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ALFRED J. HITCHCOCK

THE QUALITY OF SUSPENSE

ALL of my life I have professed a profound interest approaching fascination for the quality of Suspense—a fact which probably will not be surprising to the thousands of movie-goers who have been kind enough to share my enthusiasm for stories which have this quality.

When this enthusiasm for Suspense became so closely identified with my name that a publisher was prompted to invite me to edit a volume of Suspense Stories, I faced the difficulty of defining and limiting the quality upon which I had presumed myself to be something of an authority.

As a matter of fact, Suspense is the significant element in all stories. It is the plot device which has made the craft of story-telling an art from the beginning of time. Reciting the terrors of the hunt, primitive man held his cowering audience spellbound in the dim light of his cave with the Suspense of his tale. Sheherezade saved her pretty throat from the headsman's ax for a thousand and one nights by Suspense. She was clever enough to end the narration of her story each evening at a point of high suspense, and the Khalif, eager to learn what was going to happen next, could not resist postponing her execution another 24 hours.

Happily this stratagem repeated time after time saved not only the clever head of this Oriental beauty, but also preserved for us the delights of the thousand and one tales we know as the Arabian Nights. Perhaps

it also gave modern magazine publishers a profitable inspiration for continued stories told in installments and "Continued in Next Month's Issue." Certainly the commercial advantages of Suspense were recognized in the early movie serial which left Pauline in peril until "Next Week's Episode," and in the modern radio soap operas which bid listeners "tune in tomorrow to hear what poor Mary will do." All the world enjoys waiting with bated breath to learn what will happen next.

Don't you, as a reader of stories, often find your pleasure in the plot—in what is going to happen? Characters, background and all the other elements of color and interest are certainly important, but fundamentally they are embellishments. It is the thread of the story itself which draws you from the opening paragraph to the next page, and the next, and the next to the story's end. You want to know how it will turn out. That is Suspense.

But what is the difference between Suspense in the familiar boy-meets-girl plot, and Suspense in a story like "Suspicion," which was based on the superb novel *Before the Fact,* by Francis Iles, and *The Thirty-Nine Steps,* by John Buchan? In this difference lies the essence of the quality of Suspense in which I have found so much pleasure as a reader, and in which I have specialized as a director of motion pictures. It has been the yardstick for selection of the stories you'll read in this volume.

Principally, this difference lies in the fact that Suspense is here accompanied by Danger—danger mysterious and unknown, if possible. Or, if the danger is known—then as inexorable or as insurmountable peril as may be imagined. As in all stories, it is well if the ideal tale of Suspense be built around a character with whom the reader may identify himself so that his interest in the story grows more intense as the Suspense built upon that character's fate grows more urgent and keen. Two of the stories printed in this volume are particularly adroit examples of this type of Suspense.

If any writer has more successfully achieved the identification of his reader with a character in his story than Ralph Milne Farley has in "The House of Ecstasy," it has not been my good fortune to read it. And if more dramatic Suspense can be wrung from the attack of a universally cherished ideal by a rather horrible old cynic than you'll find in Stephen Vincent Benét's "Elementals," the writer who does so will have surpassed one of the greatest story-tellers of our time.

No stereotype formula restricts the ingenuity of plot of our favorite stories. They may involve the basic and perhaps sordid conflicts of man against man before a background of modern realism, as in James M. Cain's "The Baby in the Icebox." They may involve man as a struggling atom against the overwhelming odds of Nature's irresistible forces as in Captain Outerson's "Fire in the Galley Stove," or Hanson Baldwin's "R.M.S. Titanic." The last, incidentally, is not fiction at all but a journalistic report of high order about the famous disaster of a palatial ocean liner caught by ice-floes on its maiden voyage. You'll agree with me, I think, that although it is a factual account it bows to few of the imaginative works in the quality of its Suspense.

An author may choose to share with his reader and his characters the nature of the danger which threatens, as in the stories I have just mentioned. On the other hand, he may choose to allow the reader to guess the nature of the danger and watch the characters of the story move to meet it with blissful and terrifying unconcern, as in Margery Sharp's "The Second Step." I predict that your flesh will shudder and crawl *more* when you reconsider this story after reading it, than it did while you were reading it.

Again, as in Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," the author saves the full crushing import of his plot until the last minute and delivers it just when—but you'll see what I mean. "The Liqueur Glass," "Blue Murder" and "Flood on the Goodwins"

are a little like that too, in the best tradition of spy and mystery stories—but in these the reader rather expects the solution to be saved until the end.

Speaking, for the moment, of staggering conclusions, you may expect a real treat in "The House of Ecstasy" I have already mentioned, and in Frank Stockton's classic "The Lady or the Tiger?" If any tales come from the top drawer of Suspense stories, these two certainly may claim that honor on the strength of their endings alone. You may be tempted, as I was for a moment, to be indignant upon reading them. But remember—we are supposed to be addicts of Suspense, and when an author gives it to us in full portion as Stockton and Farley have—we get only what we've been asking for!

It is natural enough, man being a story-teller by nature and stories themselves embodying Suspense as an essential, that certain tales of Suspense have been transmitted by word of mouth so universally that they have virtually achieved the status of folklore. Many never achieve print unless some connoisseur, like the late Alexander Woollcott, who loved such yarns, selects one for publication, usually in an effort to trace its origin. Albert Payson Terhune's short summary, "The Blue Paper," is one of the most fascinating of these tales, and by virtue of its plot and conclusion, it is included, in this collection as an unquestionable classic of suspense. Another writer (besides those mentioned by Mr. Terhune) who has written a story using the plot of "The Blue Paper" is Ralph Straus. Straus called his, quite justifiably—and as an unusually merciful warning to the reader—"The Most Maddening Story in the World." Straus's "The Room on the Fourth Floor" has been included here as an excellent treatment of another theme of near-folklore familiarity.

It occurs to me that I have done less than a scholarly job as editor of this collection of Suspense Stories. Quite frankly, I can't feel the least bit apologetic. I had no intention of being a learned editor presenting you with an anthology of "Suspense Stories of All

Nations" or an "Evolution of the Tale of Suspense from Sheherezade to Superman." As you may have guessed by now, I am more of a reader than an editor. I can't even say that these are my favorite Suspense stories, for I have many favorites and space here to include but a few. If these please you, I may gather a few more together one of these days—not as an editor enlightening or educating you—but as myself introducing a number of cherished friends of mine to you. I believe you'll like them all the more for that kind of meeting, and that they'll be ever afterward numbered among your "friends" too!

ALFRED J. HITCHCOCK

C. B. GILFORD

NEVER KILL FOR LOVE

It is perhaps a truism that marriage is often the first step toward murder. Undoubtedly it was in our case. None of us were murderers by nature or choice. It was only that detestable, loathsome, ridiculous, foolish, horrifying, not-made-in-heaven marriage that led us to it. Forced us to it, I should say. For although we cudgeled our brains to find some other solution, there was absolutely none that we could find.

I'm Porter Wyck, by the way. My friends—and I have some—simply call me Port. I'm thirty-two, decent looking, and I have a bit of money, through an inheritance.

Then there's Aram Daniels. He's the handsome one, dark, lean, lithe, with soft brown eyes, black curly hair, and a small, clipped mustache. A ladies' man, you might say.

Athelstan Mallory rounds out our group. He's Aram's opposite in many ways. He's a Celt, big, barrel-chested, athletic, with a large ruggedly carved blond head, and hard, ice-blue eyes.

But the three of us probably would never have even met—certainly would not have become friends and conspirators—had we not been brought together by our common love for Leonora. It may be the more usual circumstance that several men loving the same woman are driven apart, but we had something else in common, too—our loves for Leonora were mutually futile.

Not that we didn't try . . .

I remember the first time I met Leonora. I'd been bored with my own existence and I'd come down to Tanbury to see Punkie, with whom I'd had a wartime

acquaintance some years back. I'd never particularly liked Punkie, but that's how bored I was. Anyway he took me to this country club dance.

"You've got to introduce me to that girl," I said to Punkie.

Some people would have called Leonora beautiful; maybe others wouldn't have. She was tall, willowy. Perhaps she didn't have the spectacular proportions some modern barbarians expect women to have. But she had exquisite pale skin, dark red hair, green eyes, and high cheekbones. She had a quality too—something about her that was really indescribable, intangible, but a thing which would make the kind of man who would fall in love with her, stay in love with her for as long as he lived.

A week after I met her I asked her to marry me. She said, "No."

She came across Aram Daniels in Paris. He'd been studying painting there. I suppose it was the most natural thing in the world for an artist like Aram to be attracted to a face like Leonora's. He gave up Paris and followed her back across the Atlantic. He also proposed to her, and to him also she said, "No."

She picked up Athelstan Mallory in Egypt. (Leonora did quite a bit of traveling before her marriage.) Athelstan was an archeologist who was digging into pyramids. But he quite forgot Queen Nefertiti and followed Leonora back home just as Aram had done. Proposed like both Aram and me. And was said "no" to, like Aram and me.

So Tanbury was acquiring a veritable colony of Leonora's suitors, all of whom had labored and loved in vain, scarcely any of whom had any real hope of future success, but none of whom had the slightest notion of leaving and forgetting Leonora. As for Leonora herself, she handled the situation patiently but firmly.

"I'm not going to try to avoid you, Port," she told me, "and I'm not going to turn and look the other way when I see you. That would be silly. But I'm not going

to go out with you either. That would be silly too."

So I—and Aram and Athelstan did the same thing—just hung around, trying to get as many glimpses of Leonora as I could, trying to get invited to places where she might be, trying to arrange "chance" meetings whenever and wherever possible. Which meant that the three of us by sheer coincidence and necessity became first companions and finally friends.

And then came that dreadful day.

Of course I think we all realized, clearly, that Leonora—though she didn't love any of us—was nevertheless capable of love, would some day fall in love, and that the lucky man would be someone who hadn't yet appeared on the scene.

But Richley! Not Richley! Charles Richley was the lowest, vilest form of humanity.

That's a broad statement, I know. A pretty bold conclusion. But remember I said Leonora had a quality that made people love her. Well, Richley had a quality too. The opposite quality. People hated him instantly. At least three people did, Aram, Athelstan and myself.

We hated him, I'm sure, even before we realized how Leonora felt about him. Surely all three of us couldn't have been psychic about the future. No, I think we hated him instinctively, apart from considerations of Leonora, simply for being himself, a monstrous defilement of human nature.

"The man's a pig," Athelstan said, "an ugly, gluttonous, and most filthy pig."

"Hyena," Aram corrected him. "An idiot beast, all mouth and voice."

You may gather from this—and be correct—that Charles Richley was fat. Not enormous, not gargantuan. But unpleasantly plump, with a soft, fat body, and soft, fat hands, and soft, fat folds of flesh around his neck and jowls. And he was a compulsive talker. He chattered and squeaked incessantly, on any subject. When there wasn't a subject, he talked about himself.

I don't know where he came from. I never wanted to know. He'd come to Tanbury on some real estate promotion scheme, probably dishonest. In the course of pushing his promotion, he made it a point to meet just about everybody in town. So of course he met Leonora.

I don't know to this day whether it was love at first sight, because I'd never seen Leonora in love. It was some while at least before we were aware of what was developing. Then it struck us like a thunderbolt. Leonora was engaged to Charles Richley!

We disbelieved the first rumor so desperately, that the three of us went together to ask Leonora herself if it was true. It was a Sunday afternoon. Richley was off somewhere bargaining over some swamp land. Leonora was cool and beautiful in a green dress that matched her eyes. And I remember seeing instantly that there was a change in her. Again it was something so subtle that you saw it without knowing how or where. Perhaps it was a heightened color in her pale cheeks, or a strange glow hovering about her like a halo.

"Yes, I'm going to marry Charles," she said.

We tried, as gentlemen, not to show our shock and horror.

"Well, I have to marry someone, don't I?" she went on.

Someone, yes. But not Charles Richley! Not that oafish, brutish blob of fat flesh that could not possibly love her as we loved her.

We left quickly. I was sick, physically sick. I wanted to vomit, or to curse, or to die. Above all, I never wanted to see Leonora again.

Aram felt the same. "I'm going back to Paris," he said. "I cannot stay here and watch the mating of those two creatures, one so ugly and one so beautiful. I'm going back to Paris."

But he didn't go. None of us went anywhere. We stayed, like moths around a fatal flame, thirst-crazed men drinking from a cup we knew was poisoned.

We lived a nightmare for the next several months. We drank. We quarreled. We concocted a hundred miserable, desperate schemes of hatred and revenge. Until Athelstan, with a sudden, stoic calm, proposed something that had the sound of wisdom.

"If we love Leonora as we claim, shouldn't we want to see her happy? And if by some mysterious working of a feminine mind, she should think she was happy with Richley, shouldn't we approve?"

In the end, there seemed nothing else we could do. We sat on the sidelines and watched. Leonora was an heiress in a small way, having inherited a good deal of Tanbury property from her stepfather. We watched while Richley took control of that property even before the wedding, and we tried not to believe that he was marrying Leonora for her money. We had misgivings of all sorts, but we stifled them and hoped for the best.

We even attended the wedding. We sat in stunned, sick silence while Charles Richley kissed his bride. We fretted in Tanbury for a whole month, while the newlyweds were away on an ocean honeymoon. And we still lingered when the Richleys returned to Tanbury and settled into an enormous, rambling ranch house, one of those which Richley's new corporation was bringing into being.

"It is all over," Aram said. "She has endured the intimacies of the honeymoon with the monster. Now she is setting up housekeeping for him, to slave in a kitchen to produce little delicacies for his gross appetite. It is all over. I am going back to Paris.

But he stayed. All of us did. I cannot say what held us there. We would have been much happier away. But some spiritual chain bound us to the spot. Some elemental, primitive foreknowledge made us linger. We were like three half-malicious, half-protective, ever-watchful deities of the Richley hearth, brooding over the scene, perhaps waiting to be needed, to be called, perhaps waiting to perform whatever actions the eternal fates had long ago decreed.

Then one day—or one night—we knew why we were there.

It was another dance party night at the same country club where I had first met Leonora. We had been in the habit of going everywhere where Leonora might be. And she was there with Richley. We watched from afar.

They were at a table—Leonora and Charles with two other couples. We didn't know what was being said. Of course Richley was talking. He was always talking. We couldn't help but hear the sound of his high-pitched voice, audible even above the music.

Then suddenly Leonora left the table. She walked very fast, among the other tables, across the dance floor, past people whom she knew but didn't stop to greet. And she disappeared out through the main entrance.

"Something's wrong," I said.

We followed her, not caring whether Richley or anybody else saw where we were going. Outside, we spotted Leonora's white dress in the moonlight. She was heading toward the parking lot. We ran after her. It must have been the sound of our running footsteps on the gravel which made her whirl to face us just before she reached her car.

"What do you want?" she snapped the question at us, spitting it out with a catlike savagery that we'd never seen in her.

"You're crying," I said.

It was all I could say. The sight of her tear-filled eyes, her distorted face, unnerved me, left me speechless after two words.

"What business is it of yours?" she flung back.

And then nobody said anything for a long moment. Leonora glared at us. We stood there frightened, confused, with an anger of our own, but not directed toward her as hers obviously was toward us.

"What has he done to you?" Athelstan asked finally.

"Who are you talking about?"

"Your husband. What has he done to you?" Athel-

stan had a rocklike, perserving stubbornness. "You are unhappy, Leonora. What has he done?"

"I am not unhappy . . ."

"You're crying."

"All right, supposing I am unhappy. What makes you think it's Charles' fault?"

We should have stopped right there. We should have understood. Everything was clear at that one moment. But what we saw was something we didn't want to see. The fateful moment passed, and forever afterwards everything was veiled from our comprehension, mysterious, enigmatic, an eternal puzzle.

"You don't like Charles, do you?" she asked.

"How could we like him if he married you?" Aram answered, with both frankness and gallantry.

It mollified her a little. But she still didn't want any help from us. "Excuse me," she said, "I'm going home."

We stood helplessly by and watched her get into the car. The engine roared, she backed crazily from the parking place, then shot away, the wheels spurting gravel at us in a revengeful spray.

"Whatever she claims to the contrary," Athelstan said gloomily, "she is unhappy."

"No marriage runs smoothly all the time," I argued, but I failed to convince even myself.

"A man who would quarrel with his wife in public," Aram said, "who would make her cry in the presence of strangers, that man deserves a horse whip."

And I suppose it was only our consideration for Leonora, our reluctance to embarrass her, that prevented us from returning to the club and dealing with Richley then and there—and with a horse whip, if we'd had one.

But the worst was yet to come. In the ensuing months, Richley consolidated his real estate holdings in Tanbury, which had been started with Leonora's money and property of course. And it also became widely known that he mistreated his wife as a rather regular thing. We fumed over the situation, but with-

out knowing what to do about it.

The only thing we did do, for the moment, was to establish a continuous watch over the Richley house. There were three of us available for the operation, and time meant nothing to us, so that day and night there was always at least one of us there, and more often two.

Not right on the spot, of course, except sometimes at night, when we simply parked in a car a few houses down, or around the corner. Most of the time our sentry post was an office over a store about two blocks distant. From there, with aid of binoculars, we could keep pretty good track.

