good; I shall look to see you then. Good-by, my dear fellow; I am very, very much pleased with what you have shown me!"

The worst of going up to London from the country was that one was apt to catch a cold in town. When he got back Augustine Marchant was almost sure that this misfortune had befallen him, so he ordered a fire in his bedroom, despite the season, and consumed a *recherché* little supper in seclusion. And, as the cold turned out to have been imaginary, he was very com-

fortable, sitting there in his silken dressing gown, toasting his toes and holding up a glass of golden Tokay to the flames. Really *Theodora and Marozia* would make as much sensation when it came out with these illustrations as when it first appeared!

All at once he set down his glass. Not far away on his left stood a big cheval mirror, like a woman's, in which a good portion of the bed behind him was reflected. And, in this mirror, he had just seen the valance of the bed move. There could be no draft to speak of in this warm room, he never allowed a cat in the house, and it was quite impossible that there should be a rat about. If after all some stray cat should have got in it must be ejected at once. Augustine hitched round in his chair to look at the actual bedhanging.

Yes, the topaz-hued silk valance again swung very slightly outward as though it were being pushed. Augustine bent forward to the bell-pull to summon his valet. Then the flask of Tokay rolled over on the table as he leaped from his chair instead. Something like a huge, dark caterpillar was emerging very slowly from under his bed, moving as a caterpillar moves, with undulations running over it. Where its head should have been was merely a tapering end smaller than the rest of it, but of like substance. It was a dark fur boa.

Augustine Marchant felt that he screamed, but he could not have done so, for his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. He merely stood staring, staring, all the blood gone from his heart. Still very slowly the thing continued to creep out from under the valance, waving that eyeless, tapering end to and fro, as though uncertain where to proceed. "I am going mad!" thought Augustine, and then, with a revulsion, "No, it can't be! It's a real snake of some kind!"

That could be dealt with. He snatched up the poker as the boa-thing, still swaying the head which was no head, kept pouring steadily out from under the lifted yellow frill, until quite three feet were clear of the

bed. Then he fell upon it furiously, with blow after blow.

But they had no effect on the furry, spineless thing; it merely gave under them and rippled up in another place. Augustine hit the bed, the floor; at last, really screaming, he threw down his weapon and fell upon the thick, hairy rope with both hands, crushing it together into a mass—there was little if any resistance in it—hurled it into the fire and, panting, kept it down with shovel and tongs. The flames licked up instantly and, with a roar, made short work of it, though there seemed to be some slight effort to escape, which was perhaps only the effect of the heat. A moment later there was a very strong smell of burnt hair, and that was all.

Augustine Marchant seized the fallen flask of Tokay and drained from its mouth what little was left in the bottom ere, staggering to the bed, he flung himself upon it and buried his face in the pillows, even heaping them over his head as if he could thus stifle the memory of what he had seen.

He kept his bed next morning; the supposed cold afforded a good pretext. Long before the maid came in to re-lay the fire he had crawled out to make sure that there were no traces left of . . . what he had burnt there. There were none. A nightmare could not have left a trace, he told himself. But well he knew that it was not a nightmare.

And now he could think of nothing but that room in Prague and the long fur boa of the woman. Some department of his mind (he supposed) must have projected that thing, scarcely noticed at the time, scarcely remembered, into the present and the here. It was terrible to think that one's mind possessed such dark, unknown powers. But not so terrible as if the . . . apparition . . . had been endowed with an entirely separate objective existence. In a day or two he would consult his doctor and ask him to give him a tonic.

But, expostulated an uncomfortably lucid part of his brain, you are trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Is it not better to believe that the thing *had* an objective existence, for you have burnt it to nothing? Well and good! But if it is merely a projection from your own mind, what is to prevent it from reappearing like the phœnix, from ashes?

There seemed no answer to that, save in an attempt to persuade himself that he had been feverish last night. Work was the best antidote. So Augustine Marchant rose, and was surprised and delighted to find the atmosphere of his study unusually soothing and inspiring, and that day, against all expectation, *Salutation to All Unbeliefs* was completed by some stanzas with which he was not too ill pleased. Realizing nevertheless that he should be glad of company that evening, he had earlier sent round a note to the local solicitor, a good fellow, to come and dine with him; played a game of billiards with the lawyer afterward and retired to bed after some vintage port and a good stiff whisky and soda with scarcely a thought of the visitant of the previous night.

He woke at that hour when the thrushes in early summer punctually greet the new day—three o'clock. They were greeting it even vociferously, and Augustine Marchant was annoyed with their enthusiasm. His golden damask window curtains kept out all but a glimmer of the new day, yet as, lying upon his back, the poet opened his eyes for a moment, his only half-awakened sense of vision reported something swinging to and fro in the dimness like a pendulum of rope. It was indistinct but seemed to be hanging from the tester of the bed. And, wide awake in an instant, with an unspeakable anguish of premonition tearing through him, he felt, next moment, a light thud on the coverlet about the level of his knees. Something had arrived on the bed. . . .

And Augustine Marchant neither shrieked nor leaped from his bed; he could not. Yet, now that his

eyes were grown used to the twilight of the room, he saw it clearly, the fur rope which he had burnt to extinction two nights ago, dark and shining as before, rippling with a gentle movement as it coiled itself neatly together in the place where it had struck the bed and subsided there in a symmetrical round, with only that tapering end a little raised and, as it were, looking at him—only, eyeless and featureless, it could not look. One thought of disgusted relief, that it was not at any rate going to attack him, and Augustine Marchant fainted.

Yet his swoon must have merged into sleep, for he woke in a more or less ordinary fashion to find his man placing his early tea tray beside him and inquiring when he should draw his bath. There was nothing on the bed.

"I shall change my bedroom," thought Augustine to himself, looking at the haggard, fallen-eyed man who faced him in the mirror as he shaved. "No, better still, I will go away for a change. Then I shall not have these . . . dreams. I'll go to old Edgar Fortescue for a few days; he begged me again not long ago to come any time."

So to the house of that old Mæcenas he went. He was much too great a man now to be in need of Sir Edgar's patronage. It was homage which he received there, both from host and guests. The stay did much to soothe his scarified nerves. Unfortunately the last day undid the good of all the foregoing ones.

Sir Edgar possessed a pretty young wife—his third—and, among other charms of his place in Somerset, an apple orchard underplanted with flowers. And in the cool of the evening Augustine walked there with his host and hostess almost as if he were the Almighty with the dwellers in Eden. Presently they sat down upon a rustic seat (but a very comfortable one) under the shade of the apple boughs, amid the incongruous but pleasant parterres.

"You have come at the wrong season for these apple

trees, Marchant," observed Sir Edgar after a while, taking out his cigar. "Blossom time or apple time—they are showy at either, in spite of the underplanting. What is attracting you on that tree—a tit? We have all kinds here, pretty, destructive little beggars!"

"I did not know that I was looking . . . it's nothing . . . thinking of something else," stammered the poet. Surely, surely he had been mistaken in thinking that he had seen a sinuous, dark furry thing undulating like a caterpillar down the stem of that particular apple tree at a few yards' distance?

Talk went on, even his; there was safety in it. It was only the breeze which faintly rustled that bed of heliotrope behind the seat. Augustine wanted desperately to get up and leave the orchard, but neither Sir Edgar nor his wife seemed disposed to move, and so the poet remained at his end of the seat, his left hand playing nervously with a long bent of grass which had escaped the scythe.

All at once he felt a tickling sensation on the back of his hand, looked down and saw that featureless snout of fur protruding upward from underneath the rustic bench and sweeping itself backward and forward against his hand with a movement which was almost caressing. He was on his feet in a flash.

"Do you mind if I go in?" he asked abruptly. "I'm not . . . feeling very well."

If the thing could follow him it was of no use to go away. He returned to Abbot's Medding looking so much the worse for his change of air that Burrows expressed a respectful hope that he was not indisposed. And almost the first thing that occurred, when Augustine sat down at his writing table to attend to his correspondence, was the unwinding of itself from one of its curved legs, of a soft, brown oscillating serpent which slowly waved an end at him as if in welcome. . . .

In welcome, yes, that was it! The creature, incredible though it was, the creature seemed glad to

see him! Standing at the other end of the room, his hands pressed over his eyes—for what was the use of attempting to hurt or destroy it—Augustine Marchant thought shudderingly that, like a witch's cat, a "familiar" would not, presumably, be ill disposed toward its master. Its master! Oh, God!

The hysteria which he had been trying to keep down began to mount uncontrollably when, removing his hand, Augustine glanced again toward his writing table and saw that the boa had coiled itself in his chair and was sweeping its end to and fro over the back, somewhat in the way that a cat, purring meanwhile, rubs itself against furniture or a human leg in real or simulated affection.

"Oh, go, go away from there!" he suddenly screamed at it, advancing with outstretched hand. "In the devil's name, get out!"

To his utter amazement, he was obeyed. The rhythmic movements ceased, the fur snake poured itself down out of the chair and writhed toward the door. Venturing back to his writing table after a moment Augustine saw it coiled on the threshold, the blind end turned toward him as usual, as though watching. And he began to laugh. What would happen if he rang and someone came; would the opening door scrape it aside . . . would it vanish? Had it, in short, an existence for anyone else but himself?

But he dared not make the experiment. He left the room by the French window, feeling that he could never enter the house again. And perhaps, had it not been for the horrible knowledge just acquired that it could follow him, he might easily have gone away for good from Abbot's Medding and all his treasures and comforts. But of what use would that be—and how should he account for so extraordinary an action? No; he must think and plan while he yet remained sane.

To what, then, could he have recourse? The black magic in which he had dabbled with such disastrous consequences might possibly help him. Left to himself

he was but an amateur, but he had a number of books. . . . There was also that other realm whose boundaries sometimes marched side by side with magic—religion. But how could he pray to a Diety in whom he did not believe? Rather pray to the Evil which had sent this curse upon him to show him how to banish it. Yet since he had deliberately followed what religion stigmatized as sin, what even the world would label as lust and necromancy, supplication to the dark powers was not likely to deliver him from them. They must somehow be outwitted, circumvented.

He kept his *grimoires* and books of the kind in a locked bookcase in another room, not in his study; in that room he sat up till midnight. But the spells which he read were useless; moreover, he did not really believe in them. The irony of the situation was that, in a sense, he had only played at sorcery; it had but lent a spice to sensuality. He wandered wretchedly about the room dreading at any moment to see his "familiar" wreathed round some object in it. At last he stopped at a small bookcase which held some old forgotten books of his mother's—Longfellow and Mrs. Hemans, *John Halifax, Gentleman,* and a good many volumes of sermons and mild essays. And when he looked at that blameless assembly a cloud seemed to pass over Augustine Marchant's vision, and he saw his mother, gentle and lace-capped as years and years ago she used to sit, hearing his lessons, in an antimacassared chair. She had been everything to him then, the little boy whose soul was not smirched. He called silently to her now: "Mamma, Mamma, can't you help me? Can't you send this thing away?"

When the cloud had passed he found that he had stretched out his hand and removed a big book. Looking at it he saw that it was her Bible, with "Sarah Amelia Marchant" on the faded yellow flyleaf. Her spirit *was* going to help him! He turned over a page or two, and out of the largish print there sprang instantly at him: *Now the serpent was more subtle than any*

beast of the field. Augustine shuddered and almost put the Bible back, but the conviction that there was help there urged him to go on. He turned a few more pages of Genesis and his eyes were caught by this verse, which he had never seen before in his life.

> And if thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

What strange words! What could they possibly mean? Was there light for him in them? "Unto thee shall be his desire." That Thing, the loathsome semblance of affection which hung about it. . . . "Thou shalt rule over him." It *had* obeyed him, up to a point. . . . Was this Book, of all others, showing him the way to be free? But the meaning of the verse was so obscure! He had not, naturally, such a thing as a commentary in the house. Yet, when he came to think of it, he remembered that some pious and anonymous person, soon after the publication of *Pomegranates of Sin,* had sent him a Bible in the Revised Version, with an inscription recommending him to read it. He had it somewhere, though he had always meant to get rid of it.

After twenty minutes' search through the sleeping house he found it in one of the spare bedrooms. But it gave him little enlightenment, for there was scant difference in the rendering, save that for "lieth at the door," this version had "coucheth," and that the margin held an alternative translation for the end of the verse: "And unto thee is its desire, but thou shouldst rule over it."

Nevertheless, Augustine Marchant stood after midnight in this silent, sheeted guest chamber repeating, *"But thou shouldst rule over it."*

And all at once he thought of a way of escape.

II

It was going to be a marvelous experience, staying with Augustine Marchant. Sometimes Lawrence Storey hoped there would be no other guests at Abbot's Medding; at other times he hoped there would be. A tête-à-tête of four days with the great poet—could he sustain his share worthily? For Lawrence, despite the remarkable artistic gifts which were finding their first real flowering in these illustrations to Augustine's poem, was still unspoiled, still capable of wonder and admiration, still humble and almost naïf. It was still astonishing to him that he, an architect's assistant, should have been snatched away, as Ganymede by the eagle, from the lower world of elevations and drains to serve on Olympus. It was not, indeed, Augustine Marchant who had first discovered him, but it was Augustine Marchant who was going to make him famous.

The telegraph poles flitted past the second-class carriage window and more than one traveler glanced with a certain envy and admiration at the fair, good-looking young man who diffused such an impression of happiness and candor, and had such a charming smile on his lips. He carried with him a portfolio which he never let out of reach of his hand; the oldish couple opposite, speculating upon its contents, might have changed their opinion of him had they seen them.

But no shadow of the dark weariness of things unlawful rested on Lawrence Storey; to know Augustine Marchant, to be illustrating his great poem, to have learned from him that art and morality had no kinship, this was to plunge into a new realm of freedom and enlarging experience. Augustine Marchant's poetry, he felt, had already taught his hand what his brain and heart knew nothing of.

There was a dogcart to meet him at the station, and in the scented June evening he was driven with a

beating heart past meadows and hay fields to his destination.

Mr. Marchant, awaiting him in the hall, was at his most charming. "My dear fellow, are those the drawings? Come, let us lock them away at once in my safe! If you had brought me diamonds I should not be one quarter so concerned about thieves. And did you have a comfortable journey? I have had you put in the orange room; it is next to mine. There is no one else staying here, but there are a few people coming to dinner to meet you."

There was only just time to dress for dinner, so that Lawrence did not get an opportunity to study his host until he saw him seated at the head of the table. Then he was immediately struck by the fact that he looked curiously ill. His face—ordinarily by no means attenuated—seemed to have fallen in, there were dark circles under his eyes, and the perturbed Lawrence, observing him as the meal progressed, thought that his manner too seemed strange and once or twice quite absent-minded. And there was one moment when, though the lady on his right was addressing him, he sharply turned his head away and looked down at the side of his chair just as if he saw something on the floor. Then he apologized, saying that he had a horror of cats, and that sometimes the tiresome animal from the stables . . . But after that he continued to entertain his guests in his own inimitable way, and, even to the shy Lawrence, the evening proved very pleasant.

The three ensuing days were wonderful and exciting to the young artist—days of uninterrupted contact with a master mind which acknowledged, as the poet himself admitted, none of the petty barriers which man, for his own convenience, had set up between alleged right and wrong. Lawrence had learned why his host did not look well; it was loss of sleep, the price exacted by inspiration. He had a new poetic drama shaping in his mind which would scale heights that he had not yet attempted.

There was almost a touch of fever in the young man's dreams tonight—his last night but one. He had several. First he was standing by the edge of a sort of mere, inexpressibly desolate and unfriendly, a place he had never seen in his life, which yet seemed in some way familiar; and something said to him, "You will never go away from here!" He was alarmed, and woke, but went to sleep again almost immediately, and this time was back, oddly enough, in the church where in his earliest years he had been taken to service by the aunt who had brought him up—a large church full of pitch-pine pews with narrow ledges for hymnbooks, which ledges he used surreptitiously to lick during the long dull periods of occultation upon his knees. But most of all he remembered the window with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, on either side of an apple tree round whose trunk was coiled a monstrous snake with a semi-human head. Lawrence had hated and dreaded that window, and because of it he would never go near an orchard and had no temptation to steal apples. . . . Now he was back in that church again, staring at the window, lit up with some infernal glow from behind. He woke again, little short of terrified—he, a grown man! But again he went to sleep quite quickly.

His third dream had for background, as sometimes happens in nightmares, the very room in which he lay. He dreamed that a door opened in the wall, and in the doorway, quite plain against the light from another room behind him, stood Augustine Marchant in his dressing gown. He was looking down at something on the ground which Lawrence did not see, but his hand was pointing at Lawrence in the bed, and he was saying in a voice of command, "Go to him, do you hear? Go to him! Go to *him!* Am I not your master?" And Lawrence, who could neither move nor utter a syllable, wondered uneasily what this could be which was thus commanded, but his attention was chiefly focused on Augustine Marchant's face. After he had said these

words several times, and apparently without result, a dreadful change came upon it, a look of the most unutterable despair. It seemed visibly to age and wither; he said, in a loud, penetrating whisper, "Is there no escape then?" covered his ravaged face a moment with his hands, and then went back and softly closed the door. At that Lawrence woke; but in the morning he had forgotten all three dreams.

The tête-à-tête dinner on the last night of his stay would have lingered in a gourmet's memory, so that it was a pity the young man did not know in the least what he was eating. At last there was happening what he had scarcely dared hope for; the great poet of the sensuous was revealing to him some of the unimaginably strange and secret sources of his inspiration. In the shaded rosy candlelight, his elbows on the table among trails of flowers he, who was not even a neophyte, listened like a man learning for the first time of some spell or spring which will make him more than mortal.

"Yes," said Augustine Marchant, after a long pause, "Yes, it was a marvelous, an undying experience . . . one that is not given to many. It opened doors, it—but I despair of doing it justice in mere words." His look was transfigured, almost dreamy.

"But she . . . the woman . . . how did you . . . ?" asked Lawrence Storey in a hushed voice.

"Oh, the woman?" said Augustine, suddenly finishing off his wine. "The woman was only a common streetwalker."

A moment or two later Lawrence was looking at his host wistfully. "But this was in Prague. Prague is a long way off."

"One does not need to go so far, in reality. Even in Paris—"

"One could . . . have that experience in Paris?"

"If you knew where to go. And of course, it is necessary to have credentials. I mean that—like all such

enlightenments—it has to be kept secret, most secret, from the vulgar minds who lay their restrictions on the finer. That is self-evident."

"Of course," said the young man, and sighed deeply. His host looked at him affectionately.

"You, my dear Lawrence—I may call you Lawrence? —want just that touch of . . . what shall I call them—*les choses cachées*—to liberate your immense artistic gifts from the shackles which still bind them. Through that gateway you would find the possibility of their full fruition! It would fertilize your genius to a still finer blossoming. . . . But you would have scruples . . . and you are very young."

"You know," said Lawrence in a low and trembling tone, "what I feel about your poetry. You know how I ache to lay the best that is in me at your feet. If only I could make my drawings for the Two Queens more worthy—already it is an honor which overwhelms me that you should have selected me to do them—but they are not what they should be. I am *not* sufficiently liberated. . . ."

Augustine leant forward on the flower-decked table. His eyes were glowing.

"Do you truly desire to be?"

The young man nodded, too full of emotion to find his voice.

The poet got up, went over to a cabinet in a corner and unlocked it. Lawrence watched his fine figure in a sort of trance. Then he half-rose with an exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Augustine very sharply, facing round.

"Oh, nothing, sir—only that I believe you hate cats, and I thought I saw one, or rather its tail, disappearing into that corner."

"There's no cat here," said Augustine quickly. His face had become all shiny and mottled, but Lawrence did not notice it. The poet stood a moment looking at the carpet; one might almost have thought that he was

gathering resolution to cross it; then he came swiftly back to the table.

"Sit down again," he commanded. "Have you a pocket-book with you, a pocket-book which you never leave about? Good! Then write *this* in one place; and *this* on another page . . . write it small . . . among other entries is best . . . not on a blank page . . . write it in Greek characters if you know them. . . ."

"What . . . is it?" asked Lawrence, all at once intolerably excited, his eyes fixed on the piece of paper in Augustine's hand.

"The two halves of the address in Paris."

III

Augustine Marchant kept a diary in those days, a locked diary, written in cipher. And for more than a month after Lawrence Storey's visit the tenor of the entries there was almost identical:

> No change . . . Always with me . . . How much longer can I endure it? The alteration in my looks is being remarked upon to my face. I shall have to get rid of Thornton [his man] on some pretext or other, for I begin to think that he has seen It. No wonder, since It follows me about like a dog. When It is visible to everyone it will be the end. . . . I found It in bed with me this morning, pressed up against me as if for warmth. . . .

But there was a different class of entry also, appearing at intervals with an ever increasing note of impatience.

> Will L.S. go there? . . . When shall I hear from L.S.? . . . Will the experiment do what I think? It is my last hope

Then, suddenly, after five weeks had elapsed, an entry in a trembling hand:

> For twenty-four hours I have seen no sign of It! Can it be possible?

And next day:

> Still nothing. I begin to live again.—This evening has just come an ecstatic letter from L.S., from Paris, telling me that he had "presented his credentials" and was to have the experience next day. He has had it by now—by yesterday, in fact. Have I really freed myself? It looks like it!

In one week from the date of that last entry it was remarked in Abbot's Medding how much better Mr. Marchant was looking again. Of late he had not seemed at all himself; his cheeks had fallen in, his clothes seemed to hang loosely upon him, who had generally filled them so well, and he appeared nervous. Now he was as before, cheery, courtly, debonair. And last Sunday, will you believe it, he went to church! The rector was so astonished when he first became aware of him from the pulpit that he nearly forgot to give out his text. And the poet joined in the hymns, too! Several observed this amazing phenomenon.

It was the day after this unwonted appearance at St. Peter's. Augustine was strolling in his garden. The air had a new savor, the sun a new light; he could look again with pleasure at Thetis and her nymphs of the fountain, could work undisturbed in the summerhouse. Free, free! All the world was good to the senses once again, and the hues and scents of early autumn better, in truth, than the brilliance of that summer month which had seen his curse descend upon him.

The butler brought him out a letter with a French stamp. From Lawrence Storey, of course; to tell him—what? Where had he caught his first glimpse of it? In one of those oppressively furnished French bedrooms? And how had he taken it?

At first, however, Augustine was not sure that the letter was from Storey. The writing was very different,

cramped instead of flowing, and, in places, spluttering, the pen having dug into the paper as if the hand which held it had not been entirely under control—almost, thought Augustine, his eyes shining with excitement, almost as though something had been twined, liana-like, round the wrist. (He had a sudden sick recollection of a day when that had happened to him, quickly submerged in a gush of eager anticipation.) Sitting down upon the edge of the fountain he read—not quite what he had looked for.

> "I don't know what is happening to me," began the letter without other opening. "Yesterday I was in a café by myself, and had just ordered some absinthe—though I do not like it. And quite suddenly, although I knew that I was in the café, I realized that I was also back in *that room.* I could see every feature of it, but I could see the café too, with all the people in it; the one was, as it were, superimposed upon the other, the room, which was a good deal smaller than the café, being inside the latter, as a box may be within a larger box. And all the while the room was growing clearer, the café fading. I saw the glass of absinthe suddenly standing on nothing, as it were. All the furniture of *the room,* all the accessories you know of, were mixed up with the chairs and tables of the café. I do not know how I managed to find my way to the *comptoir,* pay and get out. I took a *fiacre* back to my hotel. By the time I arrived there I was all right. I suppose that it was only the after-effects of a very strange and violent emotional experience. But I hope to God that it will not recur!"

"How interesting!" said Augustine Marchant, dabbling his hand in the swirling water where he had once drowned a piece of dark fluff. "And why indeed should I have expected that It would couch at his door in the same form as at mine?"

Four days more of new-found peace and he was reading this:

> In God's name—or the Devil's—come over and help me! I have hardly an hour now by night or day when I am sure of my whereabouts. I could not risk the journey back to England alone. It is like being imprisoned in some kind of infernal half-transparent box, always growing a little smaller. Wherever I go now I carry it about with me; when I am in the street I hardly know which is the pavement and which is the roadway, because I am always treading on that black carpet with the cabalistic designs; if I speak to anyone they may suddenly disappear from sight. To attempt to work is naturally useless. I would consult a doctor, but that would mean telling him everything. . . .

"I hope to God he won't do that!" muttered Augustine uneasily. "He can't—he swore to absolute secrecy. I hadn't bargained, however, for his ceasing work. Suppose he finds himself unable to complete the designs for *Theodora and Marozia!* That would be serious. . . . However, to have freed myself is worth *any* sacrifice. . . . But Storey cannot, obviously, go on living indefinitely on two planes at once. . . . Artistically, though, it might inspire him to something quite unprecedented. I'll write to him and point that out; it might encourage him. But go near him in person—is it likely!"

The next day was one of great literary activity. Augustine was so deeply immersed in his new poetical drama that he neglected his correspondence and almost his meals—except his dinner, which seemed that evening to be shared most agreeably and excitingly by these new creations of his brain. Such, in fact, was his preoccupation with them that it was not until he had finished the savory and poured out a glass of his

superlative port that he remembered a telegram which had been handed to him as he came in to dinner. It still lay unopened by his plate. Now, tearing apart the envelope, he read with growing bewilderment these words above his publishers' names:

> PLEASE INFORM US IMMEDIATELY WHAT STEPS TO TAKE ARE PREPARED SEND TO FRANCE RECOVER DRAWINGS IF POSSIBLE WHAT SUGGESTION CAN YOU MAKE AS TO SUCCESSOR ROSSELL AND WARD.

Augustine was more than bewildered; he was stupefied. Had some accident befallen Lawrence Storey of which he knew nothing? But he had opened all his letters this morning though he had not answered any. A prey to a sudden very nasty anxiety he got up and rang the bell.

"Burrows, bring me *The Times* from the library."

The newspaper came, unopened. Augustine, now in a frenzy of uneasiness, scanned the pages rapidly. But it was some seconds before he came upon the headline: TRAGIC DEATH OF A YOUNG ENGLISH ARTIST, and read the following, furnished by the Paris correspondent:

> Connoisseurs who were looking forward to the appearance of the superb illustrated edition of Mr. Augustine Marchant's *Queen Theodora and Queen Marozia* will learn with great regret of the death by drowning of the gifted young artist, Mr. Lawrence Storey, who was engaged upon the designs for it. Mr. Storey had recently been staying in Paris, but left one day last week for a remote spot in Brittany, it was supposed in pursuance of his work. On Friday last his body was discovered floating in a lonely pool near Carhaix. It is hard to see how Mr. Storey could have fallen in, since this piece of water—the Mare de Plougouven—has a completely level shore surrounded by reeds, and is not in itself very deep, nor is there any boat

upon it. It is said that the unfortunate young Englishman had been somewhat strange in his manner recently and complained of hallucinations; it is therefore possible that under their influence he deliberately waded out into the Mare de Plougouven. A strange feature of the case is that he had fastened round him under his coat the finished drawings for Mr. Marchant's book, which were of course completely spoiled by the water before the body was found. It is to be hoped that they were not the only—

Augustine threw *The Times* furiously from him and struck the dinner table with his clenched fist.