That was how we knew, for instance, when Leonora walked out on Richley the first time. She had no close relatives in Tanbury, and she evidently didn't like the public life of the hotel. So she drove her car to the motor court on the edge of town and stayed in one of the cabins for two days.

Actually we were happy over that at first, hoping it meant a break-up of the marriage. But it didn't. After those two days Leonora returned to Richley. But the routine became a periodic thing. Every month or so, Leonora—in some kind of despair that perhaps we couldn't quite appreciate—would pack a suitcase and go to the motor court for a day or two. But always, without fail, she returned.

Then a queer thing happened. Leonora didn't come out of the house for a week. Richley came and went; lights burned behind drawn drapes at night in Richley's absence. So she was there. She had to be there. She could not have left without our knowing it. Yet she was staying completely out of sight.

Finally, our curiosity and apprehension got the better of us. We waited till Richley left the house one day, and then we marched straight up to the front door and rang the bell. When there was no immediate answer, our fears grew. But we kept on ringing, making it clear to Leonora that we weren't going to be discouraged. So finally we heard the bolt working, and

the door opened as far as the chain would allow it. Leonora's voice came from the interior shadows.

"Yes, Port, what is it?"

"We want to see you, Leonora."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not seeing anyone."

"Why not?"

"Port, when are you going to learn that my private life is not your special business?" She didn't say it in an unkindly way, just wearily.

"Have you been ill, Leonora? We'd like to know if there's anything we can do to help—if there's anything wrong, that is." This was useless conversation, but I was stalling. My vision was slowly growing more accustomed to peering into the dimness, and I was seeing better every second.

"There is nothing wrong, Port. Now please go away . . . please . . . and don't come back." And she closed the door in our faces.

Back in our car, we consulted. I had seen what I had seen, and Aram, with his sharp painter's eyes, had seen even better perhaps.

"Her face is bruised, isn't it?" I asked him.

"Yes," he agreed.

"She could have fallen."

"If she'd fallen, she would have called a doctor. And we know that no doctor's been here. So she's been hurt in a way she doesn't want anybody to know about. That husband of hers has beaten her."

Then Athelstan gave voice to what was in all our minds. "We'll kill him," he said.

It was only the fact that we couldn't locate him that prevented us from immediately taking Charles Richley and murdering him in broad daylight, a sort of public execution. But Richley was on the move that day and kept one jump ahead of us. Everywhere we looked for him, he had just left. By the end of the day, we'd about decided just to go back to his house, wait for him there, and kill him when he arrived.

"Right before Leonora's eyes?" Aram asked.

We hadn't considered that aspect. But that thought bred other thoughts. There were numerous problems, we discovered.

"No," Athelstan said. "Why should we inflict a bloody scene on Leonora? She's suffered enough because of that brute already."

"In fact," Aram said, "I don't think she should even have to view his corpse afterwards. We can provide the necessary identification."

"But she'll have to know he's been killed."

"Certainly. But she doesn't have to be directly involved in it."

"That will require definite arrangements."

"Yes, we'll have to make arrangements. Maybe it's rather a good thing that we didn't find him."

"So he gets a reprieve then?"

"Yes, but a short one."

We went to my place. I got out a bottle of wine to aid our thinking.

"Which one of us gets the actual honor of killing Richley?" Athelstan wanted to know. "I would like to volunteer."

"Why should it be you?" I challenged him. "After all, I have seniority. I've known Leonora longer than either of you."

"I don't see how that matters. In fact, Port, I'd be willing to submit to a duel or test of any kind to see who gets the privilege . . ."

"Shut up, both of you," Aram intervened. "The important thing is to dispose of Richley in the best possible way. I should like to kill him myself, by myself, but personal pleasure must bow in this case to the common good."

We agreed. We had by no means cooled down, but the fires within were under control.

"Do you suppose," I wondered, "that Leonora would feel kindly towards whoever killed Richley? And another thought—suppose the one who kills him goes to prison or something of the sort. What would the chances be for the other two? With Leonora, I mean."

Aram was inclined to be gloomy. "Leonora has already rejected the three of us. If she re-marries after Richley, it's not likely to be any of us. No, I'm afraid this project will have to be a bit more altruistic than that. We'd simply better think of punishing Richley, and freeing Leonora in the most painless way possible."

"I agree heartily," I said. "But my first question is still unanswered. How will Leonora feel toward us, singly or as a group, when she finds out we killed her husband? Lord knows, she may even feel guilty herself, knowing we did it for her sake. And then there's the matter of public opinion. It'll create rather a scandal, don't you think?"

"Well, Port, what's your solution then?" Aram demanded.

"I don't know for sure . . ."

"I have the solution," Athelstan said. "For Leonora's sake—not for our own—we must kill Richley without being detected. Don't you see, fellows? A secret, well-planned murder . . ."

On a Wednesday morning, a fortnight later, Leonora—her face healed and presentable now—left her house and drove to the motor court. She registered there, as before, as Mrs. Charles Richley. If past performances were any indication, she would stay overnight at least, perhaps two nights. To be on the safe side, however, we'd agreed our plan had better go into action the first night.

Aram had drawn the assignment of watching Leonora. He decided against renting another cabin and being too obvious. Instead, he stayed parked in his own car, in a spot from which he could watch Leonora's door.

With the binoculars, Athelstan covered the Richley house from our observation point. The house was to be our execution place, our Tyburn Hill, our Place de la Revolution, and we wanted to make sure it wasn't disturbed.

I shadowed Richley. He left the house shortly after Leonora's departure, and went about his daily round of business as if nothing unusual had happened. As a matter of fact, he looked almost smug. Leonora had left, but it had happened before, and she'd always come back. She'd come back again. He had nothing to worry about.

I hated him for his smugness. But I also rather enjoyed his air of confidence. He flitted about Tanbury that day with the vitality and enthusiasm of a man who thinks he is going to live forever. But he was going to die very soon. He didn't know it. But I did.

He must have been aware that Leonora always went to that motor court whenever she left him. If he'd had any spark of decency or chivalry in him, he'd have gone there sometime that day and begged her to come back to him. But he didn't. He was all business, and the fact that his beautiful wife was probably shedding bitter tears didn't prevent him from talking with his architect, his banker, his lumber dealer, half dozen customers, and probably turning every one of those conversations to his selfish advantage.

He dined in a restaurant that evening with a middle-aged couple who looked like good prospective victims for some kind of swindle. Being nervous with anticipation, I wasn't hungry myself. I nibbled and drank coffee, while Richley, still not perturbed about Leonora and still true to his old habits, stowed away an enormous meal. He took two hours or more at it.

He's prolonging his life by just that much, I thought. And he's going to die on a full stomach. I begrudged him both the extra time and that last meal.

It was past nine when he said good-bye to the middle-aged couple and started home. I followed a block behind him. There was never too much traffic in Tanbury, so you couldn't lose a car very easily.

But anyway, his destination was predictable. He turned into his driveway, his garage door opened by radio signal, and both he and his car were swallowed

up. The prey was in his cage; all the hunters had to do was to walk in.

I blinked my lights toward the office where Athelstan waited, and the window blinked back at me. Then I settled down to wait, while Athelstan drove to the motor court and picked up Aram.

I kept watch on the Richley house though, just in case our bird had a late rendezvous somewhere. Lights burned now in two rooms, probably the living room and the kitchen. All the windows in the house were luxuriously and heavily draped, but even so, some illumination shone through.

When Athelstan and Aram arrived together, the latter reported that Leonora was still at the motor court. It was next to impossible, he felt, that she would change her mind and return home at this late hour.

"We're ready then," I said, with a military briskness.

We knew exactly what we were going to do. We'd planned it; we'd argued and discussed it; we'd rehearsed it as well as we could. Now there was no further talk. We went straight up to the front door and rang the bell.

"He may be a little while," I explained. "The kitchen light is on; so he's probably eating. He may be gentleman enough to swallow his mouthful before he answers the bell. And that will take a little time."

It did. It was a full minute before the lock clicked and the door swung open. Richley was in his shirt sleeves and house slippers. His face was shiny and sweaty, his jaws chomped a few last times, and his fat neck convulsed while he swallowed.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?"

He knew us, of course; so we didn't have to force our way in as strangers. "Charlie," I began, "we've got a little deal for you we think you can make some money out of . . ."

It was more than enough. He opened the door wide and invited us in. From the entrance foyer, he led us into the living room.

We'd never been inside Leonora's house, but I re-

member deciding at once that the interior reflected her more than it did her husband. The living room furniture had slim and light lines. The chairs rested on thin, tubular legs, the sofas seemed mere airy benches. The colorings were pale, fragile, like Leonora herself. There was nothing heavy or ponderous or ugly like Richley was.

"How about a beer, gentlemen?" our genial host asked. I'm sure it wasn't hospitality that prompted the offer, only the fact that he wanted one himself.

"We haven't time," Athelstan told him.

"Well, all right then." The choice between food or drink and money was a hard one for Richley to make. Right now he was torn between reluctance and anticipation.

He was so thoroughly distracted by those mixed emotions that I don't think he was aware that we had surrounded him. Aram stayed facing him, while I deployed to his left and Athelstan to his right. Aram was our spokesman.

"Richley, we want to tell you why we're really here. We are Leonora's friends. You have mistreated her. She is an angel. You are a beast. We are going to kill you like a beast."

For a moment, he acted as if he didn't believe what he had heard. Or believed he had heard it wrong. Or thought that we were joking. In fact, he almost laughed. Being something of a joker himself, he received Aram's announcement as preposterous.

"What is this anyway? What are you guys. . . ?" His voice squeaked, then trailed off. He'd begun vaguely to sense the reality of our intention, and his body was experiencing fear before his mind fully appreciated it.

"And may we say, Richley, that it will be a pure pleasure to kill you."

His mouth fell open, and all that loose flesh of his jowls, deprived of any support, sagged over his loosened collar. His sweaty skin grayed to the look of wet putty. His eyes traveled in horrible rotation from me to Aram to Athelstan.

With one concerted motion, we drew out our butcher knives. What weapon more fitting than butcher knives, to slaughter the fatted animal? With a second planned motion we lunged at him, I toward his heart from the rear, Athelstan toward his heart from the front, and Aram toward his throat. We killed him not singly, but together.

The blows against him so balanced one another that he did not fall at once. He stood there, repeatedly stabbed and gushing blood in sluggish fountains. When he began to topple, however, we stepped back and let him drop. He must have been already quite dead, when he collapsed into a shapeless heap on the rug.

None of us moved immediately then. We all stared down at him, breathing hard, our minds—despite our hatred—still shocked from the unaccustomed experience of committing murder.

"We should have done it some other way," Aram said finally. "This was too easy for him."

"Let's get going," I said.

We went to the kitchen together. There was the booty of a refrigerator raid spread out on the table, including a bitten-into sandwich. It was a comical sight, but we didn't linger to savor it. Instead, we washed our hands and knives at the sink. Athelstan then took charge of the weapons, would dispose of them later. None of us had much blood on our clothes. The few tainted articles could be burned. Aram's apartment had a fireplace.

When the other two returned to the corpse, I stayed in the kitchen to use the phone. I put on my cotton gloves as the others had done. Then I dialed a memorized number, waited patiently and calmly for the answer.

"Tanbury Motor Court and Motel."

"Do you have a Mrs. Charles Richley registered?"

A pause. "Yes, sir, we do."

"I'd like to speak to her."

"It may be a little late, sir . . ."

I glanced at my wristwatch. "It's only a quarter

past ten. Is a quarter past ten too late?"

"Well, sir, I can see her cabin from here. I happen to notice she's there and the lights are out . . ."

"All right, never mind."

I hung up. I didn't want the clerk asking who I was. But I'd accomplished what was necessary, established firmly in the clerk's mind what time it was, together with a reminder that Mrs. Richley was in her cabin. Leonora would have her alibi.

When I flicked off the kitchen lights and returned to the living room, my two companions had already overturned several chairs and were well toward making the scene appear as if there had been a struggle. As I stood and watched, Athelstan hurled a dainty ash tray at the fireplace. It shattered into a hundred pieces. Then he looked at me. "We're having trouble, Port," he said.

"How so?"

"Some of these things are Leonora's most prized possessions. We don't want to be too destructive."

We all agreed to that. Some articles were expendable, others were not. There were items we all remembered that Leonora had collected on her tours and treasured so highly. So we spared the Siamese carvings, the Egyptian cat statues, the Bavarian glass, the Swiss music box. Other things, like the two ungainly lamps that were obviously Richley's contribution to the room, we smashed with glee. We worked at it till the place was a shambles.

We were ready then for the final detail, manufacturing our means of entrance into the house. We could have done things in chronological order, of course, and could have actually broken into the house. But the noise of our amateur efforts might have alerted Richley. So we chose the surer way, entering first and breaking in later.

We opened the drape at the chosen window. The room was almost dark now, what with the lamps broken. The window was of the casement type. We unlocked it and cranked it open. Aram and Athelstan climbed outside, exiting exactly like the burglars we

were pretending to be. They trampled the hedges, and in so doing left blurred footprints. I, meanwhile, performed the little distasteful task I'd saved until last.

I didn't relish touching the dead body. But even amateur burglars, unnerved though they might have been by having to fight with their victim and then having to kill him, would conceivably be deterred from thoroughly ransacking the house, but they would at least take what they could find on the corpse. So I knelt and yanked Richley's watch off his dead wrist, located his wallet after some difficulty and transferred it to my own pocket.

"Shut the window," Aram was calling to me in a whisper.

The window had to be shut in order to be broken, of course. I cranked the thing shut again, then stood out of the way of flying glass while Aram punched a rock through the pane. It made a bit of noise, and Richley certainly might have heard it, if we hadn't taken care to murder him first.

The hole made by the rock was quite satisfactory,of ample size both to put an arm through and reach both the latch and the crank. I opened the window once again and climbed out through it.

We huddled together there on the dark lawn for a moment, reveling in the sweet feeling of success. "We did everything, didn't we?" Athelstan wondered.

I had an afterthought. "I've got Richley's wristwatch," I said, "but I'm not so sure we ought to take it. Why don't we break it, put it back on Richley, and it will show the exact time he was killed? It will also correspond with the time we established for Leonora's alibi."

"That's a bit too neat," Aram objected. "The idea of the broken watch has been used in too many mystery stories. Let the coroner decide the time of death, even if he's just approximate. The broken watch would be a trap. Why, the most stupid detective in the world would notice the planned coincidence of a telephone call and a broken watch . . ."

"All right, all right," I conceded.

We returned to the cars. As per our plan, we changed our clothes right there because of the blood on the things we were wearing. Aram would go home and burn it all. I would take the stuff that wouldn't burn, like the knives and the watch, and dispose of them in the ocean.

Athelstan had the most ticklish job. He was to go to a pay telephone and ring up the police. His story would be that he was driving by, and had seen a man run away from the Richley house, jump into a car and drive away. Vague descriptions of both the man and the vehicle, of course, but very suspicious actions. Let the police come then and go through the gory business of discovering the body, thus sparing Leonora.

We separated then, each to his own task. We thought we had taken care of everything.

It came as a shock and a surprise then, when within forty-eight hours they arrested Leonora on a charge of murder. We held an immediate conference.

"How can they do it?" Aram moaned. "Even if we made some mistakes in the house . . . maybe we did . . . but the damn newspapers don't give any hint of it. Athelstan, you told them about the man you saw running away?"

"Certainly I told them."

"And, Port, you did call the motor court?"

"Yes, I made the call. And I said what I was supposed to say."

"Then how . . . ?"

"They've got something we don't know about. That's obvious."

"All they have is a motive. Leonora had quarreled with Richley and had left home. But a motive's not enough. And the paper says she's denied it."

"Maybe it's a trap."

"For us?"

"Maybe."

"Well, I think we should give ourselves up anyway."

But it was the same old question as before. Certainly now, the way things had miscarried, we could save Leonora some inconvenience if we surrendered. But she'd still have to endure the public scandal, and she'd still have the guilty knowledge that we'd committed murder for her sake. Would it be the best thing in the long run?

"Fellows," Athelstan said finally, "don't mistake me for a coward. I'd go to prison or the gallows any time for Leonora's sake. But if this foolish accusation against her fails from lack of evidence, then we'd have been better off to keep our bloody mouths shut. And the accusation has to fail."

"We can look at it this way," I added. "If worse comes to worse—if Leonora is ever by any remote chance in real danger, that is—we can always confess at that time."

And it did seem the best way.

But our error and stupidities were piling up, you see. Innocent errors. Forgiveable stupidities, because we weren't professional criminals. The amateur is at a tremendous disadvantage. Like the amateur poker player. He simply doesn't know the odds. He has little conception of the strategies possible on the part of his opponent.

We were positively dumfounded when the case actually came to trial. But conviction was still impossible, we reasoned. Leonora was pleading not guilty. And there was the alibi. So we waited.

But we attended the trial naturally. Athelstan was a witness, of course. One of the first to be called, as it happened.

"You summoned the police on the night of October second, Mr. Mallory?"