"Upon my soul, that is too much! It is criminal! My property—and I who had done so much for him! Fastened them round himself—he must have been crazy!"

But had he been so crazy? When his wrath had subsided a little Augustine could not but ask himself whether the young artist had not in some awful moment of insight guessed the truth, or a part of it—that his patron had deliberately corrupted him? It looked almost like it. But, if he had really taken all the finished drawings with him to this place in Brittany, what an unspeakably mean trick of revenge thus to destroy them! . . . Yet, even if it were so, he must regard their loss as the price of his own deliverance, since, from his point of view, the desperate expedient of passing on his "familiar" had been a complete success. By getting someone else to plunge even deeper than he had done into the unlawful (for he had seen to it that Lawrence Storey should do that) he had proved, as that verse in Genesis said, that he *had* rule over . . . what had pursued him in tangible form as a consequence of his own night in Prague. He could not be too thankful. The literary world might well be thankful too. For his own art was of infinitely more importance than the subservient, the parasitic art of

an illustrator. He could with a little search find half a dozen just as gifted as that poor hallucination-ridden Storey to finish *Theodora and Marozia*—even, if necessary, to begin an entirely fresh set of drawings. And meanwhile, in the new lease of creative energy which this unfortunate but necessary sacrifice had made possible for him, he would begin to put on paper the masterpiece which was now taking brilliant shape in his liberated mind. A final glass, and then an evening in the workshop!

Augustine poured out some port, and was raising the glass, prepared to drink to his own success, when he thought he heard a sound near the door. He looked over his shoulder. Next instant the stem of the wineglass had snapped in his hand and he had sprung back to the farthest limit of the room.

Reared up for quite five feet against the door, huge, dark, sleeked with wet and flecked with bits of green waterweed, was something half python, half gigantic cobra, its head drawn back as if to strike . . . its head, for in its former featureless tapering end were now two reddish eyes, such as furriers put into the heads of stuffed creatures. And they were fixed in an unwavering and malevolent glare upon him, as he cowered there clutching the bowl of the broken wineglass, the crumpled copy of *The Times* lying at his feet.

The October Game

by RAY BRADBURY

He put the gun back into the bureau drawer and shut the drawer.

No, not that way. Louise wouldn't suffer that way. She would be dead and it would be over and she wouldn't suffer. It was very important that this thing have, above all, duration. Duration through imagination. How to prolong the suffering? How, first of all, to bring it about? Well.

The man standing before the bedroom mirror carefully fitted his cuff links together. He paused long enough to hear the children run by swiftly on the street below, outside this warm two-story house; like so many gray mice the children, like so many leaves.

By the sound of the children you knew the calendar day. By their screams you knew what evening it was. You knew it was very late in the year. October. The last day of October, with white bone masks and cut pumpkins and the smell of dropped candle fat.

No. Things hadn't been right for some time. October didn't help any. If anything it made things worse. He adjusted his black bow-tie. If this were spring, he nodded slowly, quietly, emotionlessly, at his image in

the mirror, then there might be a chance. But tonight all the world was burning down into ruin. There was no green of spring, none of the freshness, none of the promise.

There was a soft running in the hall. "That's Marion," he told himself. "My little one. All eight quiet years of her. Never a word. Just her luminous gray eyes and her wondering little mouth." His daughter had been in and out all evening, trying on various masks, asking him which was most terrifying, most horrible. They had both finally decided on the skeleton mask. It was "just awful!" It would "scare the beans" from people!

Again he caught the long look of thought and deliberation he gave himself in the mirror. He had never liked October. Ever since he first lay in the autumn leaves before his grandmother's house many years ago and heard the wind and saw the empty trees. It had made him cry, without a reason. And a little of that sadness returned each year to him. It always went away with spring.

But, it was different tonight. There was a feeling of autumn coming to last a million years.

There would be no spring.

He had been crying quietly all evening. It did not show, not a vestige of it, on his face. It was all somewhere hidden, but it wouldn't stop.

A rich syrupy smell of candy filled the bustling house. Louise had laid out apples in new skins of caramel, there were vast bowls of punch fresh mixed, stringed apples in each door, scooped, vented pumpkins peering triangularly from each cold window. There was a waiting water tub in the center of the living room, waiting, with a sack of apples nearby, for bobbling to begin. All that was needed was the catalyst, the inpouring of children, to start the apples bobbling, the stringed apples to penduluming in the crowded doors, the candy to vanish, the halls to echo with fright or delight, it was all the same.

Now, the house was silent with preparation. And just a little more than that.

Louise had managed to be in every other room save the room he was in today. It was her very fine way of intimating, Oh look, Mich, see how busy I am! So busy that when you walk into a room *I'm* in there's always something I need to do in *another* room! Just see how I dash about!

For a while he had played a little game with her, a nasty childish game. When she was in the kitchen then he came to the kitchen, saying, "I need a glass of water." After a moment, him standing, drinking water, she like a crystal witch over the caramel brew bubbling like a prehistoric mudpot on the stove, she said, "Oh, I must light the window pumpkins!" and she rushed to the living room to make the pumpkins smile with light. He came after her, smiling, "I must get my pipe." "Oh, the cider!" she had cried, running to the dining room. "I'll check the cider," he had said. But when he tried following she ran to the bathroom and locked the door.

He stood outside the bath door, laughing strangely and senselessly, his pipe gone cold in his mouth, and then, tired of the game, but stubborn, he waited another five minutes. There was not a sound from the bath. And lest she enjoy in any way knowing that he waited outside, irritated, he suddenly jerked about and walked upstairs, whistling merrily.

At the top of the stairs he had waited. Finally he had heard the bath door unlatch and she had come out and life belowstairs had resumed, as life in a jungle must resume once a terror has passed on away and the antelope return to their spring.

Now, as he finished his bow-tie and put on his dark coat there was a mouse-rustle in the hall. Marion appeared in the door, all skeletonous in her disguise.

"How do I look, Papa?"

"Fine!"

From under the mask, blond hair showed. From the

skull sockets small blue eyes smiled. He sighed. Marion and Louise, the two silent denouncers of his virility, his dark power. What alchemy had there been in Louise that took the dark of a dark man and bleached and bleached the dark brown eyes and black black hair and washed and bleached the ingrown baby all during the period before birth until the child was born, Marion, blond, blue-eyed, ruddy-cheeked? Sometimes he suspected that Louise had conceived the child as an idea, completely asexual, an immaculate conception of contemptuous mind and cell. As a firm rebuke to him she had produced a child in her *own* image, and, to top it, she had somehow *fixed* the doctor so he shook his head and said, "Sorry, Mr. Wilder, your wife will never have another child. This is the *last* one."

"And I wanted a boy," Mich had said, eight years ago.

He almost bent to take hold of Marion now, in her skull mask. He felt an inexplicable rush of pity for her, because she had never had a father's love, only the crushing, holding love of a loveless mother. But most of all he pitied himself, that somehow he had not made the most of a bad birth, enjoyed his daughter for herself, regardless of her not being dark and a son and like himself. Somewhere he had missed out. Other things being equal, he would have loved the child. But Louise hadn't wanted a child, anyway, in the first place. She had been frightened of the idea of birth. He had forced the child on her, and from that night, all through the year until the agony of the birth itself, Louise had lived in another part of the house. She had expected to die with the forced child. It had been very easy for Louise to hate this husband who so wanted a son that he gave his only wife over to the mortuary.

But—Louise had lived. And in triumph! Her eyes, the day he came to the hospital, were cold. I'm alive, they said. And I have a *blond* daughter! Just look! And when he had put out a hand to touch, the mother

had turned away to conspire with her new pink daughter-child—away from that dark forcing murderer. It had all been so beautifully ironic. His selfishness deserved it.

But now it was October again. There had been other Octobers and when he thought of the long winter he had been filled with horror year after year to think of the endless months mortared into the house by an insane fall of snow, trapped with a woman and child, neither of whom loved him, for months on end. During the eight years there had been respites. In spring and summer you got out, walked, picnicked; these were desperate solutions to the desperate problem of a hated man.

But, in winter, the hikes and picnics and escapes fell away with the leaves. Life, like a tree, stood empty, the fruit picked, the sap run to earth. Yes, you invited people in, but people were hard to get in winter with blizzards and all. Once he had been clever enough to save for a Florida trip. They had gone south. He had walked in the open.

But now, the eighth winter coming, he knew things were finally at an end. He simply could not wear this one through. There was an acid walled off in him that slowly had eaten through tissue and tissue over the years, and now, tonight, it would reach the wild explosive in him and all would be over!

There was a mad ringing of the bell below. In the hall, Louise went to see. Marion, without a word, ran down to greet the first arrivals. There were shouts and hilarity.

He walked to the top of the stairs.

Louise was below, taking wraps. She was tall and slender and blond to the point of whiteness, laughing down upon the new children.

He hesitated. What was all this? The years? The boredom of living? Where had it gone wrong? Certainly not with the birth of the child alone. But it had been a symbol of all their tensions, he imagined. His jeal-

ousies and his business failures and all the rotten rest of it. Why didn't he just turn, pack a suitcase and leave? No. Not without hurting Louise as much as she had hurt him. It was simple as that. Divorce wouldn't hurt her at all. It would simply be an end to numb indecision. If he thought divorce would give her pleasure in any way he would stay married the rest of his life to her, for damned spite. No, he must hurt her. Figure some way, perhaps, to take Marion away from her, legally. Yes. That was it. That would hurt most of all. To take Marion away.

"Hello down there!" He descended the stairs, beaming.

Louise didn't look up.

"Hi, Mr. Wilder!"

The children shouted, waved, as he came down.

By ten o'clock the doorbell had stopped ringing, the apples were bitten from stringed doors, the pink child faces were wiped dry from the apple bobbling, napkins were smeared with caramel and punch, and he, the husband, with pleasant efficiency had taken over. He took the party right out of Louise's hands. He ran about talking to the twenty children and the twelve parents who had come and were happy with the special spiked cider he had fixed them. He supervised PIN THE TAIL ON THE DONKEY, SPIN THE BOTTLE, MUSICAL CHAIRS and all the rest, midst fits of shouting laughter. Then, in the triangular-eyed pumpkin shine, all house lights out, he cried, "Hush! Follow me!" he said, tiptoeing toward the cellar.

The parents, on the outer periphery of the costumed riot, commented to each other, nodding at the clever husband, speaking to the lucky wife. How *well* he got on with children, they said.

The children crowded after the husband, squealing.

"The cellar!" he cried. "The tomb of the witch!"

More squealing. He made a mock shiver. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here!"

The parents chuckled.

One by one the children slid down a slide which Mich had fixed up from lengths of table-section, into the dark cellar. He hissed and shouted ghastly utterances after them. A wonderful wailing filled the dark pumpkin-lighted house. Everybody talked at once. Everybody but Marion. She had gone through all the party with a minimum of sound or talk; it was all inside her, all the excitement and joy. What a little troll, he thought. With a shut mouth and shiny eyes she had watched her own party, like so many serpentines, thrown before her.

Now, the parents. With laughing reluctance they slid down the short incline, uproarious, while little Marion stood by, always wanting to see it all, to be last. Louise went down without help. He moved to aid her, but she was gone even before he bent.

The upper house was empty and silent in the candleshine.

Marion stood by the slide. "Here we go," he said, and picked her up.

They sat in a vast circle in the cellar. Warmth came from the distant bulk of the furnace. The chairs stood on a long line down each wall, twenty squealing children, twelve rustling relatives, alternately spaced, with Louise down at the far end, Mich up at this end, near the stairs. He peered but saw nothing. They had all groped to their chairs, catch-as-you-can in the blackness. The entire program from here on was to be enacted in the dark, he as Mr. Interlocutor. There was a child scampering, a smell of damp cement, and the sound of the wind out in the October stars.

"Now!" cried the husband in the dark cellar. "Quiet!"

Everybody settled.

The room was black black. Not a light, not a shine, not a glint of an eye.

A scraping of crockery, a metal rattle.

"The witch is dead," intoned the husband.

"Eeeeeeeeeeeee," said the children.

"The witch is dead, she has been killed, and here is the knife she was killed with."

He handed over the knife. It was passed from hand to hand, down and around the circle, with chuckles and little odd cries and comments from the adults.

"The witch is dead, and this is her head," whispered the husband, and handed an item to the nearest person.

"Oh, I know how this game is played," some child cried, happily, in the dark. "He gets some old chicken innards from the icebox and hands them around and says, 'These are her innards!' And he makes a clay head and passes it for her head, and passes a soup-bone for her arm. And he takes a marble and says, 'This is her eye!' And he takes some corn and says, 'This is her teeth!' And he takes a sack of plum pudding and gives that and says, 'This is her stomach!' I know how *this* is played!"

"Hush, you'll spoil everything," some girl said.

"The witch came to harm, and this is her arm," said Mich.

"Eeeee!"

The items were passed and passed, like hot potatoes, around the circle. Some children screamed, wouldn't touch them. Some ran from their chairs to stand in the center of the cellar until the grisly items had passed.

"Aw, it's only chicken insides," scoffed a boy. "Come back, Helen!"

Shot from hand to hand, with small scream after scream, the items went down, down, to be followed by another and another.

"The witch cut apart, and this is her heart," said the husband.

Six or seven items moving at once through the laughing, trembling dark.

Louise spoke up. "Marion, don't be afraid; it's only play."

Marion didn't say anything.

"Marion?" asked Louise. "Are you afraid?"

Marion didn't speak.

"She's all right," said the husband. "She's not afraid."

On and on the passing, the screams, the hilarity.

The autumn wind sighed about the house. And he, the husband, stood at the head of the dark cellar, intoning the words, handing out the items.

"Marion?" asked Louise again, from far across the cellar.

Everybody was talking.

"Marion?" called Louise.

Everybody quieted.

"Marion, answer me, are you afraid?"

Marion didn't answer.

The husband stood there, at the bottom of the cellar steps.

Louise called, "Marion, are you there?"

No answer. The room was silent.

"Where's Marion?" called Louise.

"She was here," said a boy.

"Maybe she's upstairs."

"Marion!"

No answer. It was quiet.

Louise cried out, "Marion, Marion!"

"Turn on the lights," said one of the adults.

The items stopped passing. The children and adults sat with the witches' items in their hands.

"No." Louise gasped. There was a scraping of her chair, wildly, in the dark. "No. Don't turn on the lights, oh God, God, God, don't turn them on, please, please *don't* turn on the lights, *don't!*" Louise was shrieking now. The entire cellar froze with the scream.

Nobody moved.

Everyone sat in the dark cellar, suspended in the suddenly frozen task of this October game; the wind blew outside, banging the house, the smell of pumpkins and apples filled the room with the smell of the objects in their fingers while one boy cried, "I'll go upstairs and look!" and he ran upstairs hopefully and out around the house, four times around the house, call-

ing, "Marion, Marion, Marion!" over and over and at last coming slowly down the stairs into the waiting, breathing cellar and saying to the darkness, "I can't find her."

Then . . . some idiot turned on the lights.

Water's Edge

by ROBERT BLOCH

The fly-specked lettering on the window read *The Bright Spot Restaurant.* The sign overhead urged *Eat.*

He wasn't hungry, and the place didn't look especially attractive, but he went inside anyway.

It was a counter joint with a single row of hard-backed booths lining one wall. A half-dozen customers squatted on stools at the end of the counter, near the door. He walked past them and slid onto a stool at the far end.

There he sat, staring at the three waitresses. None of them looked right to him, but he had to take a chance. He waited until one of the women approached him.

"Yours, mister?"

"Coke."

She brought it to him and set the glass down. He pretended to be studying the menu and talked without looking up at her.

"Say, does a Mrs. Helen Krauss work here?"

"I'm Helen Krauss."

He lifted his eyes. What kind of a switch was this, anyway? He remembered the way Mike used to talk about her, night after night. "She's a tall blonde, but

stacked. Looks a lot like that dame who plays the dumb blonde on television—what's-her-name—you know the one I mean. But she's no dope, not Helen. And boy, when it comes to loving. . . .

After that, his descriptions would become anatomically intricate, but all intricacies had been carefully filed in memory.

He examined those files now, but nothing in them corresponded to what he saw before him.

This woman was tall, but there all resemblance ended. She must have tipped the scales at one sixty, at least, and her hair was a dull, mousy brown. She wore glasses, too. Behind the thick lenses, her faded blue eyes peered stolidly at him.

She must have realized he was staring, and he knew he had to talk fast. "I'm looking for a Helen Krauss who used to live over in Norton Center. She was married to a man named Mike."

The stolid eyes blinked. "That's me. So what's this all about?"

"I got a message for you from your husband."

"Mike? He's dead."

"I know. I was with him when he died. Just before, anyway. I'm Rusty Connors. We were cellmates for two years."

Her expression didn't change, but her voice dropped to a whisper. "What's the message?"

He glanced around. "I can't talk here. What time do you get off?"

"Seven-thirty."

"Good. Meet you outside?"

She hesitated. "Make it down at the corner, across the street. There's a park, you know?"

He nodded, rose and left without looking back.

This wasn't what he had expected—not after the things Mike had told him about his wife. When he bought his ticket for Hainesville, he had had other ideas in mind. It would have been nice to find this hot, good-looking blond widow of Mike's and, maybe,

combine business with pleasure. He had even thought about the two of them blowing town together, if she was half as nice as Mike said. But that was out, now. He wanted no part of this big, fat, stupid-looking slob with the dull eyes.

Rusty wondered how Mike could have filled him with such a line of bull for two years straight—and then he knew. Two years straight—that was the answer—two years in a bare cell, without a woman. Maybe it had got so that, after a time, Mike believed his own story, that Helen Krauss became beautiful to him. Maybe Mike had gone a little stir-simple before he died, and made up a lot of stuff.

Rusty only hoped Mike had been telling the truth about one thing. He had better have been, because what Mike had told Connors, there in the cell, was what brought him to town. It was this that was making him cut into this rat-race, that had led him to Mike's wife.

He hoped Mike had been telling the truth about hiding away the fifty-six thousand dollars.

She met him in the park, and it was dark. That was good, because nobody would notice them together. Besides, he couldn't see her face, and she couldn't see his, and that would make it easier to say what he had to say.

They sat down on a bench behind the bandstand, and he lit a cigarette. Then he remembered that it was important to be pleasant, so he offered the pack to her.

She shook her head. "No thanks—I don't smoke."

"That's right. Mike told me." He paused. "He told me a lot of things about you, Helen."

"He wrote me about you, too. He said you were the best friend he ever had."

"I'd like to think so. Mike was a great guy in my book. None better. He didn't belong in a crummy hole like that."

"He said the same about you."

"Both of us got a bad break, I guess. Me, I was just a kid who didn't know the score. When I got out of Service, I lay around for a while until my dough was gone, and then I took this job in a bookie joint. I never pulled any strong-arm stuff in my life until the night the place was raided.

"The boss handed me this suitcase, full of dough, and told me to get out the back way. And there was this copper, coming at me with a gun. So I hit him over the head with the suitcase. It was just one of those things—I didn't mean to hurt him, even, just wanted to get out. So the copper ends up with a skull fracture and dies."

"Mike wrote me about that. You had a tough deal."

"So did he, Helen." Rusty used her first name deliberately and let his voice go soft. It was part of the pitch. "Like I said, I just couldn't figure him out. An honest John like him, up and knocking off his best friend in a payroll stick-up. And all alone, too. Then getting rid of the body, so they'd never find it. They never did find Pete Taylor, did they?"

"Please! I don't want to talk about it any more."

"I know how you feel." Rusty took her hand. It was plump and sweaty, and it rested in his like a big warm piece of meat. But she didn't withdraw it, and he went on talking. "It was just circumstantial evidence that pinned it on him, wasn't it?"

"Somebody saw Mike pick Pete up that afternoon," Helen said. "He'd lost his car keys somewhere, and I guess he thought it would be all right if Mike took him over to the factory with the payroll money. That was all the police needed. They got to him before he could get rid of the bloodstains. Of course, he didn't have an alibi. I swore he was home with me all afternoon. They wouldn't buy that. So he went up for ten years."

"And did two, and died," Rusty said. "But he never told how he got rid of the body. He never told where he put the dough."

He could see her nodding in the dimness. "That's right. I guess they beat him up something awful, but he wouldn't tell them a thing."

Rusty was silent for a moment. Then he took a drag on his cigarette and said, "Did he ever tell you?"

Helen Krauss made a noise in her throat. "What do *you* think? I got out of Norton Center because I couldn't stand the way people kept talking about it. I came all the way over here to Hainesville. For two years, I've been working in that lousy hash-house. Does that sound like he told me anything?"

Rusty dropped the cigarette stub on the sidewalk, and its little red eye winked up at him. He stared at the eye as he spoke.

"What would you do if you found that money, Helen? Would you turn it over to the cops?"

She made the noise in her throat again. "What for? To say, 'Thank you,' for putting Mike away and killing him? That's what they did, they killed him. Pneumonia, they told me—I know about their pneumonia! They let him rot in that cell, didn't they?"

"The croaker said it was just flu. I put up such a stink over it, they finally took him down to the Infirmary."

"Well, *I* say they killed him. And *I* say he paid for that money with his life. I'm his widow—it's mine."

"Ours," said Rusty.

Her fingers tightened, and her nails dug into his palm. "He told you where he hid it? Is that it?"

"Just a little. Before they took him away. He was dying, and couldn't talk much. But I heard enough to give me a pretty good hunch. I figured, if I came here when I got out and talked to you, we could put things together and find the dough. Fifty-six gees, he said—even if we split it, that's still a lot of money."

"Why are you cutting me in on it, if you know where it is?" There was an edge of sudden suspicion in her voice, and he sensed it, met it head-on.

"Because, like I told you, he didn't say enough. We'd

have to figure out what it means, and then do some hunting. I'm a stranger around here, and people might get suspicious if they saw me snooping. But if you helped, maybe there wouldn't be any need to snoop. Maybe we could go right to it."

"Business deal, is that it?"

Rusty stared at the glowing cigarette butt again. Its red eye winked back at him.

"Not *all* business, Helen. You know how it was with Mike and me. He talked about you all the time. After a while, I got the funniest feeling, like I already knew you—knew you as well as Mike. I wanted to know you better."

He kept his voice down, and he felt her nails against his palm. Suddenly his hand returned the pressure, and his voice broke. "Helen, I don't know, maybe I'm screwy, but I was over two years in that hole. Two years without a woman, you got any idea what that means to a guy?"

"It's been over two years for me, too."

He put his arms around her, forced his lips to hers. It didn't take much forcing. "You got a room?" he whispered.

"Yes, Rusty—I've got a room."

They rose, clinging together. Before moving away, he took a last look at the little winking red eye and crushed it out under his foot.

II

Another winking red eye burned in the bedroom, and he held the cigarette to one side in his hand so as to keep the light away. He didn't want her to see the disgust in his face.

Maybe she was sleeping now. He hoped so, because it gave him time to think.

So far, everything was working out. Everything *had* to work out, this time. Because before, there had always been foul-ups, somewhere along the line.

Grabbing the satchel full of dough, when the cops raided the bookie joint, had seemed like a good idea at the time. He had thought he could lam out the back door before anyone noticed in the confusion. But he had fouled that one up himself, and landed in stir.

Getting buddy-buddy with that little jerk Mike had been another good idea. It hadn't been long before he knew everything about the payroll caper—everything except where Mike had stashed the loot. Mike never *would* talk about that. It wasn't until he took sick that Rusty could handle him without anybody getting wise. He had made sure Mike was real sick before he put real pressure on.

Even then, the lousy fink hadn't come across—Rusty must have half-killed him, right there in the cell. Maybe he'd overdone it, because all he got out of him was the one sentence before the guards showed up.

For a while there, he had wondered if the little quiz show was going to kick back on him. If Mike had pulled out of it, he'd have talked. But Mike hadn't pulled out of it—he had died in the Infirmary before morning, and they had said it was the pneumonia that did it.

So Rusty was safe—and Rusty could make plans.

Up till now, his plans were going through okay. He had never applied for parole—believing it better to sweat out another six months, so he could go free without anybody hanging onto his tail. When they sprung him, he had taken the first bus to Hainesville. He knew where to go because Mike had told him about Helen working in this restaurant.

He hadn't been conning her as to his need for her in the deal. He needed her all right. He needed help, needed her to front for him, so he wouldn't have to look around on his own and arouse curiosity when he asked questions of strangers. That part was straight enough.

But, all along, he had believed what Mike told him about Helen—that she was a good-looking doll, the

kind of dame you read about in the paperback books. He had coked himself up on the idea of finding the dough *and* going away with her, of having a real ball.

Well, that part was out.

He made a face in the darkness as he remembered the clammy fat of her, the wheezing and the panting and the clutching. No, he couldn't take much more of that. But he had had to go through with it, it was part of the plan. He needed her on his side, and that was the best way to keep her in line.

But now, he'd have to decide on the next move. If they found the dough, how could he be sure of her, once they made the split? He didn't want to be tied to this kitchen mechanic, and there had to be a way . . .

"Darling, are you awake?"

Her voice! And calling him "darling." He shuddered, then controlled himself.

"Yeah." He doused the cigarette in an ash tray.

"Do you feel like talking now?"

"Sure."

"I thought maybe we'd better make plans."

"That's what I like, a practical dame." He forced a smile into his voice. "You're right, baby. The sooner we get to work the better." He sat up and turned to her. "Let's start at the beginning—with what Mike told me, before he died. He said they'd never find the money, they couldn't—because Pete still had it."

For a moment Helen Krauss was silent. Then she said, "Is that all?"

"*All?* What more do you want? It's plain as the nose on your face, isn't it? The dough is hidden with Pete Taylor's body."

He could feel Helen's breath on his shoulder. "Never mind the nose on my face," she said. "I know where that is. But for two years, all the cops in the county haven't been able to find Pete Taylor's body." She sighed. "I thought you really had something, but I guess I was wrong. I should of known."

Rusty grabbed her by the shoulders. "Don't *talk*

like that! We've got the answer we need. All we got to do now is figure where to look."

"*Sure.* Real easy!" Her tone dripped sarcasm.

"Think back, now. Where did the cops look?"