The prosecutor was a little bald fellow named Beaton. He looked mild, harmless, not even too intelligent. But we underestimated him. He was razor-sharp, vindictive, enormously persuasive. In fact, a devil.

"But you couldn't tell the police exactly what kind of car it was?"

"No." Athelstan could scarcely change his story now.

"And you didn't see the man closely? You couldn't tell the police, for instance, how he was dressed, or how big he was?"

"No . . ."

"Exhibit A," Beaton concluded triumphantly. He put a small suitcase up on the table and opened it. "This is the suitcase, gentlemen of the jury, which Mrs. Richley had with her at the Tanbury Motor Court. With the original contents. You will notice they include a pair of trousers and a jacket belonging to the deceased."

We should have intervened then and there. But we were confused and thrown off-balance. We waited.

". . . Mr. Matthews, you were at the desk at the Tanbury Motor Court on the night of October second, and you received a phone call."

"Yes, sir. A man's voice asked for Mrs. Richley."

"What time was this?"

"Ten-fifteen."

"Did you call Mrs. Richley to the phone?"

"I hesitated to call her because the lights in her cabin were out. The man didn't insist and hung up."

"You are sure Mrs. Richley was in her cabin?"

"As far as I know."

"As far as you know. Would it have been possible for Mrs. Richley to have left and returned to her cabin without your knowing it?"

"Oh yes, sir. I nap off and on all night."

". . . Officer Norton, would you tell us about the broken glass in the Richley living room?"

"Well, the drape was open. The only one in the whole house that was open."

"Is that very odd, Officer?"

"Well, maybe it's not odd that the killer would open the drape so he could leave through the window. But the drape was open when the glass was broken. If it had been closed, you see, and the glass broken from the

outside—as it was—the pieces of flying glass would have been stopped by the drape, and the pieces would have been right there underneath the window. But there was glass scattered six feet inside the room."

"Now what do you conclude from that, Officer Norton?"

"Well, it looked to me like the killer broke the window after he was inside and opened the drape. Maybe an inside job, sir."

". . . Mrs. Morgan, you say you did cleaning for Mrs. Richley?"

"Yes, sir, twice a week."

"Now, Mrs. Morgan, I want you to look at these photographs. They are, as you can see, of the Richley living room. The destruction you see is that left by the apparent struggle between Mr. Richley and whoever killed him. Do you notice anything special about these photos, Mrs. Morgan?"

"There's lots of things smashed."

"But not everything is smashed."

"No, sir, I see Mrs. Richley's best things is all right. All the things she always told me to be real careful of, they're all in one piece. Now that's odd, isn't it?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Morgan."

". . . Mrs. Richley, why did you go to the Tanbury Motor Court on the evening of October second?"

"Because my husband and I had quarreled."

"Had you ever gone to the Tanbury Motor Court previously for similar reasons?"

"Quite a few times."

"You and your husband did not get along very well then, did you?"

"No, we did not."

"Can you tell us, Mrs. Richley, why items of your husband's clothing were found in your suitcase at the motor court?"

"I'd taken them there to mend them. My suitcase also contained needle and thread, Mr. Beaton."

"Very thoughtful of you, Mrs. Richley. Now, can

you tell us who called you at the motor court at ten-fifteen that same night?"

"No, because I didn't talk to him."

"It was a man's voice."

"That's possible."

"What do you mean, that's possible?"

"It's possible a man called me. I do know some men."

"Why would this man call you at the motor court. Why not at home?"

"Maybe he did call me at home. Quite a few people knew that when I quarreled with Charles I always went to the motor court. So when this man couldn't get me at home, he might have tried the motor court."

"Mrs. Richley, could you guess who this man might have been?"

"It might have been any one of several men."

It took some doing after that to get Leonora's lawyer to let me go on the stand. But when we finally convinced him, Leonora objected. It took more doing to convince her that we weren't being martyrs. But then suddenly she changed her mind. She said I could tell my story, for all the good it would do.

I was the surprise witness for the defense. I began at the beginning, and I left nothing out. I admitted we hadn't been as clever as we'd imagined ourselves, but we were prepared to accept the consequences.

The effect on the judge, the jury, and the spectators was not what we'd hoped. Instead of registering an immediate clamor for Leonora's release, everybody seemed to listen with snickering cynicism. As for Beaton, we thought he'd surrender. But he didn't. He waited patiently for the cross-examination.

"Mr. Wyck," he began calmly, "you realize that you have been testifying under oath?"

"I realize it perfectly," I assured him.

"You have told the precise truth?"

"I have."

"And you expect the jury to believe it?"

"I do."

"Even despite the fact there is evidence against Mrs. Richley and none against you?"

"You have my confession."

"Which came rather tardily."

"I explained why we delayed."

"Oh yes, to spare Mrs. Richley's experiencing indirect guilt. Very interesting."

"I don't think you could possibly understand, Mr. Beaton. You don't seem the type ever to have fallen in love."

"When I was in love, Mr. Wyck, I expected some tangible return for my affection. Which still seems to me to be the practical point-of-view. But you have testified that the three of you—may I call you the three musketeers?—were not motivated by any hope of gaining the future affection or gratitude of Mrs. Richley. You were simply three knights in armor slaying the dragon and rescuing the fair lady. Mr. Wyck, that sounds a bit old-fashioned to me. I haven't heard of chivalry like that since I stopped reading Victorian fiction."

He'd gotten under my skin, and I replied hotly, "But I had the facts accurate, didn't I? I told you exactly what happened."

But Beaton only smiled. "Mr. Wyck, you've been in this courtroom every day. Naturally, you have the facts. You heard them all here."

It was no use. Beaton could twist anything I said. I was sick with the humiliation of failure.

But Beaton wasn't responsible for the worst thing of all. That was Leonora's doing. It happened when I left the stand and started to walk past the table where she was sitting.

Suddenly, she left her chair and intercepted me. Without warning I found myself standing there in the middle of that courtroom, with Leonora's face just inches in front of mine, and her green eyes looking up at me in a way in which they'd never looked at me before.

"Port darling," she said in a voice loud enough for

the whole room to hear, "it was a nice try, and I love you."

And then she put her arms around my neck and kissed me. It wasn't like it was between friends, but the real thing, hard and passionate. It was a long time before she let me go. But finally she took her arms away, and walked back to her chair and sat down.

Which left me standing there alone in front of that crowd. I guess I knew even then how it must have looked to everybody. But I couldn't help feeling thrilled at the same time. It was the first, last, and only kiss I ever received from Leonora.

The plan was all ready to go into action. Aram and Athelstan were outside, fully armed and prepared to move. They waited only for my signal.

But I was waiting too, waiting till that guard who kept his eyes fastened on both of us should relax his vigilance for just one second. One second would be enough. This was a plan which could not fail.

But meanwhile I chatted with Leonora through the wire. "I want you to know I forgive all of you," she was saying.

I had less than half my attention on the conversation. "Forgive us what?" I asked.

"For murdering Charles. I understand how you could have misinterpreted our quarrels, and his beating me and all that. And I realize you didn't kill him for revenge or any selfish reasons. You really wanted to help me, and you actually thought you were helping me."

Her words were getting through to me now and I was distracted from my contemplation of the guard. "How long have you known that we killed your husband?" I asked her.

"From the beginning."

"Well, why didn't you accuse us?"

She smiled. It was a sweet, tired smile. Leonora was more beautiful that day than she'd ever been. "Don't you really know, Port?"

"No, I don't," I said. There was a vague horror forming inside me. I could feel it rising and welling up. Or was it fear?

"But while I'm asking questions," I went on, "I have a couple of others. Why did you act like you did all through the trial? You didn't once protest your innocence. You completely ignored the fact that you were on trial for your life. And why that dreadful last scene. What must people have thought? Kissing me like that in front of everybody . . . why, you clinched the verdict right there."

Her smile became more wistful. "I know all that, poor, dear, darling Port. And you never understood anything, did you? You never understood how I loved Charles. Even when he insulted me and beat me, I loved him. And I still do. That's why I wanted to be found guilty, to get the gas chamber. I'm going to rejoin Charles . . ."

The guard, bored finally with staring at us, turned and glanced out the window, at the far blue sky beyond it. Now was the time. We had it all planned . . . the excitement of the chase . . . the fast car . . . the motorboat . . . the old freighter waiting . . . disguises . . . forged passports . . . the faraway places . . . Morocco . . . Arabia . . . Malaya . . . the South Seas . . . just the four of us . . . Leonora and the three musketeers . . .

But Charles was waiting too.

"Hey, buddy," the guard said. He wasn't looking out the window any more. "Your time's up."

He was right. "Good-bye, Leonora," I said. It wouldn't have been right to kiss her now, even if I could have . . .

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

THE LIQUEUR GLASS

MRS. HENRY WATKINS loved going to church. She could not have told you why she loved it. It had perhaps less to do with religious motives than most people's reason for attending divine service; and she took no interest in other people's clothes.

She gazed long and fixedly at the stained glass window in which St. Peter, in a loose magenta blouse, was ladling salmon-colored sardines out of a grassgreen sea; but she did not really see St. Peter or notice his sleight-of-hand preoccupation with the fish. She was simply having a nice, quiet time.

She always sat where she could most easily escape seeing the back of Henry Watkins's head. She had never liked the back of his head and 20 years' married life had only deepened her distaste for it.

Hetty and Paul sat between her and their father, and once or twice it had occurred to Mrs. Watkins as strange that she should owe the life of these two beloved beings to the man she hated.

It was no use pretending at this time of the day that she didn't hate Henry Watkins. She hated him with all the slow, quiet force of a slow, quiet nature. She had hated him for some time before she discovered that she no longer loved him.

Mrs. Watkins arrived slowly at the recognition of a new truth; she would go on provisionally for years with a worn-out platitude, but when she once dropped it, she never returned to pick it up again; and she acted upon her discoveries.

The choir began to sing *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*. Mrs. Watkins disliked this hymn; and she had

never found God much of a help. She thought the verse that compared men's lives to the flight of dreams was nonsense. Nobody could imagine Henry Watkins flying like a dream.

The first lesson was more attractive. Mrs. Watkins enjoyed Jael's reception of Sisera. "She brought him butter in a lordly dish," boomed the curate. Henry Watkins ate a lot of butter, though he insisted, from motives of economy, upon its being Danish. Sisera, worn out with battle, slumbered. Jael took up the nail and carried out with efficiency and dispatch her inhospitable deed. Mrs. Watkins thought the nails in those days must have been larger than they are now and probably sharper at the end.

The curate cleared his throat a little over the story; it seemed to him to savor of brutality. "Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" cried Sisera's mother.

Mrs. Watkins leaned back in her seat and smiled. Sisera was done for, his mother would never hear the sound of those returning chariot wheels. Jael had permanently recouped herself for the butter.

A little later on the vicar swept out of his stall and up to the pulpit covered by the prolonged "Amen" of the accompanying hymn. Henry looked at his watch and shut it with a click. Then his hard blue eyes closed suddenly—he had no eyelashes. Mrs. Watkins folded her hands in her lap and fixed her attention upon St. Peter.

This was her nice, quiet time, and she spent it in considering how she could most easily kill Henry Watkins.

She was not in the least touched by the sight of her wedding ring. Her marriage had been an accident, one of those accidents that happened frequently 20 years ago, and which happen, though more seldom, now. An unhappy blunder of ignorance and family pressure.

She had liked making Henry Watkins jump, and her mother had explained to her that the tendency to jump on Henry's part was ardent, manly love, and that her own amused contemplation of the performance

was deep womanly inclination.

It was then that Mrs. Watkins urged that she did not like the back of Henry's head. She had been told that it was immodest to notice it. His means were excellent and her own parents were poor. Twenty years ago Mrs. Watkins had known very little about life, and what she did know she was tempted to enjoy. She knew a good deal about it now, and she had long ago outgrown the temptation to enjoy it.

Still, that in itself wouldn't have given her any idea of killing her husband. She was a just woman and she knew that her husband had not invented the universe; if he had, she thought it would have been more unpleasant still.

Henry's idea of marriage was very direct; he knew that he had done his wife an enormous favor. She was penniless and he had the money; she was to come to him for every penny and all she had was his as a matter of course. She could do him no favors, she had no rights, and her preferences were silly.

It had occurred to Mrs. Watkins in one awful moment of early resentment that she would rather be bought by a great many men than by one. There would be more variety, and some of them, at least, wouldn't be like Henry.

Then her children came; she aged very rapidly. Nothing is so bad for the personal appearance as the complete abrogation of self-respect. Henry continually threw her birthdays in her teeth. "A woman of your age," he would say with deep contempt.

He was a man of favorite phrases. Mrs. Watkins was not constitutionally averse to repetition, but the repetition of a phrase that means to hurt can be curiously unpleasant. Still, as her mother had pointed out to her long years ago, you can get used to the unpleasant. She never complained, and her parents were gratefully conscious of how soon she had settled down.

But there was a strange fallacy that lingered deep in Mrs. Watkins's heart. She had given up her rights as a woman, since presumably her marriage necessitated

the sacrifice. But she believed that she would be allowed the rights of a mother. This, of course, was where she made her mistake.

Henry Watkins meant to be master in his own house. The house was his own, so was his wife, so were his children. There is no division of property where there is one master. This was a great religious truth to Henry, so that when his son displeased him he thrashed him, and when his daughter got in his way he bullied her.

Mrs. Watkins disputed this right not once but many times, till she found the results were worse for the children. Then she dropped her opposition. Henry Watkins saw that she had learned her lesson. It taught the children a lesson, too; they saw that it made no difference what mother said to father.

Nothing happened to alter either her attitude or Henry's. They went to the same church twice every Sunday, except when it rained; and ate roast beef afterward.

In spite of Henry, Hetty had grown into a charming, slightly nervous young woman, and in spite of Henry, Paul had become a clever, highly strung, regrettably artistic young man.

But if Henry couldn't help their temperaments he could put his foot down about their future.

Paul should go into the bank and learn to be a man (by learning to be a man, Henry meant learning to care more for money than for anything else); and Hetty should receive no assistance toward marrying an impecunious young architect to whom she had taken a fancy.

Hetty could do as she chose: she could marry Henry's old friend Baddeley, who had a decent income; or she could stay at home and pretend to be ill; but she certainly shouldn't throw herself away on a young fool who hadn't the means (rather fortunately, as it happened) to support her.

Henry looked at his watch; the sermon had already lasted 20 minutes. Mrs. Watkins went over once more

in her mind how she had better do it. "And now to God the Father," said the vicar. The sermon had lasted 27 minutes, and Henry meant to point it out to the vicar in the vestry. "Oh, what the joy and the glory must be!" sang the choir. "And if I am hanged," said Mrs. Watkins to herself, "they'll get the money just the same. I shall try not to be, because it would be so upsetting for them, poor young things; still it's wonderful what you can get over when you're young."

At lunch Henry made Hetty cry and ordered her from the room.

Paul flashed out in his sister's defense. "You're unbearable, sir—why can't you leave us alone?"

His mother strangely interposed.

"Never mind, Paul," she said. "Let father have his own way."

Paul looked at her in astonishment, and Henry was extremely annoyed. He was perfectly capable of taking his own way without his wife's interference, and he told her so.

It was the cook's evening out, and the house parlormaid—a flighty creature—was upstairs in her room, trimming a new hat. There was no one downstairs in the kitchen after supper.

Paul went out to smoke in the garden, and Hetty had gone to finish her tears in her own room. That was something Mrs. Watkins hadn't got; but she needed no place for finishing her tears, because she had never yet begun them. She did not see the use of tears.

Mrs. Watkins stood and looked at her husband as he sprawled at his ease in the most comfortable chair.

"Henry," she said, "would you like some of that sloe gin your brother sent you? You haven't tried it yet."

"I don't mind trying a glass," said Henry goodnaturedly.

His wife paused at the door. She came back a step or two. "You've not changed your mind," she asked, "about the children's futures?"

"No! Why should I change my mind?" said Henry. "Do I ever change my mind? They can make as much

fuss as they like, but the man who pays the piper calls the tune!"

"I've heard you say that before," said his wife reflectively.

"I dare say you'll hear me say it again!" said Henry with a laugh.

Mrs. Watkins's hand went toward the handle of the door; she did not think she would ever hear Henry say this favorite maxim again; but still she lingered.

"Hurry up with that liqueur!" said her husband.

Mrs. Watkins went into the pantry and took out a liqueur glass. She poured a little sloe gin into it, then she put down the bottle and left the pantry. She went into the children's darkroom—they were allowed that for their photography.

She still had the glass in her hand. There was a bottle on the highest shelf. She took it down and measured it carefully with her eye. The children's manual of photography and the medical dictionary in Henry's dressing-room had been a great help.

She poured out into the deep red of the sloe gin some of the contents of the bottle; it looked very white and harmless and hardly smelt at all. She wondered if it was enough, and she tipped up the bottle a little to make sure. She used a good deal more than the medical dictionary said was necessary, but the medical dictionary might have underestimated Henry's constitution. She put the bottle back where she found it, and returned to the pantry. There she filled up the liqueur glass with more sloe gin.

She saw Paul on a garden seat through the window. "I wish you'd come out, Mother," he said.

"I will in a minute, dear," she answered quietly. Then she went back to her husband. "Here it is, Henry."