"Well, they searched our place, of course. We were living in a rented house, but that didn't stop them. They tore up the whole joint, including the cellar. No dice there."

"Where else?"

"The sheriff's department had men out for a month, searching the woods around Norton's Center. They covered all the old barns and deserted farmhouses, too, places like that. They even dragged the lake. Pete Taylor was a bachelor—he had a little shack in town and one out at the lake, too. They ripped them both apart. Nothing doing."

Rusty was silent. "How much time did Mike have between picking up Pete and coming back home again?"

"About three hours."

"Hell, then he couldn't have gone very far, could he? The body must be hid near town."

"That's just how the police figured. I tell you, they did a job. They dug up the ditches, drained the quarry. It was no use."

"Well, there's got to be an answer somewhere. Let's try another angle. Pete Taylor and your husband were pals, right?"

"Yes. Ever since we got married, Mike was thick with him. They got along great together."

"What did they do? I mean, did they drink, play cards or what?"

"Mike wasn't much on the sauce. Mostly, they just hunted and fished. Like I say, Pete Taylor had this shack out at the lake."

"Is that near Norton's Center?"

"About three miles out." Helen sounded impatient. "I know what you're thinking, but it's no good. I tell

you, they dug things up all around there. They even ripped out the floorboards and stuff like that."

"What about sheds, boathouses?"

"Pete Taylor didn't have anything else on his property. When Mike and him went fishing, they borrowed a boat from the neighbors down the line." She sighed again. "Don't think I haven't tried to figure it out. For two years, I've figured, and there just isn't any answer."

Rusty found another cigarette and lit it. "For fifty-six grand, there's got to be an answer," he said. "What happened the day Pete Taylor was killed? Maybe there's something you forgot about."

"I don't know what happened, really. I was at home, and Mike had the day off, so he went downtown to bum around."

"Did he say anything before he left? Was he nervous? Did he act funny?"

"No—I don't think he had anything planned, if that's what you mean. I think it was just one of those things—he found himself in the car with Pete Taylor and all this money, and he just decided to do it.

"Well, they figured it was all planned in advance. They said he knew it was payroll day, and how Pete always went to the bank in his car and got the money in cash. Old Man Huggins at the factory was a queer duck, and he liked to pay that way. Anyway, they say Pete went into the bank, and Mike must have been waiting in the parking lot behind.

"They think he sneaked over and stole Pete's car keys, so, when he came out with the guard, Pete couldn't get started. Mike waited until the guard left, then walked over and noticed Pete, as if it was an accident he happened to be there, and asked what the trouble was.

"Something like that must have happened, because the guy in the parking lot said they talked, and then Pete got into Mike's car and they drove off together.

That's all they know, until Mike came home alone almost three hours later."

Rusty nodded. "He came home to you, in the car, alone. What did he say?"

"Nothing much. There wasn't time, I guess. Because the squad car pulled up about two minutes after he got in the house."

"So fast? Who tipped them off?"

"Well, naturally the factory got worried when Pete never showed with the payroll. So Old Man Huggins called the bank, and the bank checked with the cashier and the guard, and somebody went out and asked around in the parking lot. The attendant told about how Pete had left in Mike's car. So they came around here, looking for him."

"Did he put up any struggle?"

"No. He never even said a word. They just took him away. He was in the bathroom, washing up."

"Much dirt on him?" Rusty asked.

"Just his hands, is all. They never found anything they could check up on in their laboratories, or whatever. His shoes were muddy, I think. There was a big fuss because his gun was missing. That was the worst part, his taking the gun with him. They never found it, of course, but they knew he'd owned one, and it was gone. He said he'd lost it months beforehand but they didn't believe him."

"Did *you?*"

"I don't know."

"Anything else?"

"Well, he had a cut on his hand. It was bleeding a little when he came in. I noticed it and asked him about it. He was halfway upstairs, and he said something about rats. Later, in court, he told them he'd caught his hand in the window glass, and that's why there was blood in the car. One of the windows was cracked, too. But they analyzed the blood, and it wasn't his type. It checked with Pete Taylor's blood-type record."

Rusty took a deep drag. "But he didn't tell you that, when he came home. He said a rat bit him."

"No—he just said something about rats, I couldn't make out what. In court, the doctor testified he'd gone upstairs and cut his hand open with a razor, They found his razor on the washstand, and it was bloody."

"Wait a minute," Rusty said, slowly. "He started to tell you something about rats. Then he went upstairs and opened up his hand with a razor. Now it's beginning to make sense, don't you see? A rat *did* bite him, maybe when he was getting rid of the body. But if any one knew that, they'd look for the body some place where there were rats. So he covered up by opening the wound with his razor."

"Maybe so," Helen Kraus said. "But where does that leave us? Are we going to have to search every place with rats in it around Norton's Center?"

"I hope not," Rusty answered. "I hate the damned things. They give me the creeps. Used to see them in Service, big fat things hanging around the docks. . . ." He snapped his fingers. "Just a second. You say, when Pete and Mike went fishing, they borrowed a boat from neighbors. Where did the neighbors keep their boat?"

"They had a boathouse."

"Did the cops search there?"

"I don't know—I guess so."

"Maybe they didn't search good enough. Were the neighbors on the property that day?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure enough. They were a city couple from Chicago, name of Thomason. Two weeks before the payroll robbery, they got themselves killed in an auto accident on the way home."

"So nobody was around at all, and Mike knew it."

"That's right." Helen's voice was suddenly hoarse. "It was too late in the season anyway, just like now. The lake was deserted. Do you think . . . ?"

"Who's living in the neighbors' place now?" Rusty asked.

"No one, the last I heard. They didn't have any kids, and the real estate man couldn't sell it. Pete Taylor's place is vacant, too. Same reason."

"It adds up—adds up to fifty-six thousand dollars, if I'm right. When could we go?"

"Tomorrow, if you like. It's my day off. We can use my car. Oh, darling, I'm so excited!"

She didn't have to tell him. He could feel it, feel her as she came into his arms. Once more, he had to force himself, had to keep thinking about something else, so that he wouldn't betray how he felt.

He had to keep thinking about the money, and about what he'd do after they found it. He needed the right answer, fast.

He was still thinking when she lay back, and then she suddenly surprised him by asking, "What are you thinking about, darling?"

He opened his mouth and the truth popped out. "The money," he said. "All that money. Twenty-eight gees apiece."

"Does it have to be apiece, darling?"

He hesitated—and then the right answer came. "Of course not—not unless you want it that way." And it wouldn't be. It was still fifty-six thousand, and it would be his after they found it.

All he had to do was rub her out.

III

If Rusty had any doubts about going through with it, they vanished the next day. He spent the morning and afternoon with her in her room, because he had to. There was no sense in letting them be seen together here in town or anywhere around the lake area.

So he forced himself to stall her, and there was only one way to do that. By the time twilight came, he

would have killed her anyway, money or no money, just to be rid of her stinking fat body.

How could Mike have ever figured she was good-looking? He'd never know, any more than he'd ever known what had gone on in the little jerk's head when he suddenly decided to knock off his best friend and steal the dough.

But that wasn't important now—the important thing was to find that black metal box.

Around four o'clock he slipped downstairs and walked around the block. In ten minutes, she picked him up at the corner in her car.

It was a good hour's drive to the lake. She took a detour around Norton's Center, and they approached the lake shore by a gravel road. He wanted her to cut the lights, but she said there was no need, because nobody was there anyway. As they scanned the shore Rusty could see she was telling the truth—the lake was dark, deserted, in the early November night.

They parked behind Pete Taylor's shack. At sight of it, Rusty realized that the body couldn't possibly be hidden there. The little rickety structure wouldn't have concealed a dead fly for long.

Helen got a flashlight from the car.

"I suppose you want to go straight to the boathouse," she said. "It's down this way, to the left. Be careful—the path is slippery."

It was treacherous going in the darkness. Rusty followed her, wondering if now was the time. He could pick up a rock and bash her head in while she had her back to him.

No, he decided, better wait. First see if the dough was there, see if he could find a good place to leave her body. There must be a good place—Mike had found one.

The boathouse stood behind a little pier running out into the lake. Rusty tugged at the door. It was padlocked.

"Stand back," he said. He picked up a stone from the bank. The lock was flimsy, rusty with disuse. It broke easily and fell to the ground.

He took the flashlight from her, opened the door and peered in. The beam swept the interior, piercing the darkness. But it wasn't total darkness. Rusty saw the glow of a hundred little red cigarette butts winking up at him, like eyes.

Then, he realized, they *were* eyes.

"Rats," he said. "Come on, don't be afraid. Looks like our hunch was right."

Helen moved behind him, and she wasn't afraid. But he had really been talking to himself. He didn't like rats. He was glad when the rodents scattered and disappeared before the flashlight's beam. The sound of footsteps sent them scampering off into the corners, into their burrows beneath the boathouse floor.

The floor! Rusty sent the beam downward. It was concrete, of course. And underneath . . . ?

"Damn it!" he said. "They *must* have been here."

They had—because the once-solid concrete floor was rubble. The pick-axes of the sheriff's men had done a thorough job.

"I *told* you," Helen Krauss sighed. "They looked everywhere."

Rusty swept the room with light. There was no boat, nothing stored in corners. The beam bounced off bare walls.

He raised it to the flat roof of the ceiling and caught only the reflection of mica from tar-paper insulation.

"It's no use," Helen told him. "It couldn't be this easy."

"There's still the house," Rusty said. "Come on."

He turned and walked out of the place, glad to get away from the rank, fetid animal odor. He turned the flashlight toward the roof.

Then he stopped. "Notice anything?" he said.

"What?"

"The roof. It's higher than the ceiling."

"So what?"

"There could be space up there," Rusty said.

"Yes, but . . ."

"Listen."

She was silent—both of them were silent. In the silence, they could hear the emerging sound. It sounded at first like the patter of rain on the roof, but it wasn't raining, and it wasn't coming from the roof. It was coming from directly underneath—the sound of tiny, scurrying feet between roof and ceiling. The rats were there. The rats and what else?

"Come on," he muttered.

"Where are you going?"

"Up to the house—to find a ladder."

He didn't have to break in, and that was fine. There was a ladder in the shed, and he carried it back. Helen discovered a crowbar. She held the flashlight while he propped the ladder against the wall and climbed up. The crowbar pried off the tar paper in strips. It came away easily, ripping out from the few nails. Apparently, the stuff had been applied in a hurry. A man with only a few hours to work in has to do a fast job.

Underneath the tar paper, Rusty found timbers. Now the crowbar really came in handy. The boards groaned in anguish, and there were other squeaking sounds as the rats fled down into the cracks along the side walls. Rusty was glad they fled, otherwise he'd never have had the guts to crawl up there through the opening in the boards and look around. Helen handed him the flashlight, and he used it.

He didn't have to look very far.

The black metal box was sitting there right in front of him. Beyond it lay the thing.

Rusty knew it was Pete Taylor, because it had to be, but there was no way of identification. There wasn't a shred of clothing left, nor a shred of flesh, either. The rats had picked him clean, picked him down to the bones. All that was left was a skeleton—a skeleton and a black metal box.

Rusty clawed the box closer, opened it. He saw the bills, bulging in stacks. He smelled the money, smelled it even above the sickening fetor. It smelled good, it smelled of perfume and tenderloin steak and the leathery seat-cover aroma of a shiny new car.

"Find anything?" Helen called. Her voice was trembling.

"Yes," he answered, and his voice was trembling just a little too. "I've got it. Hold the ladder, I'm coming down now."

He was coming down now, and that meant it was time—time to act. He handed her the crowbar and the flashlight, but kept his fingers on the side of the black metal box. He wanted to carry that himself. Then, when he put it down on the floor, and she bent over to look at it, he could pick up a piece of concrete rubble and let her have it.

It was going to be easy. He had everything figured out in advance—everything except the part about handing her the crowbar.

That's what she used to hit him with when he got to the bottom of the ladder. . . .

He must have been out for ten minutes, at least. Anyway, it was long enough for her to find the rope somewhere. Maybe she had kept it in the car. Wherever she got it, she knew how to use it. His wrists and ankles hurt almost as much as the back of his head, where the blood was starting to congeal.

He opened his mouth and discovered that it did no good. She had gagged him tightly with a handkerchief. All he could do was lie there in the rubble on the boathouse floor and watch her pick up the black metal box.

She opened it and laughed.

The flashlight was lying on the floor. In its beam, he could see her face quite plainly. She had taken off her glasses, and he discovered the lenses lying shattered on the floor.

Helen Krauss saw what he was staring at and laughed again.

"I don't need those things any more," she told him. "I never did. It was all part of the act, like letting my hair go black and putting on all this weight. For two years now, I've put on this dumb slob routine, just so nobody'd notice me. When I leave town, nobody's going to pay any attention either. Sometimes it's smart to play dumb, you know?"

Rusty made noises underneath the gag. She thought that was funny, too.

"I suppose you're finally beginning to figure it out," she said. "Mike never meant to pull off any payroll job. Pete Taylor and I had been cheating on him for six months, and he had just begun to suspect. I don't know who told him, or what they said.

"He never said anything to me about it beforehand—just went downtown with his gun to find Pete and kill him. Maybe he meant to kill me too. He never even thought about the money at the time. All he knew was that it would be easy to pick Pete up on payroll day.

"I guess he knocked Pete out and drove him down here, and Pete came to before he died and kept saying he was innocent. At least, Mike told me that much when he came back.

"I never got a chance to ask where he'd taken Pete or what he'd done with the money. The first thing I did, when Mike came home and said what he'd done, was to cover up for myself. I swore it was all a pack of lies, that Pete and I hadn't done anything wrong. I told him we'd take the money and go away together. I was still selling him on that when the cops came.

"I guess he believed me—because he never cracked during the trial. But I didn't get a chance again to ask where he hid the dough. He couldn't write me from prison, because they censor all the mail. So my only out was to wait—wait until he came back, or someone else came. And that's how it worked out."

Rusty tried to say something, but the gag was too tight.

"Why did I conk you one? For the same reason you were going to conk me. Don't try to deny it—that's what you intended to do, wasn't it? I know the way creeps like you think." Her voice was soft.

She smiled down at him. "I know how you get to thinking when you're a prisoner—because I've been a prisoner myself, for two years—a prisoner in this big body of mine. I've sweated it out for that money, and now I'm leaving. I'm leaving here, leaving the dumb waitress prison I made for myself. I'm going to shed forty pounds and bleach my hair again and go back to being the old Helen Krauss—with fifty-six grand to live it up with."

Rusty tried just once more. All that came out was a gurgle. "Don't worry," she said, "they won't find me. And they won't find you for a long, long time. I'm putting that lock back on the door when I go. Besides, there's nothing to tie the two of us together. It's clean as a whistle."

She turned, and then Rusty stopped gurgling. He hunched forward and kicked out with his bound feet. They caught her right across the back of the knees, and she went down. Rusty rolled across the rubble and raised his feet from the ground, like a flail. They came down on her stomach, and she let out a gasp.

She fell against the boathouse door, and it slammed shut, her own body tight against it. Rusty began to kick at her face. In a moment the flashlight rolled off into the rubble and went out, so he kicked in the direction of the gasps. After a while, the moaning stopped, and it was silent in the boathouse.

He listened for her breathing and heard no sound. He rolled over to her and pressed his face against something warm and wet. He shivered and drew back, then pressed again. The unbattered area of her flesh was cold.

He rolled over to the side and tried to free his hands.

He worked the rope-ends against the jagged edges of rubble, hoping to feel the strands fray and part. His wrists bled, but the rope held. Her body was wedged against the door, holding it shut—holding him here in the rank darkness.

Rusty knew he had to move her, had to get the door open fast. He had to get out of here. He began to butt his head against her, trying to move her—but she was too solid, too heavy, to budge. He banged into the money box and tried to gurgle at her from under the gag, tried to tell her that she must get up and let them out, that they were both in prison together now, and the money didn't matter. It was all a mistake, he hadn't meant to hurt her or anyone, he just wanted to get out.

But he didn't get out.

After a little while, the rats came back.

The Jokester

by ROBERT ARTHUR

It was Bradley's idea. It was a dull night, and in the dingy little room at Headquarters where the reporters on the police beat gathered, Bradley of the *Express* tired of playing three-handed stud and waiting for something to happen.

"Listen," he said, throwing in his hand, "let's play a joke on old Pop."

Pop Henderson was the night attendant on duty at the morgue, in the basement of the building. He was a slow-moving man in his seventies, and his wits moved slower than his body. He should have been retired from municipal service years before, but he had family obligations to meet—an invalid wife, among them—and retirement pay doesn't stretch very far. So, as the job was not difficult, his superiors overlooked his age and let him stay.

"What kind of joke?" demanded Furness, tall and lanky, who covered crime news for the *Record*. Bradley explained, and Furness shook his head. "I don't like it," he said. "Leave old Pop alone. He's not very bright."

But Bradley wasn't so easily discouraged. He was an inveterate practical joker, and he had a reputation for

thinking up original gags. To him it was the joke that counted; he didn't care whom it was on.

He kept on arguing, and finally Furness, who hated a dispute, gave in. Morgan, the easygoing *Chronicle* man, who'd had a couple of drinks, was already agreeable. So the three of them trooped down to the big, gloomy morgue room where Pop Henderson sat in his tiny office, waiting out his shift. Not reading—he was too nearsighted. Not even listening to the radio. Just sitting and waiting for his shift to be over.

Along one wall of the main room were twenty compartments about eighteen by twenty-four inches—just big enough to hold a full-grown man provided he had no intention of turning over. And of course no one who occupied one of the compartments had. They were refrigerated, with the temperature below freezing, and because it was a big city, with its quota of accident victims and unidentified dead, a number of them were usually occupied.

"Pop," Bradley said, "we'd like to see Number 11. Just had a tip he may be that missing New York banker."

"Number 11?" Pop stood up slowly, and led them down the line of compartments. He undid the catch on the small door marked *11,* and drew out the sliding slab to its full length. A figure covered by a sheet rested on it. Bradley turned down the sheet and pretended to study the face.

"Looks like him," Bradley nodded. "Yes sir, it answers the description. Get the record on this fellow for us, will you, Pop?"

"Okay, Mr. Bradley." The night attendant turned away and plodded off. Bradley winked to Furness, who followed Pop Henderson into the office. As soon as they were out of sight, Bradley and the tipsy Morgan got busy preparing for the joke.

Furness kept Pop in the office, pretending to pore over the admittance papers of Number 11, until Morgan came in.

"No need to bother, Pop," he said, smothering a laugh. "Guess we made a mistake. You can put Eleven back to bed. Come on, Furness, let's go back up and play a few more hands."

The two newspaper men retreated to the bend in the corridor and waited. Pop methodically, patiently, put the papers back into the files. Then, with the same slow unhurrying movement of a man who is waiting out his life on a job he has to do, he trudged back into the big morgue room toward the open compartment, the extended slab and the sheeted figure.

He was a dozen feet from it when the sheet stirred. A theatrical groan came from beneath it; then the sheeted figure slowly sat up and the white cloth slipped from a face that in the dimness the nearsighted old man could not recognize as Bradley's.

"Where am I?" the reporter asked in hollow tones. "What—have—you—done—to—me?" Pop Henderson came to an uncertain stop, staring, and Bradley raised a sheeted arm, pointed it at him.

"You!" he intoned. "What have you done to me? You—have—tried—to—kill—me."

It was all very crude, like most of Bradley's practical jokes, but it only had to impress an old man whose wits were dulled by age. The effect, from Bradley's standpoint, was entirely satisfactory. For a moment, Pop Henderson stood rooted to the spot, choking for breath.Then he turned, and in a shuffling run, the fastest he had moved in twenty years, he made for the stairs.

"Gora'mighty, he's alive!" he shrilled. "He's alive! He come back! Sarge! Sarge Roberts! Come quick! One of th' corpses has come back!"

He panted past Furness and Morgan, clambering up the stairs toward the sergeant on night duty. Chuckling gustily, Dave Bradley hopped off the slab of compartment 12, tossed the covering sheet inside, then slammed the door shut.

"C'mon, fellers," he gurgled, strangling with laugh-

ter as he reached them. "Up the other stairs before the sarge gets down here. His ulcers give him the worst disposition in the state, and won't *he* be sore!"

They were back in the press room when they heard the morgue attendant go back down the corridor with the beefy, ill-tempered desk sergeant. Old Pop was still gabbling, almost incoherent.

"He sat up, sarge . . . I tell you he sat up and he looked at me and he—"

The voices died out as the two turned down the stairs to the morgue room. Bradley sat back and bellowed. Morgan chuckled uneasily, then stopped. Furness, already angry at himself for having agreed to help, lit a cigarette then ground it out again.

Three minutes later, the fat desk sergeant came back down the coridor. He stopped outside and glowered in at them.

"Some cut-ups, huh?" he growled. "The real comic kids from Funnyville!"

Then, because he knew how far he could and couldn't go in venting his displeasure on the press, he stamped on back to his desk.

"Did you see the sarge's face?" Dave Bradley gasped, convulsed with laughter as he always was at his own jokes. "He's sore as a boil on a camel's back. He—what's the matter with you guys?" he broke off to demand, as Morgan and Furness failed to respond. "Can't you laugh at a joke?"

"I'm going out," Furness announced to the room at large, and reached for his hat. "If the shop calls, tell them I'm checking on a story."

He went out. "Sorehead," Bradley grumbled. Morgan, the drinks wearing off, shrugged.

"Maybe it wasn't such a good idea after all," he said. "Guess I'll go out and have a quick one, then go home. Paper's gone to bed, anyway."

He too went out. Dave Bradley made a face, then drew out a cigar, bit off the end and spat it to the floor.

"I hate a guy who can't take a joke," he muttered, and was lighting the cigar when Pop Henderson himself shuffled up to the door and stopped, looking in.

"You shouldn't ought to have done it, Mr. Bradley," the attendant said, not accusingly, his voice as matter-of-fact as always. "It gave me a bad turn, but I don't mind that. Thing is, you got me in trouble with Sarge Roberts. He keeps complaining about me anyway, and my bustin' in on him just now got him real mad.

"When we got down there and found all the corpses just like they should be, first he said I was imagining things, then when I said you press fellows had just been down, he figured out it was one of your jokes."

Pop paused for breath, looking at Bradley steadily but without rancor. Bradley lit his cigar with elaborate ceremony.

"He said if I fell for any more jokes or made any more mistakes, he'd see to it I had to resign like I should of years ago," the attendant finished. "And I can't resign, I got to have the money. So Mr. Bradley, no more jokes, please."

He stood for a moment longer, then shuffled away again. Dave Bradley shrugged, blew a smoke ring, and reached for the phone.

"*Express* city desk," he said. ". . . Bradley. Everything quiet here. Paper gone to bed? Okay, I'm going home. Don't look for me till tomorrow."

He hung up, blew a smoke ring, and went out.

Once outside on the dark, cold street, he hesitated. His humor had turned sour. And the one thing he needed, more than he needed liquor or women, was to feel jovial, laughing, making jokes. A drink, he decided, but he didn't feel like dropping in any place where Morgan or Furness might be. He decided on a little bar down near the docks, where none of the newspaper crowd went, and headed for it.

The place was small and dirty, but the whisky was warming. After the third drink, he felt cheerful again. His spirits rose. Another drink, and the old merriment

was bubbling in him again. He began to plan another joke. What was an evening without a good joke, a good laugh, a lot of good fellows sharing their merriment? Hell with Furness and Morgan. They were soreheads.

He looked around. It was late, 2:00 A.M., the bar was almost empty. Just him and the bartender and a leathery-looking little fellow with his foot on the brass rail, drinking beer. The bartender looked like a man who could laugh and the little fellow'd have to—he was too scrawny to do anything else.

Bradley chuckled inside himself as he bent over as if to tie his shoelace. Deftly he slipped a match in between the sole and the upper of the little drinker's shoe. He lit it, then straightened and ordered another drink.

He winked at the bartender as the other poured the whisky. Then he jerked his head toward the other drinker.

"Watch!" he whispered.

The bartender stared at him, not getting it. But Bradley only grinned, holding back the laugh. Then the little man let out a yell and jerked back, hopping on one foot, frantically beating at the blazing match in his shoe with his hand.

Bradley let the laugh come, looking at the bartender for appreciation of the gag. The little man put his foot down and turned toward the reporter with a snarl.

"Suvvabish!" he said succinctly, not bothering to enunciate the words. Then he swung.

The blow caught Bradley as he turned his head, full in the mouth, mashing his lips against his teeth. He staggered, failed to get a grip on the bar, and fell full length backward, his neck cracking against the brass rail. He just had time to feel a wicked snap somewhere at the base of his skull, and all the lights went out for him.

The little man stared down at him viciously.

"The big slob!" he said. "Giving me a hotfoot. Me, Kid Wilkins!"

The bartender waddled around the end of his bar, wiping his hands on a dirty apron.

"You hit 'im kinda hard, Kid," he muttered, peering down. "He's lying awful quiet."

"Just a left to th' mouth," the smaller man growled. "Loosen a coupla teeth, that's all. Next time he'll think twice before he goes around playing them kinda gags."

"His head," the bartender said worriedly. "It's twisted funny. Do you suppose—"

He squatted down without finishing. His hands felt for Bradley's pulse, then slid inside his shirt. Then, his red face putty-colored now, the bartender straightened.

"He's dead," he said huskily. "Dead as an iced smelt."

"Dead?" The leathery little man drew the back of his hand quickly over his lips. "Mike, it was a accident! I didn't hit him hard enough to hurt. It was a accident, see."

"Sure, Kid, sure. An accident."

Moving more swiftly, the bartender went to the door, locked it, pulled down the *Closed* shade, and turned out all the exterior lights. Then he came back to Bradley's side.

"This ain't good, Kid," he murmured, as he went through Bradley's pockets. "I got enough trouble with th' cops, without nobody dying in here. And you got a couple of assault-and-battery convictions standing against you already."

"I know, I know," Kid Wilkins snapped. "I got a temper and I can use my fists. So I get in trouble. What we gonna do?"

The bartender was shuffling through the wallet he had taken from Dave Bradley's pocket.

"Kid," he said, more softly still, "this ain't just bad, this is no good at all. This slob is a reporter. For th' *Express*. That's almost as bad as a cop."

"A reporter!" Kid Wilkins said bitterly. "And he has to give me a hotfoot! And I have to hit him! And he has to break his lousy neck! Why? Tell me that! Why?"

"Never mind the why, I got an idea. We gotta get 'im outa here. Over by th' docks, we'll dump him. Let it look like he got mugged, or maybe was plastered and took a bad tumble."

"Yeah. Yeah, Mike!" The little man brightened. "At 6:00 A.M. my ship sails. I just won't come back to this port. If anybody traces him here, he went out loaded when you closed up. You don't know from nothin'."