"What a slow woman you are!" he grumbled. "Still I must say you have a steady hand."

She held the full glass toward him and watched him drink it in a gulp.

"It tastes damned odd," said Henry thoughtfully. "I

don't think I shall take any more of it."

Mrs. Watkins did not answer; she took up the liqueur glass and went back into the pantry.

She took out another glass, filled it with sloe gin, drank it, and put it on the pantry table.

The first glass she slipped up her long sleeve and went out into the garden.

"I thought you were never coming, Mother!" Paul exclaimed. "Oh, I do feel sick about everything! If this kind of thing goes on, I shall do something desperate! I sometimes think I should like to kill father."

Mrs. Watkins drew a long breath of relief. Once or twice lately it had occurred to her while she was thinking things over in church that Paul might get desperate and attack his father. He couldn't now.

"Don't talk like that dear," she said gently. "I sometimes think your father can't help himself. Besides, it's very natural he should want you and Hetty to have money; he values money."

"He doesn't want us to have it!" Paul exclaimed savagely. "He only wants to keep us in his power because we haven't got it, and can't get away! What money has he ever given you—or let us have for our own freedom?"

Mrs. Watkins looked up at the substantial house and around the well-stocked garden. Henry had gone in especially for cabbages. She looked as if she were listening for something.

"I don't like to hear you talk like that, Paul," she said at last. "I want you to go up to Hetty's room and bring her out into the garden. She ought to have some air. It'll be church time presently."

"But if I bring her down, won't *he* come out and upset her?" Paul demanded.

"I don't think he is coming out again," said Mrs. Watkins. She watched her son disappear into the house, and then walked on into the thick shrubbery at the end of the garden. She slipped the liqueur glass out of her sleeve and broke it into fragments against the garden wall, then she covered the pieces with loose

earth.

She had hardly finished before she heard a cry from the house. "Mother! Mother! Oh, Mother!"

"I've done the best I can," she said suddenly, between the kitchen garden and the house.

There was an inquest the following week, and Mrs. Watkins, dressed in decent black, gave her evidence with methodical carefulness.

Her husband had been quite well before dinner, she explained. At dinner he had been a little disturbed with one of the children, but nothing out of the ordinary at all. He had merely said a few sharp words. After dinner he had gone to sit in the drawing-room, and at his request she had brought him a glass of sloe gin sent him by his brother; when he had finished it she had carried the glass back into the pantry. She did not see him again. The maids were not downstairs at the time. The sloe gin was examined, the pantry was examined, the whole household was examined. The parlor-maid had hysterics, and the cook gave notice to the coroner for asking her if she kept her pans clean. The verdict was death through misadventure, though a medical officer declared that poison was evidently the cause.

It was considered possible that Henry had privately procured it and taken it himself.

It is true he had no motive for suicide, but there was still less motive for murder. Nobody wished ardently that Henry might live, but, on the other hand, nobody benefited by his interesting and mysterious death—that is to say, nobody but Henry's family; and it is not considered probable that well-dressed, respectable people benefit by a parent's death.

Mrs. Watkins was never tempted to confession; and she continued to gaze just as fixedly at St. Peter and the sardines every Sunday. She thought about quite different subjects now; but she still had a nice quiet time.

It was the day before Hetty's wedding to the young

architect that Mrs. Watkins made her final approach to the question of her husband's death. She never referred to it afterward.

"Do you know, Mummy darling," Hetty said, "I was sure there were a dozen liqueur glasses in the cupboard. I always looked after them myself. Father was so particular about them; and they put back the horrid inquest one, I know, and yet I can only find eleven."

Mrs. Watkins looked at her daughter with a curious expression, then she asked abruptly. "Are you very happy, child?" Hetty assented radiantly. Her mother nodded. "And Paul," said Mrs. Watkins thoughtfully, "he seems very contented in his painting. He wants me to go with him to Paris."

"Paul can't be as happy as I am," Hetty triumphantly assured her, "because he hasn't got Dick—but it does seem as if both our wildest dreams had come true in the most extraordinary way, doesn't it, Mummy?"

Mrs. Watkins did not answer her daughter at once. She turned toward the cupboard. She seemed to be counting the broken set over again.

"Well, I don't think it matters about that liqueur glass," she said finally. "I'm not as particular as your father."

A. D. DIVINE

FLOOD ON THE GOODWINS

DUNDAS looked out into the fog and blew reflectively on his fingertips. The night was cold, raw with the steady drift of the westerly wind, and the fog poured over the dark bulk of the harbor wall as flood water pours over a breach in the dykes—as evenly, as endlessly, as ominously.

The last grayness was fading out of it now, and within 20 minutes at the outside the night would be down, and the sea as lost as the black earth in a snowdrift. Dundas blew again; not a night for fishing, he decided. Not even for wartime fishing, when food was scarce and prices high.

The complete darkness of the harbor was daunting. No lights showed even on a clear night now—save when the immediate necessities of shipping demanded it. Even to find one's way through the narrow entrance was a matter for caution and skill. Dundas knew that he could do it despite the fog—but whether he could find his way home again was another matter—and this fog might easily be a two-day affair.

It was not as if he were a regular local fisherman—though, heaven knew, even the "locals" had not gone out this night. Dundas was a "deep sea" man, third mate he had been when the war began, third mate of the *Rosvean,* 5000 tons, flush-decked, running regularly like a ferry in the Rio Plata maize trade.

In May of 1917 he had watched the *Rosvean* sink off the Casquets. The incident had made a considerable impression on him, but had in no way affected his nerves. His principal reaction had been

largely one of scorn at the poorness of the shooting of the submarine which had put them down.

In July he went down with his next ship, the *Moresby,* because the torpedo gave them rather less warning than the gun of the previous sinking. He was picked up after two hours by a destroyer, and her commander commended him on his swimming ability.

That left him with nothing worse than a cold in the head, and at the end of July he signed on again. By this time he had won promotion. He signed on as second mate. His new office lasted precisely seven hours, allowing for three hours in dock before the ship sailed. Off Selsey Bill, he being then on the poop supervising the readjustment of a hatch tarpaulin, the ship was struck just for'ard of the engine-room by a mine.

The explosion cracked five ribs, dislocated his shoulder, and three parts drowned him. After he was brought ashore the doctors told him to take it easy for at least a month. By way of taking it easy he went down to Ramsgate, where his uncle had one of the new motor fishing boats. After five days of his aunt's cooking he began to get restless for the sea again. After seven days he was skipper of his uncle's fishing boat, and his uncle was taking a holiday.

It was a small boat, 18 feet long, open, with the engine under a little dog-kennel cover, and no particular virtues. Tonight the engine had been sulky, diffident over starting, and secretive about its disabilities. Dundas was inclined to thank it. If the engine had started easily, he would now be out in the very thick of the fog. When he came down to the dock there had been little sign that it would close down on them suddenly an hour later.

He bent down after a moment's rest, and began tinkering with it again. He had found the trouble—dirt in the magneto—and nothing remained now but to put the pieces together again.

The lantern he was working by made a pleasant pool of reddish light in the wide blackness about him.

There was little more to do now. He felt curiously alone. Save for the steady lap and splash of the water against the sides of the boat and the stone of the wall, the night was empty of sound. Even the long low chorus of bellows and wails and grunts that normally accompanies a Channel fog was absent.

He finished piecing the engine together, replaced the cover, rolled the strap round the groove, and, giving a mighty heave, jerked it into sudden life. After a moment he throttled down and listened contentedly to the steady purring.

Above him a voice spoke suddenly. It was an educated voice, pleasant, with a faint burr to it. "May I come aboard?" said the unknown.

"Who are you?" said Dundas, startled suddenly out of the calm emptiness that had enclosed him.

"Cutmore's my name," said the unknown. "I'm from the mine-sweeper down the wall. Taking a breather before turning in."

"Mind the weed on the ladder as you come down," said Dundas.

The unknown came slowly down, a pair of long legs coming first into the glow of the lamp, followed gradually by a long body. The unknown wore a heavy overcoat, which appeared to impede somewhat his freedom of action.

"Been having trouble with that?" he said, indicating the engine. "I heard you cursing when I passed a few minutes ago."

"Yes," said Dundas; "she's a bitch, she is, but I think I've fixed her."

"Going sweetly now?" said the unknown.

"Yes," said Dundas.

"What can you get out of her?"

"Seven knots or thereabouts," said Dundas.

"And what's her range with full tanks?"

"Eighty miles or so, I suppose," said Dundas. "I've never tried her out, really."

"Tanks full now?" said the stranger.

"Yes—er—" Dundas's tone suddenly changed. "May I ask why you are cross-examining me like this?"

"Forgive me," said the stranger, "but can you keep your mouth shut?"

"I—well, I suppose so; what is it?"

"As a matter of fact," said the stranger, "I'm a member of the Naval Intelligence service, and it is urgently necessary that I should be landed on the Belgian coast tonight. Almost anywhere along the coast will do, as long as it's clear of the German lines. I've an extraordinarily important job on hand, and it's got to be done in complete secrecy."

Dundas lifted his face away from the glow of the lamp.

"Question of getting close enough in. You know the Belgian coast, I suppose. You know how it shoals? Difficult to get a destroyer close enough in to land me with comfort. The size is against it, too, she might easily be seen by the shore posts. It's essential that I should go by a small boat. As a matter of fact, the sweeper up the wall was to have taken me along, but she's developed engine-room defects. . . . That's why I came along to see if there was any possibility up here. They told me there was a motor-boat here. I came along, missed you the first time, and then found you by the noise of your engine."

"You said you heard me the first time," said Dundas. "Heard me swearing."

"Oh, yes," said the stranger. "I heard somebody swearing, but I didn't know it was you. As a matter of fact I went along to another boat up there, and they told me you were farther back."

"And that," said Dundas, feeling in the dark for a screw wrench, "proves you to be a liar, for there was only Terris up the wall, and he called good-night to me an hour ago. Your story's a lot of bull. You're coming along with me to the sweeper now."

"I was wondering how long you'd take to see through it," said the stranger coolly. "No, don't move,

I've got my foot on the monkey wrench, and I've got you covered with a fairly large caliber revolver. Now listen to me. . . ."

"You swine—" said Dundas provocatively.

"No, you don't," said the stranger. "Keep absolutely still, because I shall shoot if you make the slightest movement, and I can hardly miss. I use soft-nosed bullets, too. Listen, I'm going to make you a fair offer. I want to charter this boat; it's absolutely necessary that I should charter it, and if you want it back you'll have to come with me. I've got to get to Bruges before ten o'clock tomorrow, and that means I've got to be on the Belgian coast by dawn. This boat can do it, and this fog makes it possible. If you'll take me there I'll give you 60 pounds, in one-pound notes. It's all I've got. If you won't do it, I'm going to shoot you now, and make a run for it myself. I can find my way out of this tin-pot basin, and I guess I can find the Belgian coast by myself. It's a fine night for yachting."

The stranger used the same tone as he had used in the early stages of his conversation, but a faint overtone of menace had crept into it. Dundas, thinking as swiftly as the other talked, decided that he meant what he said.

"You wouldn't dare," said he after a moment. "The shot would rouse the whole harbor, and the sentries on the wall would get you long before you could clear the entrance."

"In this fog?" said the stranger scornfully. "I'll take the chance."

"There's a boom across the mouth," said Dundas.

"That's an afterthought," said the stranger equably. "I don't blame you. I'd lie myself if I were in your position, but it isn't of any use, you know. Are you going to accept my offer?"

"No," said Dundas. He thought rapidly for a moment. If he could edge back slowly he could perhaps slip the tiller out of its socket and, hitting blindly in the dark, knock the other out of the boat.

The stranger seemed to be able to read his mind. "No, you don't," he said. "If you edge back another inch I'll shoot, and I don't mind telling you that I am a prizewinner at revolver shooting."

"Give me a minute to think it over," said Dundas.

"I will if you turn round with your back to me. Do it slowly now. If you move too quickly I'll shoot."

Dundas moved slowly round, shuffling cautiously on the floor boards. Immediately he felt something prod him in the back.

"This bullet will rip your spine clear out," said the stranger softly. "I warn you to make up your mind quickly. If this fog clears I'm done for, you see, and I'm not taking any risks."

Dundas trod his mind as a squirrel treads its mill, but no help came. It was clear that this man was desperate. Whatever he had done, whatever he wanted to do, it was sufficiently obvious that he was prepared to risk his own life. It was equally obvious that he would not allow the life of any other to obstruct his purpose.

"Come on," said the stranger again; "60 pounds is 60 pounds to a fisherman—and the season's bad, I know. Heroics won't help you if you're a corpse. Better take my offer and keep your mouth shut about it. Nobody will know, you can say you got lost in the fog, and couldn't get home again—engine broke down or something. Any tale. . . . Come on!"

"Can you give me any help when we get near the Belgian coast?" said Dundas suddenly. "I don't know the marks."

"Good man," said the stranger; "then you'll do it. No, I shan't be able to help you much. I don't know much about it."

"Oh, well," said Dundas slowly. "Doesn't seem as if I've any choice, and I don't suppose it'll do much harm."

"That's right." said the stranger. "That's splendid. Shall we unloosen the ropes?"

"Er—cast off—er, yes. Just a minute. Let me light the binnacle lamp. It'll be no joke working through in the fog, you know."

"I know," said the other, "but I've been waiting for a fog for a whole week now."

Dundas knelt down and, striking a match, lit the tiny lamp of the boat compass that he carried. The green card shone wanly in its glow. He could feel the muzzle of the stranger's revolver still pressed against his back.

"Sorry," said the other, "but I must safeguard myself till we're out of the harbor anyway."

Fumbling, Dundas cleared the mooring lines, and the boat drifted away from the wall. Immediately she was lost to the world.

Dundas jerked at the starting strap, and the engine came throatily to life. Foam swirled under the stern of the boat, and she surged forward through the unseen water. The fog dragged past them, faintly gold in the light of the lamp.

"We'll have that out," said Dundas after a moment; "the visibility's impossible as it is."

The stranger had squatted himself down next to the engine casing on the starboard side. He stretched out and grasped the lamp, found the wick lever, and turned it out.

They went on into the blackness with only the faint green eye of the binnacle making sign of life in it all.

After a minute or two Dundas put down the helm gently. "We ought to make the entrance now," he said.

The boat lifted to a little swell in immediate answer, and there was a momentary glance of a high black wall. From its top someone challenged, and Dundas answered, giving his name and the name of the boat.

The next instant they were outside in the live water, pitching a little to the lop that came up from the Downs.

"A-ah," said the stranger relaxing. "And that's that. Now you play me straight, young fellow, and you'll be 60 pounds the richer. How soon can we get across? It's about 55 miles, I should say—that's seven hours by this boat?"

Dundas shrugged in the darkness. "It's 65 miles as the crow flies. We'll have to reckon with the tides though."

"When's high tide?" said the stranger.

"High tide—oh, you mean the flood? Well, I'm not exactly sure," said Dundas slowly. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'll go south and a little east now, and round the heel of the Goodwins, and then stand out with the flood, and get right across. With luck we'll make it by two o'clock."

"That'll suit me," said the stranger, "but why not go straight?"

"Well, you see, this is an underpowered boat—" said Dundas slowly. "Don't you know anything about the sea?"

"Nothing," said the other airily. "I was in the cavalry."

"The Uhlans?" said Dundas swiftly.

"Don't ask questions, my little friend. You look after your steering." He settled himself more comfortably. "Remember," he added after a moment, "I still have my revolver in my hand. If you betray me, take me up to one of your patrol ships or anything, we will both die."

Dundas grunted and peered into the binnacle.

For a long hour there was silence. Only the steady mutter of the engine, and the occasional lift and rattle of the screw in the stern glands, broke across the silence of the night. Water noises from the bow, and the lap-lap along the sides were somehow merged in the immense silence of the sea.

Only once, far away, they heard a bell buoy, and once the clatter of a ship's bell at anchor. At the end of the hour Dundas spoke again. "We will have cleared the Goodwins now," he said. "I'm going to stand out

across the heel of them. Like to see the course we're making?"

"How?" said the other.

"Look at the compass," said Dundas.

"And bring my head in front of you with my back to you?" said the other. "No, no, my little friend. Remember only that I have my revolver and the soft-nosed bullets—and that if I die, you die too. The steering is your business—so long as you remember that."

Dundas grunted again, and shifted his helm very slightly.

For another hour they held on in silence, then Dundas heard a slight noise from for'ard. A faint, rasping noise. A moment later it came again, an unmistakable snore.

He nodded grimly to himself.

The snoring went on, grew louder, became more steady, more settled. It was plain that the stranger was fast asleep. For three hours it went on, varied occasionally by little grunts and slight pauses following a change of position.

Dundas occupied himself steadily with his helm, making tiny alterations of course from time to time, checking them carefully with a great silver watch that he held in the light of the binnacle lamp.

Quarter of an hour before midnight the stranger awoke. Dundas felt the jerk as he straightened up, hurriedly.

"You've been asleep," he said quietly, "for a long time."

The other muttered incoherently for a moment, and then said yes. Presently the implication seemed to strike him. "And you tried nothing, no, no funny business." He paused. "That was good," he said. "You are being sensible, my young friend—60 pounds is 60 pounds. Ach—I was tired. Three days and three nights without sleep, most of them spent in the fields of the wretched country behind Ramsgate. *Leiber Gott,* I was tired."

"Three days and three nights. That's since Monday, then?"

"Yes," said the other.

"Monday was the day of the big explosion?"

"What of it?" said the other.

"You—"

"Partly," said the other cynically. "Since you are being sensible it does not matter if you know."

"But you are English, aren't you? Your voice—"

"Come, come," said the stranger. "I was at an English school, but you knew from the start. . . ."

"I suppose so," said Dundas grudgingly.

"And how near are we?"

"Not far now," said Dundas. "We should get there a little earlier than I thought, half-past one perhaps."

"Good," said the German.

With long spells of silence and occasional brief conversations they pressed on through the night. Once or twice the fog thinned slightly, so that they could see a boat's length from them over the darkling water. Twice Dundas tried to get the German to tell him why he had to be at Bruges in so painful a hurry, but the other avoided his questions adroitly.

Every now and then he seemed to be listening. "Strange," he said once. "Strange, we should have heard the sound of the guns by now."

"Nothing strange in fog," said Dundas; "you can hear something that's miles away sometimes, and another time miss a fog gun when you're right on top of it."

The night was getting on now. When Dundas next looked at his watch it was a quarter past one. "We should be very nearly there," he said. "Can you take a sounding?"

"What do I do?" said the other.

"Feel in the locker to your right and see if you can find a fishing line with a lead," said Dundas. "I'll slow down, and you throw it ahead of you, feel when it touches the bottom, and then measure it with your arms outstretched."

The other fumbled for a bit, experimented once, and then after a second cast said, "Nine times."

"Call it eight fathoms," said Dundas. "We're closing in on the coast."

Five minutes later he slowed for another cast.

"Six times," said the German.

"Getting there; we're inside the five-fathom line."

Five minutes later they heard the sound of little seas on sand, a soft rustle that was yet loud enough to come over the noise of the engine, and the rustle and rush of their progress. Somewhere in the darkness a sleepy gull called.

"We're there," said Dundas whispering; "get ready."

The other stood up, wrapping his coat about him. Even as he did so, Dundas switched off the engine, and in absolute silence they glided in. Suddenly the boat grated, dragged forward, and grated again. The German lurched, steadied himself with a hand on the thwart and said, *"Lieber Gott."*

"The money," said Dundas.

"But yes," said the German, fumbling in his pocket. "You are sure this is Belgium?"

"By the distance we've run," said Dundas, "and the time, it must be."

"Ha," said the other, "take it!"

Dundas met the other's hand and took a rolled bundle of notes. "Thank you," he said. "Get out over the bows; there'll be a little more than a foot of water, and give me a shove off before you go. I must get afloat again."

The other lumbered over the side, splashed for a moment, and then, bending down, heaved. The boat slid astern, Dundas pushing on the other side with the loom of an oar.

In a moment it floated free, surging back into deepish water. Dundas straightened himself, the starting strap in his hand.

"High tide's at three," he called out loudly.

He heard the other splash through the shallows, and then a scrunch as he reached the dry sand beyond.

A voice came clear out of the fog to him: "What's that?"

He heard the feet run on, scrunching over the sand and then stop suddenly. The voice came—out to him again. "There's water here. A strip of sand and then—"

"High tide's at three," shouted Dundas again, "but the Goodwins are covered before the flood." He bent down and jerked at the starting strap and the engine woke to life. Sitting down he headed the boat round until her bows pointed a little west of north.

Swiftly he crossed the four-mile circle of water inside the Goodwin sands that he had thrashed round and round so many times during the long night. There were six miles between home and the neck of the South Goodwins, upon which a lone man stood watching the slow, relentless, upward movement of the tide.

"Thirty dead in the big explosion," said Dundas softly to himself. "Women, too. Well—" he fingered the roll of notes—"dirty money's as good as clean to the Red Cross fund. And the Goodwins pays for all."

HANSON W. BALDWIN

R. M. S. TITANIC

The White Star liner *Titanic,* largest ship the world had ever known, sailed from Southampton on her maiden voyage to New York on April 10, 1912. The paint on her strakes was fair and bright; she was fresh from Harland and Wolff's Belfast yards, strong in the strength of her 46,000 tons of steel, bent, hammered, shaped and riveted through the three years of her slow birth.

There was a little fuss and fanfare at her sailing; her sister-ship, the *Olympic*—slightly smaller than the *Titanic*—had been in service for some months and to her had gone the thunder of the cheers.

But the *Titanic* needed no whistling steamers or shouting crowds to call attention to her superlative qualities. Her bulk dwarfed the ships near her as longshoremen singled up her mooring lines and cast off the turns of heavy rope from the dock bollards. She was not only the largest ship afloat but was believed to be the safest. Carlisle, her builder, had given her double bottoms and had divided her hull into 16 water-tight compartments, which made her, men thought, unsinkable. She had been built to be and had been described as a gigantic lifeboat. Her designers' dreams of a triple-screw giant, a luxurious, floating hotel, which could speed to New York at 23 knots, had been carefully translated from blueprints and mold-loft lines at the Belfast yards into a living reality.

The *Titanic's* sailing from Southampton, though quiet, was not wholly uneventful. As the liner moved slowly toward the end of her dock that April day, the

surge of her passing sucked away from the quay the steamer *New York,* moored just to seaward of the *Titanic's* berth. There were sharp cracks as the manila mooring lines of the *New York* parted under the strain. The frayed ropes writhed and whistled through the air and snapped down among the waving crowd on the pier; the *New York* swung toward the *Titanic's* bow, was checked and dragged back to the dock barely in time to avert a collision. Seamen muttered, thought it an ominous start.

Past Spithead and the Isle of Wight the *Titanic* steamed. She called at Cherbourg at dusk and then laid her course for Queenstown. At 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 11, she stood out of Queenstown harbor, screaming gulls soaring in her wake, with 2,201 persons—men, women, and children—aboard.

Occupying the Empire bedrooms and Georgian suites of the first-class accommodations were many well-known men and women—Colonel John Jacob Astor and his young bride; Major Archibald Butt, military aide to President Taft, and his friend, Frank D. Millet, the painter; John B. Thayer, vice-president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and Charles M. Hays, president of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada; W. T. Stead, the English journalist; Jacques Futrelle, French novelist; H. B. Harris, theatrical manager, and Mrs. Harris; Mr. and Mrs. Isidore Straus; and J. Bruce Ismay, chairman and managing director of the White Star line.

Down in the plain wooden cabins of the steerage class were 706 immigrants to the land of promise, and trimly stowed in the great holds was a cargo valued at $420,000: oak beams, sponges, wine, calabashes, and an odd miscellany of the common and the rare.

The *Titanic* took her departure on Fastnet Light and, heading into the night, laid her course for New York. She was due at Quarantine the following Wednesday morning.

Sunday dawned fair and clear. The *Titanic* steamed smoothly toward the west, faint streamers of brownish

smoke trailing from her funnels. The purser held services in the saloon in the morning; on the steerage deck aft the immigrants were playing games and a Scotsman was puffing *The Campbells Are Coming* on his bagpipes in the midst of the uproar.

At 9 a.m. a message from the steamer *Caronia* sputtered into the wireless shack: *Captain, Titanic—Westbound steamers report bergs growlers and field ice in 42 degrees N. from 49 degrees to 51 degrees W. 12th April. Compliments—Barr.*

It was cold in the afternoon; the sun was brilliant, but the *Titanic,* her screws turning over at 75 revolutions per minute, was approaching the Banks.

In the Marconi cabin Second Operator Harold Bride, earphones clamped on his head, was figuring accounts; he did not stop to answer when he heard *MWL,* Continental Morse for the nearby Leyland liner, *Californian,* calling the *Titanic.* The *Californian* had some message about three icebergs; he didn't bother then to take it down. About 1:42 p.m. the rasping spark of those days spoke again across the water. It was the *Baltic,* calling the *Titanic,* warning her of ice on the steamer track. Bride took the message down and sent it up to the bridge. The officer-of-the-deck glanced at it; sent it to the bearded master of the *Titanic,* Captain E. C. Smith, a veteran of the White Star service. It was lunch time then; the Captain, walking along the promenade deck, saw Mr. Ismay, stopped, and handed him the message without comment. Ismay read it, stuffed it in his pocket, told two ladies about the icebergs, and resumed his walk. Later, about 7:15 p.m., the Captain requested the return of the message in order to post it in the chart room for the information of officers.

Dinner that night in the Jacobean dining-room was gay. It was bitter on deck, but the night was calm and fine; the sky was moonless but studded with stars twinkling coldy in the clear air.

After dinner some of the second-class passengers gathered in the saloon, where the Reverend Mr. Car-

ter conducted a "hymn sing-song." It was almost ten o'clock and the stewards were waiting with biscuits and coffee as the group sang: "O, hear us when we cry to Thee For those in peril on the sea."

On the bridge Second Officer Lightoller—short, stocky, efficient—was relieved at ten o'clock by First Officer Murdoch. Lightoller had talked with other officers about the proximity of ice; at least five wireless ice warnings had reached the ship; lookouts had been cautioned to be alert; captains and officers expected to reach the field at any time after 9:30 p.m. At 22 knots, its speed unslackened, the *Titanic* plowed on through the night.

Lightoller left the darkened bridge to his relief and turned in. Captain Smith went to his cabin. The steerage was long since quiet; in the first and second cabins lights were going out; voices were growing still, people were asleep. Murdoch paced back and forth on the bridge, peering out over the dark water, glancing now and then at the compass in front of Quartermaster Hichens at the wheel.

In the crow's-nest, Lookout Frederick Fleet and his partner, Leigh, gazed down at the water, still and unruffled in the dim, starlit darkness. Behind and below them the ship, a white shadow with here and there a last winking light; ahead of them a dark and silent and cold ocean.

There was a sudden clang. "Dong-dong. Dong-dong. Dong-dong. Dong!" The metal clapper of the great ship's bell struck out 11:30. Mindful of the warnings, Fleet strained his eyes, searching the darkness for the dreaded ice. But there were only the stars and the sea.

In the wireless room, where Phillips, first operator, had relieved Bride, the buzz of the *Californian's* set again crackled into the earphones:

Californian: "Say, old man, we are stuck here, surrounded by ice."

Titanic: "Shut up, shut up; keep out. I am talking to Cape Race; you are jamming my signals."

Then, a few minutes later—about 11:40 . . .

Out of the dark she came, a vast, dim, white, monstrous shape, directly in the *Titanic's* path. For a moment Fleet doubted his eyes. But she was a deadly reality, this ghastly *thing*. Frantically, Fleet struck three bells—*something dead ahead.* He snatched the telephone and called the bridge:

"Iceberg! Right ahead!"

The First Officer heard but did not stop to acknowledge the message.

"Hard-a-starboard!"

Hichens strained at the wheel; the bow swung slowly to port. The monster was almost upon them now.

Murdoch leaped to the engine-room telegraph. Bells clanged. Far below in the engine-room those bells struck the first warning. Danger! The indicators on the dial faces swung round to *Stop!* Then *Full Speed Astern!* Frantically the engineers turned great valve wheels; answered the bridge bells. . . .

There was a slight shock, a brief scraping, a small list to port. Shell ice—slabs and chunks of it—fell on the foredeck. Slowly the *Titanic* stopped.

Captain Smith hurried out of his cabin. "What has the ship struck?"

Murdoch answered, "An iceberg, sir. I hard-a-starboarded and reversed the engines, and I was going to hard-a-port around it, but she was too close. I could not do any more. I have closed the water-tight doors."

Fourth Officer Boxhall, other officers, the carpenter, came to the bridge. The Captain sent Boxhall and the carpenter below to ascertain the damage.

A few lights switched on in the first and second cabins; sleepy passengers peered through porthole glass; some casually asked the stewards:

"Why have we stopped?"

"I don't know, sir, but I don't suppose it is anything much."

In the smoking-room a quorum of gamblers and

their prey were still sitting round a poker table; the usual crowd of kibitzers looked on. They had felt the slight jar of the collision and had seen an 80-foot ice mountain glide by the smoking-room windows, but the night was calm and clear, the *Titanic* was "unsinkable"; they hadn't bothered to go on deck.

But far below, in the warren of passages on the starboard side forward, in the forward holds and boiler rooms, men could see that the *Titanic's* hurt was mortal. In No. 6 boiler room, where the red glow from the furnaces lighted up the naked, sweaty chests of coal-blackened firemen, water was pouring through a great gash about two feet above the floor plates. This was no slow leak; the ship was open to the sea; in ten minutes there were eight feet of water in No. 6. Long before then the stokers had raked the flaming fires out of the furnaces and had scrambled through the watertight doors into No. 5 or had climbed up the long steel ladders to safety. When Boxhall looked at the mailroom in No. 3 hold, 24 feet above the keel, the mailbags were already floating about in the slushing water. In No. 5 boiler room a stream of water spurted into an empty bunker. All six compartments forward of No. 4 were open to the sea; in ten seconds the iceberg's jagged claw had ripped a 300-foot slash in the bottom of the great *Titanic.*

Reports came to the bridge; Ismay in dressing gown ran out on deck in the cold, still, starlit night, climbed up the bridge ladder.

"What has happened?"

Captain Smith: "We have struck ice."

"Do you think she is seriously damaged?"

Captain Smith: "I'm afraid she is."

Ismay went below and passed Chief Engineer William Bell fresh from an inspection of the damaged compartments. Bell corroborated the Captain's statement; hurried back down the glistening steel ladders to his duty. Man after man followed him—Thomas Andrews, one of the ship's designers, Archie Frost, the builder's chief engineer, and his 20 assistants—men

who had no posts of duty in the engine-room but whose traditions called them there.

On deck, in corridor and stateroom, life flowed again. Men, women and children awoke and questioned; orders were given to uncover the lifeboats; water rose into the firemen's quarters; half-dressed stokers streamed up on deck. But the passengers—most of them—did not know that the *Titanic* was sinking. The shock of the collision had been so slight that some were not awakened by it; the *Titanic* was so huge that she must be unsinkable; the night was too calm, too beautiful, to think of death at sea.

Captain Smith half ran to the door of the radio shack. Bride, partly dressed, eyes dulled with sleep, was standing behind Phillips, waiting.

"Send the call for assistance."

The blue spark danced: *CQD—CQD—CQD—CQ—*

Miles away Marconi men heard. Cape Race heard it, and the steamships *La Provence* and *Mt. Temple.*

The sea was surging into the *Titanic's* hold. At 12:20 the water burst into the seamen's quarters through a collapsed fore and aft wooden bulkhead. Pumps strained in the engine-rooms—men and machinery making a futile fight against the sea. Steadily the water rose.

The boats were swung out—slowly; for the deckhands were late in reaching their stations, there had been no boat drill, and many of the crew did not know to what boats they were assigned. Orders were shouted; the safety valves had lifted, and steam was blowing off in a great rushing roar. In the chart house Fourth Officer Boxhall bent above a chart, working rapidly with pencil and dividers.

12:25 a.m. Boxhall's position is sent out to a fleet of vessels: *Come at once; we have struck a berg.*

To the Cunarder *Carpathia* (Arthur Henry Rostron, Master, New York to Liverpool, 58 miles away): *It's a CQD, old man. Position 41-46 N.; 50-14 W.*

The blue spark dancing: *Sinking; cannot hear for noise of steam.*

12:30 a.m. The word is passed: "Women and children in the boats." Stewards finish waking their passengers below; life-preservers are tied on; some men smile at the precaution. "The *Titanic* is unsinkable." The *Mt. Temple* starts for the *Titanic;* the *Carpathia,* with a double-watch in her stokeholds, radios: *Coming hard.* The CQD changes the course of many ships —but not of one; the operator of the *Californian,* nearby, has just put down his earphones and turned in.

The CQD flashes over land and sea from Cape Race to New York; newspaper city-rooms leap to life and presses whir.

On the *Titanic,* water creeps over the bulkhead between Nos. 5 and 6 firerooms. She is going down by the head; the engineers—fighting a losing battle—are forced back foot by foot by the rising water. Down the promenade deck, Happy Jock Hume, the bandsman, runs with his instrument.

12:45 a.m. Murdoch, in charge on the starboard side, eyes tragic, but calm and cool, orders boat No. 7 lowered. The women hang back; they want no boat-ride on an ice-strewn sea; the *Titanic* is unsinkable. The men encourage them, explain that this is just a precautionary measure: "We'll see you again at breakfast." There is little confusion; passengers stream slowly to the boat deck. In the steerage the immigrants chatter excitedly.

A sudden sharp hiss—a streaked flare against the night; Boxhall sends a rocket toward the sky. It explodes, and a parachute of white stars lights up the icy sea. "God! Rockets!" The band plays ragtime.

No. 8 is lowered, and No. 5. Ismay, still in dressing gown, calls for women and children, handles lines, stumbles in the way of an officer, is told to "get the hell out of here." Third Officer Pitman takes charge of No. 5; as he swings into the boat Murdoch grasps his hand. "Good-by and good luck, old man."