"That's it. Now come on. First we take all his stuff so they'll be longer identifyin' him, that'll slow down any investigation. Then we carry him down th' alley to th' docks."

Rapidly he went through Dave Bradley's pockets. The contents he transferred to his own. Then he turned out all the lights and opened the back door, leading into a dark and cluttered alley.

A moment later the two men, Dave Bradley supported between them like a helpless drunk, eased out into the darkness and the door closed.

Bradley regained consciousness abruptly. Semi-consciousness, rather, enough to know that he was still alive. He tried to move, but his body was numb and his muscles would not obey. He felt no pain, no sensations of any kind. He could not even be sure in what position he was lying, though he thought he was on his back.

My neck, the thought ran dimly through his mind. *I hit it when I fell. That vertebra that got twisted back in high school, that time playing football. It's twisted again. This is like that, when I spent a month in bed, could hardly move. Only this is worse. I hit it harder. I heard it crack when I went down.*

Then he heard a voice. It sounded faraway and faint.

"Okay, he's all yours," the voice was saying. "Found him down by the docks. From the looks of his face, he was mugged. He was cold already when the intern got

to him—it's a cold night to be lying around. The assistant M. E. couldn't find any pulse or heartbeat, so he sent him along to you. No identification. Put him to bed, make him real comfortable. They'll autopsy him tomorrow."

The voice faded away. Bradley felt himself being lifted, moved. There was a click in his neck, and suddenly he could open his eyes as pressure on some vital nerve was relieved.

Even in his only partly conscious state, the surroundings were familiar enough so that he recognized them. "Pop!" he whispered. "Pop Henderson."

The old man finished straightening out Bradley's arms and legs, oblivious. Bradley tried again.

"Pop!" This time the word was louder. "Pop, I'm alive!"

The stooped attendant turned, frowning. Bradley tried again, with a tremendous effort.

"Pop!" His voice was a croak. "It's me, Dave Bradley! I'm alive! Get a doctor quick!"

Pop Henderson looked startled. He bent close to Bradley and peered at him.

"Mr. Bradley," he said, bewildered. "I didn't know you, way your face was swelled up. Nobody knew you."

"Never mind that." Every word was an effort such as Bradley had never had to make before. "I'm alive. Get me out of here. Get me a doctor."

Pop Henderson hesitated, troubled and uncertain. Then he picked up a sheet, unfolded it.

"Mr. Bradley," he said. "I told you. No more jokes. Once tonight is enough."

He spread the sheet neatly over the recumbent figure.

"Sarge Roberts wouldn't stand for me getting fooled again," he said sternly. "No, Mr. Bradley. Not twice the same night." Unhurriedly he pushed the sliding slab into the compartment, closed the door marked 12, and turned the knob that held it shut.

Then he plodded back to his office and sat down to wait patiently for the end of his shift.

The Abyss

by LEONID ANDREYEV

Translated by John Cournos

The day was coming to an end, but the young pair continued to walk and to talk, observing neither the time nor the way. Before them, in the shadow of a hillock, there loomed the dark mass of a small grove, and between the branches of the trees, like the glowing of coals, the sun blazed, igniting the air and transforming it into a flaming golden dust. So near and so luminous the sun appeared that everything seemed to vanish; it alone remained, and it painted the road with its own fiery tints. It hurt the eyes of the strollers; they turned back, and all at once everything within their vision was extinguished, became peaceful and clear, and small and intimate. Somewhere afar, barely a mile away, the red sunset seized the tall trunk of a fir, which blazed among the green like a candle in a dark room; the ruddy glow of the road stretched before them, and every stone cast its long black shadow; and the girl's hair, suffused with the sun's rays, now shone with a golden-red nimbus. A stray thin hair, wandering from

the rest, wavered in the air like a golden spider's thread.

The newly fallen darkness did not break or change the course of their talk. It continued as before, intimately and quietly; it flowed along tranquilly on the same theme: on strength, beauty, and the immortality of love. They were both very young: the girl was no more than seventeen; Nemovetsky was four years older. They wore students' uniforms: she the modest brown dress of a pupil of a girls' school, he the handsome attire of a technological student. And, like their conversation, everything about them was young, beautiful, and pure. They had erect, flexible figures, permeated as it were with the clean air and borne along with a light, elastic gait; their fresh voices, sounding even the simplest words with a reflective tenderness, were like a rivulet in a calm spring night, when the snow had not yet wholly thawed from the dark meadows.

They walked on, turning the bend of the unfamiliar road, and their lengthening shadows, with absurdly small heads, now advanced separately, now merged into one long, narrow strip, like the shadow of a poplar. But they did not see the shadows, for they were too much absorbed in their talk. While talking, the young man kept his eyes fixed on the girl's handsome face, upon which the sunset had seemed to leave a measure of its delicate tints. As for her, she lowered her gaze on the footpath, brushed the tiny pebbles to one side with her umbrella, and watched now one foot, now the other as alternately, with a measured step, they emerged from under her dark dress.

The path was intersected by a ditch with edges of dust showing the impress of feet. For an instant they paused. Zinotchka raised her head, looked round her with a perplexed gaze, and asked, "Do you know where we are? I've never been here before."

He made an attentive survey of their position.

"Yes, I know. There, behind the hill, is the town. Give me your hand. I'll help you across."

He stretched out his hand, white and slender like a woman's, and which did not know hard work. Zinotchka felt gay. She felt like jumping over the ditch all by herself, running away and shouting, "Catch me!" But she restrained herself, with decorous gratitude inclined her head, and timidly stretched out her hand, which still retained its childish plumpness. He had a desire to squeeze tightly this trembling little hand, but he also restrained himself, and with a half-bow he deferentially took it in his and modestly turned away when in crossing the girl slightly showed her leg.

And once more they walked and talked, but their thoughts were full of the momentary contact of their hands. She still felt the dry heat of his palms and his strong fingers; she felt pleasure and shame, while he was conscious of the submissive softness of her tiny hand and saw the black silhouette of her foot and the small slipper which tenderly embraced it. There was something sharp, something perturbing in this unfading appearance of the narrow hem of white skirts and of the slender foot; with an unconscious effort of will he crushed this feeling. Then he felt more cheerful, and his heart so abundant, so generous in its mood that he wanted to sing, to stretch out his hands to the sky, and to shout: "Run! I want to catch you!"—that ancient formula of primitive love among the woods and thundering waterfalls. And from all these desires tears struggled to the throat.

The long, droll shadows vanished, and the dust of the footpath became gray and cold, but they did not observe this and went on chatting. Both of them had read many good books, and the radiant images of men and women who had loved, suffered, and perished for pure love were borne along before them. Their memories resurrected fragments of nearly forgotten verse, dressed in melodious harmony and the sweet sadness investing love.

"Do you remember where this comes from?" asked Nemovetsky, recalling, ". . . once more she is with me,

she whom I love; from whom, having never spoken, I have hidden all my sadness, my tenderness, my love . . ."

"No," Zinotchka replied, and pensively repeated, "all my sadness, my tenderness, my love . . ."

"All my love," with an involuntary echo responded Nemovetsky.

Other memories returned to them. They remembered those girls, pure as the white lilies, who, attired in black nunnish garments, sat solitarily in the park, grieving among the dead leaves, yet happy in their grief. They also remembered the men, who, in the abundance of will and pride, yet suffered, and implored the love and the delicate compassion of women. The images thus evoked were sad, but the love which showed in this sadness was radiant and pure. As immense as the world, as bright as the sun, it arose fabulously beautiful before their eyes, and there was nothing mightier or more beautiful on the earth.

"Could you die for love?" Zinotchka asked, as she looked at her childish hand.

"Yes, I could," Nemovetsky replied, with conviction, and he glanced at her frankly. "And you?"

"Yes, I too." She grew pensive. "Why, it's happiness to die for one you love. I should want to."

Their eyes met. They were such clear, calm eyes, and there was much good in what they conveyed to the other. Their lips smiled. Zinotchka paused.

"Wait a moment," she said. "You have a thread on your coat."

And trustfully she raised her hand to his shoulder and carefully, with two fingers, removed the thread.

"There!" she said and, becoming serious, asked, "Why are you so thin and pale? You are studying too much, I fear. You mustn't overdo it, you know."

"You have blue eyes; they have bright points like sparks," he replied, examining her eyes.

"And yours are black. No, brown. They seem to glow. There is in them . . ."

Zinotchka did not finish her sentence, but turned away. Her face slowly flushed, her eyes became timid and confused, while her lips involuntarily smiled. Without waiting for Nemovetsky, who smiled with secret pleasure, she moved forward, but soon paused.

"Look, the sun has set!" she exclaimed with grieved astonishment.

"Yes, it has set," he responded with a new sadness.

The light was gone, the shadows died, everything became pale, dumb, lifeless. At that point of the horizon where earlier the glowing sun had blazed, there now, in silence, crept dark masses of cloud, which step by step consumed the light blue spaces. The clouds gathered, jostled one another, slowly and reticently changed the contours of awakened monsters; they unwillingly advanced, driven, as it were, against their will by some terrible, implacable force. Tearing itself away from the rest, one tiny luminous cloud drifted on alone, a frail fugitive.

Zinotchka's cheeks grew pale, her lips turned red; the pupils of her eyes imperceptibly broadened, darkening the eyes. She whispered, "I feel frightened. It is so quiet here. Have we lost our way?"

Nemovetsky contracted his heavy eyebrows and made a searching survey of the place.

Now that the sun was gone and the approaching night was breathing with fresh air, it seemed cold and uninviting. To all sides the gray field spread, with its scant grass, clay gullies, hillocks and holes. There were many of these holes; some were deep and sheer, others were small and overgrown with slippery grass; the silent dusk of night had already crept into them; and because there was evidence here of men's labors, the place appeared even more desolate. Here and there, like the coagulations of cold lilac mist, loomed groves and thickets and, as it were, hearkened to what the abandoned holes might have to say to them.

Nemovetsky crushed the heavy, uneasy feeling of perturbation which had arisen in him and said, "No,

we have not lost our way. I know the road. First to the left, then through that tiny wood. Are you afraid?"

She bravely smiled and answered, "No. Not now. But we ought to be home soon and have some tea."

They increased their gait, but soon slowed down again. They did not glance aside, but felt the morose hostility of the dug-up field, which surrounded them with a thousand dim motionless eyes, and this feeling bound them together and evoked memories of childhood. These memories were luminous, full of sunlight, of green foliage, of love and laughter. It was as if that had not been life at all, but an immense, melodious song, and they themselves had been in it as sounds, two slight notes: one clear and resonant like ringing crystal, the other somewhat more dull yet more animated, like a small bell.

Signs of human life were beginning to appear. Two women were sitting at the edge of a clay hole. One sat with crossed legs and looked fixedly below. She raised her head with its kerchief, revealing tufts of entangled hair. Her bent back threw upward a dirty blouse with its pattern of flowers as big as apples; its strings were undone and hung loosely. She did not look at the passers-by. The other woman half reclined nearby, her head thrown backward. She had a coarse, broad face, with a peasant's features, and, under her eyes, the projecting cheekbones showed two brick-red spots, resembling fresh scratches. She was even filthier than the first woman, and she bluntly stared at the passers-by. When they had passed by, she began to sing in a thick, masculine voice:

> For you alone, my adored one,
> Like a flower I did bloom . . .

"Varka, do you hear?" She turned to her silent companion and, receiving no answer, broke into loud, coarse laughter.

Nemovetsky had known such women, who were filthy even when they were attired in costly handsome

dresses; he was used to them, and now they glided away from his glance and vanished, leaving no trace. But Zinotchka, who nearly brushed them with her modest brown dress, felt something hostile, pitiful and evil, which for a moment entered her soul. In a few minutes the impression was obliterated, like the shadow of a cloud running fast across the golden meadow; and when, going in the same direction, there had passed them by a barefoot man, accompanied by the same kind of filthy woman, she saw them but gave them no thought. . . .

And once more they walked on and talked, and behind them there moved, reluctantly, a dark cloud, and cast a transparent shadow. . . . The darkness imperceptibly and stealthily thickened, so that it bore the impress of day, but day oppressed with illness and quietly dying. Now they talked about those terrible feelings and thoughts which visit man at night, when he cannot sleep, and neither sound nor speech give hindrance; when darkness, immense and multiple-eyed, that is life, closely presses to his very face.

"Can you imagine infinity?" Zinotchka asked him, putting her plump hand to her forehead and tightly closing her eyes.

"No. Infinity . . . No . . ." answered Nemovetsky, also shutting his eyes.

"I sometimes see it. I perceived it for the first time when I was yet quite little. Imagine a great many carts. There stands one cart, then another, a third, carts without end, an infinity of carts. . . . It is terrible!" Zinotchka trembled.

"But why carts?" Nemovetsky smiled, though he felt uncomfortable.

"I don't know. But I did see carts. One, another . . . without end."

The darkness stealthily thickened. The cloud had already passed over their heads and, being before them, was now able to look into their lowered, paling faces. The dark figures of ragged, sluttish women ap-

peared oftener; it was as if the deep ground holes, dug for some unknown purpose, cast them up to the surface. Now solitary, now in twos or threes, they appeared, and their voices sounded loud and strangely desolate in the stilled air.

"Who are these women? Where do they all come from?" Zinotchka asked in a low, timorous voice.