No. 6 goes over the side. There are only 28 people in a lifeboat with a capacity of 65.

A light stabs from the bridge; Boxhall is calling in

Morse flashes, again and again, to a strange ship stopped in the ice jam five to ten miles away. Another rocket drops its shower of sparks above the ice-strewn sea and the dying ship.

1:00 a.m. Slowly the water creeps higher; the fore ports of the *Titanic* are dipping into the sea. Rope squeaks through blocks; lifeboats drop jerkily seaward. Through the shouting on the decks comes the sound of the band playing ragtime.

The "Millionaires' Special" leaves the ship—boat No. 1, with a capacity of 40 people, carries only Sir Cosmo and Lady Duff Gordon and ten others. Aft, the frightened immigrants mill and jostle and rush for a boat. An officer's fist flies out; three shots are fired in the air, and the panic is quelled. . . . Four Chinese sneak unseen into a boat and hide in its bottom.

1:20 a. m. Water is coming into No. 4 boiler room. Stokers slice and shovel as water laps about their ankles—steam for the dynamos, steam for the dancing spark! As the water rises, great ash hoes rake the flaming coals from the furnaces. Safety valves pop; the stokers retreat aft, and the water-tight doors clang shut behind them.

The rockets fling their splendor toward the stars. The boats are more heavily loaded now, for the passengers know the *Titanic* is sinking. Women cling and sob. The great screws aft are rising clear of the sea. Half-filled boats are ordered to come alongside the cargo ports and take on more passengers, but the ports are never opened—and the boats are never filled. Others pull for the steamer's light miles away but never reach it; the lights disappear, the unknown ship steams off.

The water rises and the band plays ragtime.

1:30 a.m. Lightoller is getting the port boats off; Murdoch the starboard. As one boat is lowered into the sea a boat officer fires his gun along the ship's side to stop a rush from the lower decks. A woman tries to take her Great Dane into a boat with her; she is refused and steps out of the boat to die with her dog.

Millet's "little smile which played on his lips all through the voyage" plays no more; his lips are grim, but he waves good-by and brings wraps for the women.

Benjamin Guggenheim, in evening clothes, smiles and says, "We've dressed up in our best and are prepared to go down like gentlemen."

1:40 a.m. Boat 14 is clear, and then 13, 16, 15 and C. The lights still shine, but the *Baltic* hears the blue spark say: *Engine-room getting flooded.*

The *Olympic* signals: *Am lighting up all possible boilers as fast as can.*

Major Butt helps women into the last boats and waves good-by to them. Mrs. Straus puts her foot on the gunwale of a lifeboat, then she draws back and goes to her husband: "We have been together many years; where you go I will go." Colonel John Jacob Astor puts his young wife in a lifeboat, steps back, taps cigarette on fingernail: "Good-by, dearie; I'll join you later."

1:45 a.m. The foredeck is under water, the fo'c'sle head almost awash; the great stern is lifted high toward the bright stars; and still the band plays. Mr. and Mrs. Harris approach a lifeboat arm in arm.

Officer: "Ladies first, please."

Harris bows, smiles, steps back: "Of course, certainly; ladies first."

Boxhall fires the last rocket, then leaves in charge of boat No. 2.

2:00 a.m. She is dying now; her bow goes deeper, her stern higher. But there must be steam. Below in the stokeholds the sweaty firemen keep steam up for the flaring lights and the dancing spark. The glowing coals slide and tumble over the slanted grate bars; the sea pounds behind that yielding bulkhead. But the spark dances on.

The *Asian* hears Phillips try the new signal—*SOS.*

Boat No. 4 has left now; boat D leaves ten minutes later. Jacques Futrelle clasps his wife: "For God's sake, go! It's your last chance; go!" Madame Futrelle is half-forced into the boat. It clears the side.

There are about 660 people in the boats, and 1,500 still on the sinking *Titanic.*

On top of the officers' quarters men work frantically to get the two collapsibles stowed there over the side. Water is over the forward part of A deck now; it surges up the companionways toward the boat deck. In the radio shack, Bride has slipped a coat and lifejacket about Phillips as the first operator sits hunched over his key, sending—still sending—*41-46 N.; 50-14 W. CQD—CQD—SOS—SOS—*

The captain's tired white face appears at the radioroom door: "Men, you have done your full duty. You can do no more. Now, it's every man for himself." The captain disappears—back to his sinking bridge, where Painter, his personal steward, stands quietly waiting for orders. The spark dances on. Bride turns his back and goes into the inner cabin. As he does so, a stoker, grimed with coal, mad with fear, steals into the shack and reaches for the lifejacket on Phillips' back. Bride wheels about and brains him with a wrench.

2:10 a.m. Below decks the steam is still holding, though the pressure is falling—rapidly. In the gymnasium on the boat deck the athletic instructor watches quietly as two gentlemen ride the bicycles and another swings casually at the punching bag. Mail clerks stagger up the boat-deck stairways, dragging soaked mail sacks. The spark still dances. The band still plays—but not ragtime: "Nearer my God to Thee, Nearer to Thee . . ."

A few men take up the refrain; others kneel on the slanting decks to pray. Many run and scramble aft, where hundreds are clinging above the silent screws on the great uptilted stern. The spark still dances and the lights still flare; the engineers are on the job. The hymn comes to its close. Bandmaster Hartley, Yorkshireman violinist, taps his bow against a bulkhead, calls for *Autumn* as the water curls about his feet, and the eight musicians brace themselves against the ship's slant. People are leaping from the

decks into the nearby water—the icy water. A woman cries, "Oh, save me, save me!" A man answers, "Good lady, save yourself. Only God can save you now." The band plays *Autumn:* "God of Mercy and Compassion! Look with pity on my pain. . . ."

The water creeps over the bridge where the *Titanic's* master stands; heavily he steps out to meet it.

2:17 a.m. "CQ—" The *Virginian* hears a ragged blurred CQ, then an abrupt stop. The blue spark dances no more. The lights flicker out; the engineers have lost their battle.

2:18 a.m. Men run about blackened decks; leap into the night; are swept into the sea by the curling wave which licks up the *Titanic's* length. Lightoller does not leave the ship; the ship leaves him; there are hundreds like him, but only a few who live to tell of it. The funnels still swim above the water, but the ship is climbing to a perpendicular; the bridge is under and most of the foremast; the great stern rises like a squat leviathan. Men swim away from the sinking ship; others drop from the stern.

The band plays in the darkness, the water lapping upward:

Hold me up in mighty waters,
Keep my eyes on things above,
Righteousness, divine atonement,
Peace and everlas . . .

The forward funnel snaps and crashes into the sea; its steel tons hammer out of existence swimmers struggling in the freezing water. Streams of sparks, of smoke and steam, burst from the after funnels. The ship upends to 50—to 60 degrees.

Down in the black abyss of the stokeholds, of the engine-rooms, where the dynamos have whirred at long last to a stop, the stokers and engineers are reeling against hot metal, the rising water clutching at their knees. The boilers, the engine cylinders, rip from their bed plates; crash through bulkheads; rumble—steel against steel.

The *Titanic* stands on end, poised briefly for the

plunge. Slowly she slides to her grave—slowly at first, and then more quickly—quickly—quickly.

2:20 a.m. The greatest ship in the world has sunk. From the calm, dark waters, where the floating lifeboats move, there goes up, in the white wake of her passing, "one long continuous moan."

The boats that the *Titanic* had launched pulled safely away from the slight suction of the sinking ship, pulled away from the screams that came from the lips of the freezing men and women in the water. The boats were poorly manned and badly equipped, and they had been unevenly loaded. Some carried so few seamen that women bent to the oars. Mrs. Astor tugged at an oar handle; the Countess of Rothes took a tiller. Shivering stokers in sweaty, coal-blackened singlets and light trousers steered in some boats; stewards in white coats rowed in others. Ismay was in the last boat that left the ship from the starboard side; with Mr. Carter of Philadelphia and two seamen he tugged at the oars. In one of the lifeboats an Italian with a broken wrist—disguised in a woman's shawl and hat—huddled on the floor boards, ashamed now that fear had left him. In another rode the only baggage saved from the *Titanic*—the carry-all of Samuel L. Goldenberg, one of the rescued passengers.

There were only a few boats that were heavily loaded; most of those that were half empty made but perfunctory efforts to pick up the moaning swimmers, their officers and crew fearing they would endanger the living if they pulled back into the midst of the dying. Some boats beat off the freezing victims; fear-crazed men and women struck with oars at the heads of swimmers. One woman drove her fist into the face of a half-dead man as he tried feebly to climb over the gunwale. Two other women helped him in and stanched the flow of blood from the ringcuts on his face.

One of the collapsible boats, which had floated off the top of the officers' quarters when the *Titanic* sank,

was an icy haven for 30 or 40 men. The boat had capsized as the ship sank; men swam to it, clung to it, climbed upon its slippery bottom, stood knee-deep in water in the freezing air. Chunks of ice swirled about their legs; their soaked clothing clutched their bodies in icy folds. Colonel Archibald Gracie was cast up there. Gracie who had leaped from the stern as the *Titanic* sank; young Thayer who had seen his father die; Lightoller who had twice been sucked down with the ship and twice blown to the surface by a belch of air; Bride, the second operator, and Phillips, the first. There were many stokers, half-naked; it was a shivering company. They stood there in the icy sea, under the far stars, and sang and prayed—the Lord's Prayer. After a while a lifeboat came and picked them off, but Phillips was dead then or died soon afterward in the boat.

Only a few of the boats had lights; only one—No. 2—had a light that was of any use to the *Carpathia,* twisting through the ice-field to the rescue. Other ships were "coming hard" too; one, the *Californian,* was still dead to opportunity.

The blue sparks still danced, but not the *Titanic's. La Provence* to *Celtic: Nobody has heard the Titanic for about two hours.*

It was 2:40 when the *Carpathia* first sighted the green light from No. 2 boat; it was 4:10 when she picked up the first boat and learned that the *Titanic* had foundered. The last of the moaning cries had just died away then.

Captain Rostron took the survivors aboard, boatload by boatload. He was ready for them, but only a small minority of them required much medical attention. Bride's feet were twisted and frozen; others were suffering from exposure; one died, and seven were dead when taken from the boats, and were buried at sea.

It was then that the fleet of racing ships learned they were too late; the *Parisian* heard the weak signals of *MPA,* the *Carpathia,* report the death of the

Titanic. It was then—or soon afterward, when her radio operator put on his earphones—that the *Californian,* the ship that had been within sight as the *Titanic* was sinking, first learned of the disaster.

And it was then, in all its white-green majesty, that the *Titanic's* survivors saw the iceberg, tinted with the sunrise, floating idly, pack-ice jammed about its base, other bergs heaving slowly nearby on the blue breast of the sea.

But it was not until later that the world knew, for wireless then was not what wireless is today, and garbled messages had nourished a hope that all of the *Titanic's* company were safe. Not until Monday evening, when P. A. S. Franklin, Vice-President of the International Mercantile Marine company, received relayed messages in New York that left little hope, did the full extent of the disaster begin to be known. Partial and garbled lists of the survivors; rumors of heroism and cowardice; stories spun out of newspaper imagination, based on a few bare facts and many false reports, misled the world, terrified and frightened it. It was not until Thursday night, when the *Carpathia* steamed into the North River, that the full truth was pieced together.

Flashlights flared on the black river when the *Carpathia* stood up to her dock. Tugs nosed about her, shunted her toward Pier 54; 30,000 people jammed the streets; ambulances and stretchers stood on the pier; coroners and physicians waited.

In midstream the Cunarder dropped over the *Titanic's* lifeboats; then she headed toward the dock. Beneath the customs letters on the pier stood relatives of the 711 survivors, relatives of the missing—hoping against hope. The *Carpathia* cast her lines ashore; stevedores looped them over bollards. The dense throngs stood quiet as the first survivor stepped down the gangway. The woman half-staggered—led by customs guards—beneath her letter. A "low wailing" moan came from the crowd; fell, grew in volume, and dropped again.

Thus ended the maiden voyage of the *Titanic.* The lifeboats brought to New York by the *Carpathia,* a few deck chairs and gratings awash in the ice-field off the Grand Banks 800 miles from shore, were all that was left of the world's greatest ship.

The aftermath of weeping and regret, of recriminations and investigations, dragged on for weeks. Charges and countercharges were hurled about; the White Star line was bitterly criticized; Ismay was denounced on the floor of the Senate as a coward, but was defended by those who had been with him on the sinking *Titanic* and by the Board of Trade investigation in England.

It was not until weeks later, when the hastily convened Senate investigation in the United States and the Board of Trade in England had been completed, that the whole story was told. The Senate investigating committee, under the chairmanship of Senator Smith, who was attacked in both the American and British press as a "backwoods politician," brought out numerous pertinents facts, though its proceedings verged at times on the farcical. Senator Smith was ridiculed for his lack of knowledge of the sea when he asked witnesses, "Of what is an iceberg composed?" and "Did any of the passengers take refuge in the watertight compartments?" The Senator seemed particularly interested in the marital status of Fleet, the lookout, who was saved: Fleet, puzzled, growled aside, "Wot questions they're arskin' me!"

The report of Lord Mersey, Wreck Commissioner in the British Board of Trade's investigation, was tersely damning.

The *Titanic* had carried boats enough for 1,178 persons, only one-third of her capacity. Her 16 boats and four collapsibles had saved but 711 persons; 400 people had needlessly lost their lives. The boats had been but partly loaded; officers in charge of launching them had been afraid the falls would break or the boats buckle under their rated loads; boat crews

had been slow in reaching their stations; launching arrangements were confused because no boat drill had been held; passengers were loaded into the boats haphazardly because no boat assignments had been made.

But that was not all. Lord Mersey found that sufficient warnings of ice on the steamer track had reached the *Titanic,* that her speed of 22 knots was "excessive under the circumstances," that "in view of the high speed at which the vessel was running it is not considered that the lookout was sufficient," and that her master made "a very grievous mistake"—but should not be blamed for negligence. Captain Rostron of the *Carpathia* was highly praised. "He did the very best that could be done." The *Californian* was damned. The testimony of her master, officers, and crew showed that she was not, at the most, more than 19 miles away from the sinking *Titanic* and probably no more than five to ten miles distant. She had seen the *Titanic's* lights; she had seen the rockets; she had not received the CQD calls because her radio operator was asleep. She had attempted to get in communication with the ship she had sighted by flashing a light, but vainly.

"The night was clear," reported Lord Mersey, "and the sea was smooth. When she first saw the rockets the *Californian* could have pushed through the ice to the open water without any serious risk and so have come to the assistance of the *Titanic.* Had she done so she might have saved many if not all of the lives that were lost.

"She made no attempt."

WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

BLUE MURDER

At Mill Crossing it was already past sunset. The rays, redder for what autumn leaves were left, still laid fire along the woods crowning the stony slopes of Jim Bluedge's pastures; but then the line of the dusk began and from that level it filled the valley, washing with transparent blue the buildings scattered about the bridge, Jim's house and horse-sheds and hay-barns, Frank's store, and Camden's blacksmith shop.

The mill had been gone fifty years, but the falls which had turned its wheel still poured in the bottom of the valley, and when the wind came from the Footstool way their mist wet the smithy, built of the old stone on the old foundations, and their pouring drowned the clink of Camden's hammer.

Just now they couldn't drown Camden's hammer, for he wasn't in the smithy; he was at his brother's farm. Standing inside the smaller of the horse paddocks behind the sheds he drove in stakes, one after another, cut green from saplings, and so disposed as to cover the more glaring of the weaknesses in the five-foot fence. From time to time, when one was done and another to do, he rested the head of his sledge in the pocket of his leather apron (he was never without it; it was as though it had grown on him, lumpy with odds and ends of his trade—bolts and nails and rusty pliers and old horseshoes) and, standing so, he mopped the sweat from his face and looked up at the mountain.

Of the three brothers he was the dumb one. He seldom had anything to say. It was providential (folks

said) that of the three enterprises at the Crossing one was a smithy; for while he was a strong, big, hungry-muscled fellow, he never would have had the shrewdness to run the store or the farm. He was better at pounding—pounding while the fire reddened and the sparks flew, and thinking, and letting other people wonder what he was thinking of.

Blossom Bluedge, his brother's wife, sat perched on the top bar of the paddock gate, holding her skirts around her ankles with a trifle too much care to be quite unconscious, and watched him work. When he looked at the mountain he was looking at the mares, half a mile up the slope, grazing in a line as straight as soldiers, their heads all one way. But Blossom thought it was the receding light he was thinking of, and her own sense of misgiving returned and deepened.

"You'd have thought Jim would be home before this, wouldn't you, Cam?"

Her brother-in-law said nothing.

"Cam, look at me!"

It was nervousness, but it wasn't all nervousness—she was the prettiest girl in the valley; a small part of it was mingled coquetry and pique.

The smith began to drive another stake, swinging the hammer from high overhead, his muscles playing in fine big rhythmical convulsions under the skin of his arms and chest, covered with short blond down. Studying him cornerwise, Blossom muttered, "Well, *don't* look at me then!"

He was too dumb for any use. He was as dumb as this: when all three of the Bluedge boys were after her a year ago, Frank, the storekeeper, had brought her candy—chocolates wrapped in silver foil in a two-pound Boston box. Jim had laid before her the Bluedge farm and with it the dominance of the valley. And Camden! To the daughter of Ed Beck, the apple grower, Camden had brought *a box of apples!*—and been bewildered too, when, for all she could help it, she had had to clap a hand over her mouth and run

into the house to have her giggle.

A little more than just bewildered, perhaps. Had she, or any of them, ever speculated about that? . . . He had been dumb enough before; but that was when he had started being as dumb as he was now.

Well, if he wanted to be dumb let him be dumb. Pouting her pretty lips and arching her fine brows, she forgot the unimaginative fellow and turned to the ridge again. And now, seeing the sun was quite gone, all the day's vague worries and dreads—held off by this and that—could not be held off longer. For weeks there had been so much talk, so much gossip and speculation and doubt.

"Camden," she reverted suddenly. "Tell me one thing; did you hear—"

She stopped there. Some people were coming into the kitchen yard, dark forms in the growing darkness. Most of them lingered at the porch, sitting on the steps and lighting their pipes. The one that came out was Frank, the second of her brothers-in-law. She was glad. Frank wasn't like Camden; he would talk. Turning and taking care of her skirts, she gave him a bright and sisterly smile.

"Well, Frankie, what's the crowd?"

Far from avoiding the smile, as Camden's habit was, the storekeeper returned it with a brotherly wink for good measure. "Oh, they're tired of waiting down the road, so they come up here to see the grand arrival." He was something of a man of the world; in his calling he had acquired a fine turn for skepticism. "Don't want to miss being on hand to see what flaws they can pick in 'Jim's five hundred dollars' wuth of expiriment'."

"Frank, ain't you the least bit worried over Jim? So late?"

"Don't see why."

"All the same, I wish either you or Cam could've gone with him."

"Don't see why. Had all the men from Perry's stable there in Twinshead to help him get the animal off

the freight, and he took an extra rope and the log-chain and the heavy wagon, so I guess no matter how wild and woolly the devil is he'll scarcely be climbing in over the tailboard. Besides, them Western horses ain't such a big breed; even a stallion."

"All the same– (look the other way, Frankie)–" Flipping her ankles over the rail, Blossom jumped down beside him. "Listen, Frank, tell me something; did you hear–did you hear the reason Jim's getting him cheap was because he killed a man out West there, what's-its-name, Wyoming?"

Frank was taking off his sleeve protectors, the pins in his mouth. It was Camden, at the bars, speaking in his sudden deep rough way, "Who the hell told you that?"

Frank got the pins out of his mouth. "I guess what it is, Blossie, what's mixed you up is his having that name 'Blue Murder'."

"No, sir! I got some sense and some ears. You don't go fooling me."

Frank laughed indulgently and struck her shoulder with a light hand.

"Don't you worry. Between two horsemen like Jim and Cam–"

"Don't *Cam* me! He's none of *my* horse. I told Jim once–" Breaking off, Camden hoisted his weight over the fence and stood outside, his feet spread and his hammer in both hands, an attitude that would have looked a little ludicrous had anyone been watching him.

Jim had arrived. With a clatter of hoofs and a rattle of wheels he was in the yard and come to a standstill, calling aloud as he threw the lines over the team, "Well, friends, here we are."

The curious began to edge around, closing a cautious circle. The dusk had deepened so that it was hard to make anything at any distance of Jim's "expiriment" but a blurry silhouette anchored at the wagon's tail. The farmer put an end to it, crying from his eminence, "Now, now, clear out and don't worry

him; give him some peace tonight, for Lord's sake! Git!" He jumped to the ground and began to whack his arms, chilled with driving, only to have them pinioned by Blossom's without warning.

"Oh, Jim, I'm so glad you come. I been so worried; gi' me a kiss!"

The farmer reddened, eying the cloud of witnesses. He felt awkward and wished she could have waited. "Get along, didn't I tell you fellows?" he cried with a trace of the Bluedge temper. "Go wait in the kitchen then; I'll tell you all about everything soon's I come in. . . . Well now—wife—"

"What's the matter?" she laughed, an eye over her shoulder. "Nobody's looking that matters. I'm sure Frank don't mind. And as for Camden—"

Camden wasn't looking at them. Still standing with his hammer two-fisted and his legs spread, his chin down and his thoughts to himself (the dumbhead) he was looking at Blue Murder, staring at that other dumbhead, which, raised high on the motionless column of the stallion's neck, seemed hearkening with an exile's doubt to the sounds of this new universe, tasting with wide nostrils the taint in the wind of equine strangers, and studying with eyes accustomed to far horizons these dark pastures that went up in the air.

Whatever the smith's cogitations, presently he let the hammer down and said aloud, "So you're him, eh?"

Jim had put Blossom aside, saying, "Got supper ready? I'm hungry!" Excited by the act of kissing and the sense of witnesses to it, she fussed her hair and started kitchenward as he turned to his brothers.

"Well, what do you make of him?"

"Five hundred dollars," said Frank. "However, it's your money."

Camden was shorter. "Better put him in."

"All right; let them bars down while I and Frank lead him around."

"No thanks!" The storekeeper kept his hands in

his pockets. "I just cleaned up, thanks. Cam's the boy for horses."

"He's none o' my horses!" Camden wet his lips, shook his shoulders, and scowled. "Be damned, no!" He never had the right words, and it made him mad. Hadn't he told Jim from the beginning that he washed his hands of this fool Agricultural College squandering, "and a man-killer to the bargain"?

"Unless," Frank put in slyly, "unless Cam's scared."

"Oh, is Cam scared?"

"Scared?" And still, to the brothers' enduring wonder, the big dense fellow would rise to that boyhood bait. "Scared? The hell I'm scared of any horse ever wore a shoe! Come on, I'll show you! I'll show you!"

"Well, be gentle with him, boys; he may be brittle." As Frank sauntered off around the shed he whistled the latest tune.

In the warmth and light of the kitchen he began to fool with his pretty sister-in-law, feigning princely impatience and growling with a wink at the assembled neighbors, "When do we eat?"

But she protested, "Land, I had everything ready since five, ain't I? And now if it ain't you it's them to wait for. I declare for men!"

At last one of the gossips got in a word.

"What you make of Jim's purchase, Frank?"

"Well, it's Jim's money, Darred. If *I* had the running of this farm—" Frank began drawing up chairs noisily, leaving it at that.

Darred persisted. "Don't look to me much like an animal for women and children to handle, not yet awhile."

"Cowboys han'les 'em, pa." That was Darred's ten-year-old, big-eyed.

Blossom put the kettle back, protesting, "Leave off, or you'll get me worried to death; all your talk—I declare, where *are* those bad boys?" Opening the door she called into the dark, "Jim! Cam! Land's sake!"

Subdued by distance and the intervening sheds, she could hear them at their business—sounds muffled and

fragmentary, soft thunder of hoofs, snorts, puffings, and the short words of men in action: "Aw, leave him be in the paddock tonight." . . . "With them mares there, you damn fool?" . . . "Damn fool, eh? Try getting him in at that door and see who's the damn fool!" . . . "Come on, don't be so scared." . . . "Scared, eh? Scared?" . . .

Why was it she always felt that curious tightening of all her powers of attention when Camden Bluedge spoke? Probably because he spoke so rarely, and then so roughly, as if his own thickness made him mad. Never mind.

"Last call for supper in the dining-car, boys!" she called and closed the door. Turning back to the stove she was about to replace the tea water for the third time when, straightening up, she said, "What's that?"

No one else had heard anything. They looked at one another.

"Frank, go—go see what—go tell the boys to come in."

Frank hesitated, feeling foolish, then went to the door.

Then everyone in the room was out of his chair.

There were three sounds. The first was human and incoherent. The second was incoherent too, but it wasn't human. The third was a crash, a ripping and splintering of wood.

When they got to the paddock they found Camden crawling from beneath the wreckage of the fence where a gap was opened on the pasture side. He must have received a blow on the head, for he seemed dazed. He didn't seem to know they were there. At a precarious balance—one hand at the back of his neck—he stood facing up the hill, gaping after the diminuendo of floundering hoofs, invisible above.

So seconds passed. Again the beast gave tongue, a high wild horning note, and on the black of the stony hill to the right of it a faint shower of sparks blew like fireflies where the herding mares wheeled. It seemed to awaken the dazed smith. He opened his

mouth. *"Almighty God!"* Swinging, he flung his arms toward the shed. *"There! There!"*

At last someone brought a lantern. They found Jim Bluedge lying on his back in the corner of the paddock near the door to the shed. In the lantern light, and still better in the kitchen when they had carried him in, they read the record of the thing which Camden, dumb in good earnest now, seemed unable to tell them with anything but his strange unfocused stare.

The bloody offense to the skull would have been enough to kill the man, but it was the second, full on the chest above the heart, that told the tale. On the caved grating of the ribs, already turning blue under the yellowish down, the iron shoe had left its mark; and when, laying back the rag of shirt, they saw that the toe of the shoe was upward and the cutting calk-ends down they knew all they wanted to know of that swift, black, crushing episode.

No outlash here of heels in fright. Here was a fore-foot. An attack aimed and frontal; an onslaught reared, erect; beast turned biped; red eyes mad to white eyes aghast. . . . And only afterward, when it was done, the blood-fright that serves the horses for conscience; the blind rush across the inclosure; the fence gone down. . . .

No one had much to say. No one seemed to know what to do.

As for Camden, he was no help. He simply stood propped on top of his logs of legs where someone had left him. From the instant when with his *"Almighty God!"* he had been brought back to memory, instead of easing its hold as the minutes passed, the event to which he remained the only living human witness seemed minute by minute to tighten its grip. It set its sweat-beaded stamp on his face, distorted his eyes, and tied his tongue. He was no good to anyone.

As for Blossom, even now—perhaps more than ever now—her dependence on physical touch was the thing that ruled her. Down on her knees beside the lamp

they had set on the floor, she plucked at one of the dead man's shoes monotonously, and as it were idly swaying the toe like an inverted pendulum from side to side. That was all. Not a word. And when Frank, the only of the three with any sense, got her up finally and led her away to her room, she clung to *him*.

It was lucky that Frank was a man of affairs. His brother was dead, and frightfully dead, but there was tomorrow for grief. Just now there were many things to do. There were people to be gotten rid of. With short words and angry gestures he cleared them out, all but Darred and a man named White, and to these he said, "Now first thing, Jim can't stay here." He ran and got a blanket from a closet. "Give me a hand and we'll lay him in the ice-house over night. Don't sound good, but it's best, poor fellow. Cam, come along!"

He waited a moment, and as he studied the wooden fool the blood poured back into his face. "Wake up, Cam! You great big scared stiff, you!"

Camden brought his eyes out of nothingness and looked at his brother. A twinge passed over his face, convulsing the mouth muscles. "Scared?"

"Yes, you're scared!" Frank's lip lifted, showing the tips of his teeth. "And I'll warrant you something: if you wasn't the scared stiff you was, this hellish damn thing wouldn't have happened, maybe. Scared! you a blacksmith! Scared of a horse!"

"Horse!" Again that convulsion of the mouth muscles, something between irony and an idiot craft. "Why don't you go catch 'im?"

"Hush it! Don't waste time by going loony now, for God's sake. Come!"

"My advice to anybody—" Camden looked crazier than ever, knotting his brows. "My advice to anybody is to let somebody else go catch that—that—"

Opening the door he faced out into the night, his head sunk between his shoulders and the fingers working at the ends of his hanging arms; and before they knew it he began to swear. They could hardly hear because his teeth were locked and his breath soft.

There were all the vile words he had ever heard in his life, curses and threats and abominations, vindictive, violent, obscene. He stopped only when at a sharp word from Frank he was made aware that Blossom had come back into the room. Even then he didn't seem to comprehend her return but stood blinking at her, and at the rifle she carried, with his distraught bloodshot eyes.

Frank comprehended. Hysteria had followed the girl's blankness. Stepping between her and the body on the floor, he spoke in a persuasive, unhurried way:

"What you doing with that gun, Blossie? Now, now, you don't want that gun, you know you don't."

It worked. Her rigidity lessened appreciably. Confusion gained.

"Well, but—oh, Frank—well, but when we going to shoot him?"

"Yes, yes, Blossie—now, yes—only you best give me that gun; that's the girlie." When he had got the weapon he put an arm around her shoulders. "Yes, yes, course we're going to shoot him; what you think? Don't want an animal like that running round. Now first thing in the morning—"

Hysteria returned. With its strength she resisted his leading.

"No, now! *Now!* He's gone and killed Jim! Killed my husband! I won't have him left alive another minute! I won't! *Now!* No sir, I'm going myself, I am! Frank, I am! *Cam!*"

At his name, appealed to in that queer screeching way, the man in the doorway shivered all over, wet his lips, and walked out into the dark.

"There, you see?" Frank was quick to capitalize anything. "Cam's gone to do it. Cam's gone, Blossie! . . . Here, one of you—Darred, take this gun and run give it to Camden, that's the boy."

"You sure he'll kill him, Frank? You *sure?*"

"Sure as daylight. Now you come along back to your room like a good girl and get some rest. Come, I'll go with you."

When Frank returned to the kitchen ten minutes later Darred was back.

"Well, now, let's get at it and carry out poor Jim; he can't lay here. . . . Where's Cam gone *now,* damn him!"

"Cam? Why, he's gone and went."

"Went where?"

"Up the pasture, like you said."

"Like I—" Frank went an odd color. He walked to the door. Between the light on the sill and the beginnings of the stars where the woods crowned the mountain was all one blackness. One stillness too. He turned on Darred. "But look, you never gave him that gun, even."

"He didn't want it."

"Lord's sake; what did he say?"

"Said nothing. He'd got the log-chain out of the wagon and when I caught him he was up hunting his hammer innunder that wreck at the fence. Once he found it he started off up. 'Cam,' says I, 'here's a gun; want it?' He seem not to. Just went on walking on up."

"How'd he look?"

"Look same's you seen him looking. Sick."

"The damned fool!" . . .

Poor dead Jim! Poor fool Camden! As the storekeeper went about his business and afterward when, the ice-house door closed on its tragic tenant and White and Darred had gone off home, he roamed the yard, driven here and there, soft-footed, waiting, harkening—his mind was for a time not his own property but the plaything of thoughts diverse and wayward. Jim, his brother, so suddenly and so violently gone. The stallion. That beast that had kicked him to death. With anger and hate and pitiless impatience of time he thought of the morrow, when they would catch him and take their revenge with guns and clubs. Behind these speculations, covering the background of his consciousness and stringing his nerves to endless vigil, spread the wall of the mountain: silent from

instant to instant but devising under its black silence (who-could-know-what instant to come) a neigh, a yell, a spark-line of iron hoofs on rolling flints, a groan. And still behind that and deeper into the borders of the unconscious, the storekeeper thought of the farm that had lost its master, the rich bottoms, the broad well-stocked pastures, the fat barns, and the comfortable house whose chimneys and gable-ends fell into changing shapes of perspective against the stars as he wandered here and there. . . .

Jim gone. . . . And Camden, at any moment—

His face grew hot. An impulse carried him a dozen steps. "I ought to go up. Ought to take the gun and go up." But there shrewd sanity put on the brakes. "Where's the use? Couldn't find him in this dark. Besides, I oughtn't to leave Blossom here alone."

With that he went around toward the kitchen, thinking to go in. But sight of the lantern, left burning out near the sheds, sent his ideas off on another course. At any rate it would give his muscles and nerves something to work on. Taking the lantern and entering the paddock, he fell to patching the gap into the pasture, using broken boards from the wreck. As he worked his eyes chanced to fall on footprints in the dung-mixed earth—Camden's footprints, leading away beyond the little ring of light. And beside them, taking off from the landing-place of that prodigious leap, he discerned the trail of the stallion. After a moment he got down on his knees where the earth was softest, holding the lantern so that its light fell full.

He gave over his fence-building. Returning to the house his gait was no longer that of the roamer; his face, caught by the periodic flare of the swinging lantern, was the face of another man. In its expression there was a kind of fright and a kind of calculating eagerness. He looked at the clock on the kitchen shelf, shook it, and read it again. He went to the telephone and fumbled at the receiver. He waited till his hand quit shaking, then removed it from the hook.

"Listen, Darred," he said, when he had got the farmer at last, "get White and whatever others you can and come over first thing it's light. Come a-riding and bring your guns. No, Cam ain't back."

He heard Blossom calling. Outside her door he passed one hand down over his face, as he might have passed a wash-rag, to wipe off what was there. Then he went in.

"What's the matter with Blossie? Can't sleep?"

"No, I can't sleep. Can't think. Can't sleep. Oh, Frankie!"

He sat down beside the bed.

"Oh, Frankie, Frankie, *hold my hand!*"

She looked almost homely, her face bleached out and her hair in a mess on the pillow. But she would get over that. And the short sleeve of the nightgown on the arm he held was edged with pretty lace.

"Got your watch here?" he asked. She gave it to him from under the pillow. This too he shook as if he couldn't believe it was going.