Nemovetsky knew who these women were. He felt terrified at having fallen into this evil and dangerous neighborhood, but he answered calmly, "I don't know. It's nothing. Let's not talk about them. It won't be long now. We only have to pass through this little wood, and we shall reach the gate and town. It's a pity that we started out so late."

She thought his words absurd. How could he call it late when they started out at four o'clock? She looked at him and smiled. But his eyebrows did not relax, and, in order to calm and comfort him, she suggested, "Let's walk faster. I want tea. And the wood's quite near now."

"Yes, let's walk faster."

When they entered the wood and the silent trees joined in an arch above their heads, it became very dark but also very snug and quieting.

"Give me your hand," proposed Nemovetsky.

Irresolutely she gave him her hand, and the light contact seemed to lighten the darkness. Their hands were motionless and did not press each other. Zinotchka even slightly moved away from her companion. But their whole consciousness was concentrated in the perception of the tiny place of the body where the hands touched one another. And again the desire came to talk about the beauty and the mysterious power of love, but to talk without violating the silence, to talk by means not of words but of glances. And they thought that they ought to glance, and they wanted to, yet they didn't dare.

"And here are some more people!" said Zinotchka cheerfully.

In the glade, where there was more light, there sat near an empty bottle three men in silence, and expectantly looked at the newcomers. One of them, shaven like an actor, laughed and whistled in such a way as if to say, "Oho!"

Nemovetsky's heart fell and froze in a trepidation of horror, but, as if pushed on from behind, he walked straight on the sitting trio, beside whom ran the footpath. These were waiting, and three pairs of eyes looked at the strollers, motionless and terrifying. And, desirous of gaining the good will of these morose, ragged men, in whose silence he scented a threat, and of winning their sympathy for his helplessness, he asked, "Is this the way to the gate?"

They did not reply. The shaven one whistled something mocking and not quite definable, while the others remained silent and looked at them with a heavy, malignant intentness. They were drunken, and evil, and they were hungry for women and sensual diversion. One of the men, with a ruddy face, rose to his feet like a bear, and sighed heavily. His companions quickly glanced at him, then once more fixed an intent gaze on Zinotchka. "I feel terribly afraid," she whispered with lips alone.

He did not hear her words, but Nemovetsky understood her from the weight of the arm which leaned on him. And, trying to preserve a demeanor of calm, yet feeling the fated irrevocableness of what was about to happen, he advanced on his way with a measured firmness. Three pairs of eyes approached nearer, gleamed, and were left behind one's back. "It's better to run," thought Nemovetsky and answered himself, "No, it's better not to run."

"He's a dead 'un! You ain't afraid of him?" said the third of the sitting trio, a bald-headed fellow with a scant red beard. "And the little girl is a fine one. May God grant everyone such a one!"

The trio gave a forced laugh.

"Mister, wait! I want to have a word with you!" said

the tall man in a thick bass voice and glanced at his comrades.

They rose.

Nemovetsky walked on, without turning round.

"You ought to stop when you're asked," said the red-haired man. "An' if you don't, you're likely to get something you ain't counting on!"

"D'you hear?" growled the tall man, and in two jumps caught up with the strollers.

A massive hand descended on Nemovetsky's shoulder and made him reel. He turned and met very close to his face the round, bulgy, terrible eyes of his assailant. They were so near that it was as if he were looking at them through a magnifying glass, and he clearly distinguished the small red veins on the whites and the yellowish matter on the lids. He let fall Zinotchka's numb hand and, thrusting his hand into his pocket, he murmured, "Do you want money? I'll give you some, with pleasure."

The bulgy eyes grew rounder and gleamed. And when Nemovetsky averted his gaze from them, the tall man stepped slightly back and, with a short blow, struck Nemovetsky's chin from below. Nemovetsky's head fell backward, his teeth clicked, his cap descended to his forehead and fell off; waving with his arms, he dropped to the ground. Silently, without a cry, Zinotchka turned and ran with all the speed of which she was capable. The man with the clean-shaven face gave a long-drawn shout which sounded strangely, "A-a-ah! . . ."

And, still shouting, he gave pursuit.

Nemovetsky, reeling, jumped up, and before he could straighten himself he was again felled with a blow on the neck. There were two of them, and he one, and he was frail and unused to physical combat. Nevertheless, he fought for a long time, scratched with his fingernails like an obstreperous woman, bit with his teeth, and sobbed with an unconscious despair.

When he was too weak to do more they lifted him and bore him away. He still resisted, but there was a din in his head; he ceased to understand what was being done with him and hung helplessly in the hands which bore him. The last thing he saw was a fragment of the red beard which almost touched his mouth, and beyond it the darkness of the wood and the light-colored blouse of the running girl. She ran silently and fast, as she had run but a few days before when they were playing tag; and behind her, with short strides, overtaking her, ran the clean-shaven one. Then Nemovetsky felt an emptiness around him, his heart stopped short as he experienced the sensation of falling, then he struck the earth and lost all consciousness.

The tall man and the red-haired man, having thrown Nemovetsky into a ditch, stopped for a few moments to listen to what was happening at the bottom of the ditch. But their faces and their eyes were turned to one side, in the direction taken by Zinotchka. From there arose the high stifled woman's cry which quickly died. The tall man muttered angrily, "The pig!"

Then, making a straight line, breaking twigs on the way, like a bear, he began to run.

"And me! And me!" his red-haired comrade cried in a thin voice, running after him. He was weak and he panted; in the struggle his knee was hurt, and he felt badly because the idea about the girl had come to him first and he would get her last. He paused to rub his knee; then, putting a finger to his nose, he sneezed; and once more began to run and to cry his plaint, "And me! And me!"

The dark cloud dissipated itself across the whole heavens, ushering in the calm, dark night. The darkness soon swallowed up the short figure of the red-haired man, but for some time there was audible the uneven fall of his feet, the rustle of the disturbed leaves, and the shrill, plaintive cry, "And me! Brothers, and me!"

Earth got into Nemovetsky's mouth, and his teeth grated. On coming to himself, the first feeling he experienced was consciousness of the pungent, pleasant smell of the soil. His head felt dull, as if heavy lead had been poured into it; it was hard to turn it. His whole body ached, there was an intense pain in the shoulder, but no bones were broken. Nemovetsky sat up, and for a long time looked above him, neither thinking nor remembering. Directly over him, a bush lowered its broad leaves, and between them was visible the now clear sky. The cloud had passed over, without dropping a single drop of rain, and leaving the air dry and exhilarating. High up, in the middle of the heavens, appeared the carven moon, with a transparent border. It was living its last nights, and its light was cold, dejected, and solitary. Small tufts of cloud rapidly passed over in the heights where, it was clear, the wind was strong; they did not obscure the moon, but cautiously passed it by. In the solitariness of the moon, in the timorousness of the high bright clouds, in the blowing of the wind barely perceptible below, one felt the mysterious depth of night dominating over the earth.

Nemovetsky suddenly remembered everything that had happened, and he could not believe that it had happened. All that was so terrible and did not resemble truth. Could truth be so horrible? He, too, as he sat there in the night and looked up at the moon and the running clouds, appeared strange to himself and did not resemble reality. And he began to think that it was an ordinary if horrible nightmare. Those women, of whom they had met so many, had also become a part of this terrible and evil dream.

"It can't be!" he said with conviction, and weakly shook his heavy head. "It can't be!"

He stretched out his hand and began to look for his cap. His failure to find it made everything clear to him; and he understood that what had happened had

not been a dream, but the horrible truth. Terror possessed him anew, as a few moments later he made violent exertions to scramble out of the ditch, again and again to fall back with handfuls of soil, only to clutch once more at the hanging shrubbery.

He scrambled out at last, and began to run, thoughtlessly, without choosing a direction. For a long time he went on running, circling among the trees. With equal suddenness, thoughtlessly, he ran in another direction. The branches of the trees scratched his face, and again everything began to resemble a dream. And it seemed to Nemovetsky that something like this had happened to him before: darkness, invisible branches of trees, while he had run with closed eyes, thinking that all this was a dream. Nemovetsky paused, then sat down in an uncomfortable posture on the ground, without any elevation. And again he thought of his cap, and he said, "This is I. I ought to kill myself. Yes, I ought to kill myself, even if this is a dream."

He sprang to his feet, but remembered something and walked slowly, his confused brain trying to picture the place where they had been attacked. It was quite dark in the woods, but sometimes a stray ray of moonlight broke through and deceived him; it lighted up the white tree trunks, and the wood seemed as if it were full of motionless and mysteriously silent people. All this, too, seemed as if it had been, and it resembled a dream.

"Zinaida Nikolaevna!" called Nemovetsky, pronouncing the first word loudly, the second in a lower voice, as if with the loss of his voice he had also lost hope of any response.

And no one responded.

Then he found the footpath, and knew it at once. He reached the glade. Back where he had been, he fully understood that it all had actually happened. He ran about in his terror, and he cried, "Zinaida Nikolaevna! It is I! I!"

No one answered his call. He turned in the direction where he thought the town lay, and shouted a prolonged shout, "He-l-l-p!"

And once more he ran about, whispering something while he swept the bushes, when before his eyes there appeared a dim white spot, which resembled a spot of congealed faint light. It was the prostrate body of Zinotchka.

"Oh, God! What's this?" said Nemovetsky, with dry eyes, but in a voice that sobbed. He got down on his knees and came in contact with the girl lying there.

His hand fell on the bared body, which was so smooth and firm and cold but by no means dead. Trembling, he passed his hand over her.

"Darling, sweetheart, it is I," he whispered, seeking her face in the darkness.

Then he stretched out a hand in another direction, and again came in contact with the naked body, and no matter where he put his hand it touched this woman's body, which was so smooth and firm and seemed to grow warm under the contact of his hand. Sometimes he snatched his hand away quickly, and again he let it rest; and just as, all tattered and without his cap, he did not appear real to himself, so it was with this bared body: he could not associate it with Zinotchka. All that had passed here, all that men had done with this mute woman's body, appeared to him in all its loathsome reality, and found a strange intensely eloquent response in his whole body. He stretched forward in a way that made his joints crackle, dully fixed his eyes on the white spot, and contracted his brows like a man thinking. Horror before what had happened congealed in him, and like a solid lay on his soul, as it were, something extraneous and impotent.

"Oh, God! What's this?" he repeated, but the sound of it rang untrue, like something deliberate.

He felt her heart: it beat faintly but evenly, and when he bent toward her face he became aware of its

equally faint breathing. It was as if Zinotchka were not in a deep swoon, but simply sleeping. He quietly called to her, "Zinotchka, it is I!"

But at once he felt that he would not like to see her awaken for a long time. He held his breath, quickly glanced round him, then he cautiously smoothed her cheek; first he kissed her closed eyes, then her lips, whose softness yielded under his strong kiss. Frightened lest she awaken, he drew back, and remained in a frozen attitude. But the body was motionless and mute, and in its helplessness and easy access there was something pitiful and exasperating, not to be resisted and attracting one to itself. With infinite tenderness and stealthy, timid caution, Nemovetsky tried to cover her with the fragments of her dress, and this double consciousness of the material and the naked body was as sharp as a knife and as incomprehensible as madness. . . . Here had been a banquet of wild beasts . . . he scented the burning passion diffused in the air, and dilated his nostrils.

"It is I! I!" he madly repeated, not understanding what surrounded him and still possessed of the memory of the white hem of the skirt, of the black silhouette of the foot and of the slipper which so tenderly embraced it. As he listened to Zinotchka's breathing, his eyes fixed on the spot where her face was, he moved a hand. He listened, and moved the hand again.

"What am I doing?" he cried out loudly, in despair, and sprang back, terrified of himself.

For a single instant Zinotchka's face flashed before him and vanished. He tried to understand that this body was Zinotchka, with whom he had lately walked, and who had spoken of infinity; and he could not understand. He tried to feel the horror of what had happened, but the horror was too great for comprehension, and it did not appear.

"Zinaida Nikolaevna!" he shouted imploringly. "What does this mean? Zinaida Nikolaevna!"

But the tormented body remained mute, and, con-

tinuing his mad monologue, Nemovetsky descended on his knees. He implored, threatened, said that he would kill himself, and he grasped the prostrate body, pressing it to him. . . . The now warmed body softly yielded to his exertions, obediently following his motions, and all this was so terrible, incomprehensible and savage that Nemovetsky once more jumped to his feet and abruptly shouted, "Help!"

But the sound was false, as if it were deliberate.

And once more he threw himself on the unresisting body, with kisses and tears, feeling the presence of some sort of abyss, a dark, terrible, drawing abyss. There was no Nemovetsky; Nemovetsky had remained somewhere behind, and he who had replaced him was now with passionate sternness mauling the hot, submissive body and was saying with the sly smile of a madman, "Answer me! Or don't you want to? I love you! I love you!"

With the same sly smile he brought his dilated eyes to Zinotchka's very face and whispered, "I love you! You don't want to speak, but you are smiling, I can see that. I love you! I love you! I love you!"

He more strongly pressed to him the soft, will-less body, whose lifeless submission awakened a savage passion. He wrung his hands, and hoarsely whispered, "I love you! We will tell no one, and no one will know. I will marry you tomorrow, when you like. I love you. I will kiss you, and you will answer me—yes? Zinotchka . . ."

With some force he pressed his lips to hers, and felt conscious of his teeth's sharpness in her flesh; in the force and anguish of the kiss he lost the last sparks of reason. It seemed to him that the lips of the girl quivered. For a single instant flaming horror lighted up his mind, opening before him a black abyss.

And the black abyss swallowed him.

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