Pretty Blossom Beck. Here for a wonder he sat in her bedroom and held her hand. One brother was dead and the other was on the mountain.

But little by little, as he sat and dreamed so, nightmare crept over his brain. He had to arouse and shake himself. He had to set his thoughts resolutely in other roads. . . . Perhaps there would be even the smithy. The smithy, the store, the farm. Complete. The farm, the farmhouse, the room in the farmhouse, the bed in the room, the wife in the bed. Complete beyond belief. If— Worth dodging horror for. If—

"Frank, has Cam come back?"

"Cam? Don't you worry about Cam. . . . Where's that watch again? . . ."

Far from rounding up their quarry in the early hours after dawn, it took the riders, five of them, till almost noon simply to make certain that he wasn't to be found—not in any of the pastures. Then when they discovered the hole in the fence far up in the woods

beyond the crest where Blue Murder had led the mares in a break for the open country of hills and ravines to the south, they were only at the beginning.

The farmers had left their work undone at home and, as the afternoon lengthened and with it the shadows in the hollow places, they began to eye one another behind their leader's back. Yet they couldn't say it; there was something in the storekeeper's air today, something zealous and pitiless and fanatical, that shut them up and pulled them plodding on.

Frank did the trailing. Hopeless of getting anywhere before sundown in that unkempt wilderness of a hundred square miles of scrub, his companions slouched in their saddles and rode more and more mechanically, knee to knee, and it was he who made the casts to recover the lost trail and, dismounting to read the dust, cried back, "He's still with 'em," and with gestures of imperious excitement beckoned them on.

"Which you mean?" Darred asked him once. "Cam, or the horse?"

Frank wheeled his beast and spurred back at the speaker. It was extraordinary. "You don't know what you're talking about!" he cried, with a causelessness and a disordered vehemence which set them first staring, then speculating. "Come on, you dumbheads; don't talk—*ride!*"

By the following day, when it was being told in all the farmhouses, the story might vary in details and more and more as the tellings multiplied, but in its fundamentals it remained the same. In one thing they certainly all agreed: they used the same expression—"It was like Frank was drove. Drove in a race against something, and no sparing the whip."

They were a good six miles to the south of the fence. Already the road back home would have to be followed three parts in the dark.

Darred was the spokesman. "Frank, I'm going to call it a day."

The others reined up with him but the man ahead

rode on. He didn't seem to hear. Darred lifted his voice:

"Come on, call it a day, Frank. Tomorrow, maybe. But you see we've run it out and they're not here."

"Wait," said Frank over his shoulder, still riding on into the pocket.

White's mount—a mare—laid back her ears, shied, and stood trembling. After a moment she whinnied.

It was as if she had whinnied for a dozen. A crashing in the woods above them to the left and the avalanche came—down-streaming, erupting, wheeling, wheeling away with volleying snorts, a dark rout.

Darred, reining his horse, began to shout, "Here they go this way, Frank!" But Frank was yelling, "Up here, boys! This way, quick!"

It was the same note, excited, feverish, disordered, breaking like a child's. When they neared him they saw he was off his horse, rifle in hand, and down on his knees to study the ground where the woods began. By the time they reached his animal the impetuous fellow had started up into the cover, his voice trailing:

"Come on; spread out and come on!"

One of the farmers got down. When he saw the other three keeping their saddles he swung up again.

White spoke this time. "Be darned if I do!" He lifted a protesting hail, "Come back here, Frank! You're crazy! It's getting dark!"

It was Frank's own fault. They told him plainly to come back and he wouldn't listen.

For a while they could hear his crackle in the mounting underbrush. Then that stopped, whether he had gone too far for their ears or whether he had come to a halt to give his own ears a chance. . . . Once, off to his right, a little higher up under the low ceiling of the trees that darkened moment by moment with the rush of night, they heard another movement, another restlessness of leaves and stones. Then that was still, and everything was still.

Darred ran a sleeve over his face and swung down. "God alive, boys!"

It was the silence. All agreed there—the silence and the deepening dusk.

The first they heard was the shot. No voice. Just the one report. Then after five breaths of another silence a crashing of growth, a charge in the darkness under the withered scrub, continuous and diminishing.

The shouted, "Frank!" No answer. They called, *Frank Bluedge!"*

Now, since they had to, they did. Keeping contact by word, and guided partly by directional memory (and mostly in the end by luck), after a time they found the storekeeper in a brake of ferns, lying across his gun.

They got him down to the open, watching behind them all the while. Only then, by the flares of successive matches, under the noses of the snorting horses, did they look for the damage done.

They remembered the stillness and the gloom; it must have been quite black in there. The attack had come from behind—equine and pantherine at once, and planned and cunning. A deliberate lunge with a forefoot again: the shoe which had crushed the backbone between the shoulder blades was a foreshoe; that much they saw by the match flares in the red wreck.

They took no longer getting home than they had to, but it was longer than they would have wished. With Frank across his own saddle, walking their horses and with one or another ahead to pick the road (it was going to rain, and even the stars were lost), they made no more than a creeping speed.

None of them had much to say on the journey. Finding the break in the boundary fence and feeling through the last of the woods, the lights of their farms began to show in the pool of blackness below, and Darred uttered a part of what had lain in the minds of them all during the return:

"Well, that leaves Cam."

None followed it up. None cared to go any closer

than he was to the real question. Something new, alien, menacing and pitiless had come into the valley of their lives with that beast they had never really seen; they felt its oppression, every one, and kept the real question back in their minds: "*Does* it leave Cam?"

It answered itself. Camden was at home when they got there.

He had come in a little before them, empty-handed. Empty-headed too. When Blossom, who had waited all day, part of the time with neighbor women who had come in and part of the time alone to the point of going mad—when she saw him coming down the pasture, his feet stumbling and his shoulders dejected, her first feeling was relief. Her first words, however, were, "Did you get him, Cam?" And all he would answer was, "Gi'me something to eat, can't you? Gi'me a few hours' sleep, can't you? Then wait!"

He looked as if he would need more than a few hours' sleep. Propped on his elbows over his plate, it seemed as though his eyes would close before his mouth would open.

His skin was scored by thorns and his shirt was in ribbons under the straps of his iron-sagged apron; but it was not by these marks that his twenty-odd hours showed: it was by his face. While yet his eyes were open and his wits still half awake, his face surrendered. The flesh relaxed into lines of stupor, a putty-formed, putty-colored mask of sleep.

Once he let himself be aroused. This was when, to an abstracted query as to Frank's wherabouts, Blossom told him Frank had been out with four others since dawn. He heaved clear of the table and opened his eyes at her, showing the red around the rims.

He spoke with the thick tongue of a drunkard. "If anybody but me lays hand on that stallion I'll kill him. I'll wring his neck."

Then he relapsed into his stupidity, and not even the arrival of the party bringing his brother's body seemed able to shake him so far clear of it again.

At first, when they had laid Frank on the floor where on the night before they had laid Jim, he seemed hardly to comprehend.

"What's wrong with Frank?"

"Some more of Jim's 'expiriment'."

"Frank see him? He's scared, Frank is. Look at his face there."

"He's dead, Cam."

"Dead, you say? Frank dead? Dead of fright; is that it?"

Even when, rolling the body over they showed him what was what, he appeared incapable of comprehension, of amazement, of passion, or of any added grief. He looked at them all with a kind of befuddled protest. Returning to his chair and his plate, he grumbled, "Le'me eat first, can't you? Can't you gi'me a little time to sleep?"

"Well, you wouldn't do much tonight anyway, I guess."

At White's words Blossom opened her mouth for the first time.

"No, nothing tonight, Cam. Cam! *Camden!* Say! Promise!"

"And then tomorrow, Cam, what we'll do is to get every last man in the valley, and we'll go at this right. We'll lay hand on that devil—"

Camden swallowed his mouthful of cold steak with difficulty. His obsession touched, he showed them the rims of his eyes again.

"You do and I'll wring your necks. The man that touches that animal before I do gets his neck wrang. That's all you need to remember."

"Yes, yes—no—that is—" Poor Blossom. "Yes, Mr. White, thanks; no, Cam's not going out tonight. . . . No, Cam, nobody's going to interfere—nor nothing. Don't you worry there. . . ."

Again poor Blossom! Disaster piled too swiftly on disaster; no discipline but instinct left. Caught in fire and flood and earthquake and not knowing what to come, and no creed but "save him who can!"—by

hook or crook of wile or smile. With the valley of her life emptied out, and its emptiness repeopled monstrously and pressing down black on the roof under which (now that Frank was gone to the ice-house too and the farmers back home) one brother was left of three—she would tread softly, she would talk or she would be dumb, as her sidelong glimpses of the awake-asleep man's face above the table told her was the instant's need; or if he would eat, she would magic out of nothing something, anything; or if he would sleep, he could sleep, so long as he slept in that house where she could know he was sleeping.

Only one thing. If she could touch him. If she could touch and cling.

Lightning filled the windows. After a moment the thunder came avalanching down the pasture and brought up against the clapboards of the house. At this she was behind his chair. She put out a hand. She touched his shoulder. The shoulder was bare, the shirt ripped away; it was caked with sweat and with the blackening smears of scratches, but for all its exhaustion and dirt it was flesh alive—a living man to touch.

Camden blundered up. "What the hell!" He started off two steps and wheeled on her. "Why don't you get off to bed, for Goll sake!"

"Yes, Cam, yes—right off, yes."

"Well, *I'm* going. I can tell you. For Goll sake, I need some sleep!"

"Yes, that's right, yes, Cam, good-night, Cam—only—only you promise—promise you won't go out—nowheres."

"Go *out*? Not likely I won't! Not *likely!* Get along."

It took her no time to get along then—quick and quiet as a mouse.

Camden lingered to stand at one of the windows where the lightning came again, throwing the black barns and paddocks at him from the white sweep of the pastures crowned by woods.

As it had taken her no time to go, it took Blossom

no time to undress and get in bed. When Camden was on his way to his room he heard her calling, "Cam! Just a second, Cam!"

In the dark outside her door he drew one hand down over his face, wiping off whatever might be there. Then he entered.

"Yes? What?"

"Cam, set by me a minute, won't you? And Cam, oh, Cam, hold my hand."

As he slouched down, his fist inclosing her fingers, thoughts awakened and ran and fastened on things. They fastened, tentatively at first, upon the farm. Jim gone. Frank gone. The smithy, the store, and the farm. The whole of Mill Crossing. The trinity. The three in one. . . .

"Tight, Cam, for pity's sake! Hold it tight!"

His eyes, falling to his fist, strayed up along the arm it held. The sleeve, rumpled near the shoulder, was trimmed with pretty lace. . . .

"Tighter, Cam!"

A box of apples. That memory hidden away in the cellar of his mind. Hidden away, clamped down in the dark, till the noxious vapors, the murderous vapors of its rotting had filled the shut-up house he was. . . . A box of red apples for the apple-grower's girl—the girl who sniggered and ran away from him to laugh at him. . . .

And here, by the unfolding of a devious destiny, he sat in that girl's bedroom, holding that girl's hand. Jim who had got her, Frank who had wanted her lay side by side out there in the ice-house under the lightning. While he, the "dumb one"—the last to be thought of with anything but amusement and the last to be feared—his big hot fist inclosing her imprecating hand now, and his eyes on the pretty lace at her shoulder— He jumped up with a gulp and a clatter of iron.

"What the—" He flung her hand away. "What the —hell!" He swallowed. "Damn you, Blossie Beck!" He stared at her with repugnance and mortal fright.

"Why, you—you—you—"

He moderated his voice with an effort, wiping his brow, "Good night. You must excuse me, Blossie; I wasn't meaning—I mean—I hope you sleep good. *I* shall. . . . Good-night!"

In his own brain was the one word, *Hurry!*

She lay and listened to his boots going along the hall and heard the closing of his door. She ought to have put out the lamp. But even with the shades drawn, the lightning around the edges of the window unnerved her; in the dark alone it would have been more than she could bear.

She lay so till she felt herself nearing exhaustion from the sustained rigidity of her limbs. Rain came and with the rain, wind. Around the eaves it neighed like wild stallions; down the chimneys it moaned like men.

Slipping out of bed and pulling on a bathrobe she ran from her room, barefooted, and along the hall to Camden's door.

"Cam!" she called. "Oh, Cam!" she begged. "Please, please!"

And now he wouldn't answer her.

New lightning, diffused through all the sky by the blown rain, ran at her along the corridor. She pushed the door open. The lamp was burning on the bureau but the room was empty and the bed untouched.

Taking the lamp she skittered down to the kitchen. No one there. . . .

Hurry!

Camden had reached the woods when the rain came. Lighting the lantern he had brought, he made his way on to the boundary fence. There, about a mile to the east of the path the others had taken that day, he pulled the rails down and tumbled the stones together in a pile. Then he proceeded another hundred yards, holding the lantern high and peering through the streaming crystals of the rain.

Blue Murder was there. Neither the chain nor the

sapling had given way. The lantern and, better than the lantern, a globe of lightning, showed the tethered stallion glistening and quivering, his eyes all whites at the man's approach.

"Gentle, boy; steady, boy!" Talking all the while in the way he had with horses, Camden put a hand on the taut chain and bore with a gradually progressive weight, bringing the dark head nearer. "Steady, boy; gentle there, damn you; gentle!"

Was he afraid of horses? Who was it said he was afraid of horses?

The beast's head was against the man's chest, held there by an arm thrown over the bowed neck. As he smoothed the forehead and fingered the nose with false caresses, Camden's "horse talk" ran on—the cadence one thing, the words another.

"Steady, Goll damn you; you're going to get yours. Cheer up, cheer up, the worst is yet to come. Come now! Come easy! Come along!"

When he had unloosed the chain, he felt for and found with his free hand his hammer hidden behind the tree. Throwing the lantern into the brush, where it flared for an instant before dying, he led the stallion back as far as the break he had made in the fence. Taking a turn with the chain around the animal's nose, like an improvised hackamore, he swung from the stone pile to the slippery back. A moment's shying, a sliding caracole of amazement and distrust, a crushing of knees, a lash of the chain-end, and that was all there was to that. Blue Murder had been ridden before. . . . .

In the smithy, chambered in the roaring of the falls and the swish and shock of the storm, Camden sang as he pumped his bellows, filling the cave beneath the rafters with red. The air was nothing, the words were mumbo-jumbo, but they swelled his chest. His eyes, cast from time to time at his wheeling prisoner, had lost their look of helplessness and surly distraction.

Scared? He? No, no, no! Now that he wasn't any

longer afraid of time, he wasn't afraid of anything on earth.

"Shy, you devil!" He wagged his exalted head. "Whicker, you hellion! Whicker all you want to, stud horse! Tomorrow they're going to get you, the numb fools! Tomorrow they can have you. *I* got you *tonight!*"

He was more than other men; he was enormous. Fishing an iron shoe from that inseparable apron pocket of his, he thrust it into the coals and blew and blew. He tried it and it was burning red. He tried it again and it was searing white. Taking it out on the anvil he began to beat it, swinging his hammer one-handed, gigantic. So in the crimson light, irradiating iron sparks, he was at his greatest. Pounding, pounding. A man in the dark of night with a hammer about him can do wonders; with a horseshoe about him he can cover up a sin. And if the dark of night in a paddock won't hold it, then the dark of undergrowth on a mountainside will. . . .

Pounding, pounding; thinking, thinking, in a great halo of hot stars. Feeding his hungry, his insatiable muscles.

"Steady now, you blue bastard! Steady, boy!"

What he did not realize in his feverish exaltation was that his muscles were not insatiable. In the thirty-odd hours past they had had a feast spread before them and they had had their fill. . . . More than their fill.

As with the scorching iron in his tongs he approached the stallion, he had to step over the nail-box he had stepped over five thousand times in the routine of every day.

A box of apples, eh? Apples to snigger at, eh? But whose girl are you now? . . . Scared, eh?

His foot was heavier of a sudden than it should have been. This five thousand and first time, by the drag of the tenth of an inch, the heel caught the lip of the nail-box.

He tried to save himself from stumbling. At the

same time, instinctively, he held the iron flame in his tongs away.

There was a scream out of a horse's throat; a whiff of hair and burnt flesh.

There was a lash of something in the red shadows. There was another sound and another wisp of stench. . . .

When, guided by the stallion's whinnying, they found the smith next day, they saw by the cant of his head that his neck was broken, and they perceived that he too had on him the mark of a shoe. It lay up one side of his throat and the broad of a cheek. It wasn't blue this time, however—it was red. It took them some instants in the sunshine pouring through the wide door to comprehend this phenomenon. It wasn't sunk in by a blow this time; it was burned in, a brand.

Darred called them to look at the stallion, chained behind the forge.

"Almighty God!" The words sounded funny in his mouth. They sounded the funnier in that they were the same ones the blundering smith had uttered when, staring uphill from his clever wreckage of the paddock fence, he had seen the mares striking sparks from the stones where the stallion struck none. And he, of all men, a smith!

"Almighty God!" called Darred. "What you make of these here feet?"

One fore-hoof was freshly pared for shoeing; the other three hoofs were as virgin as any yearling's on the plains. Blue Murder had never been shod. . . .

RALPH MILNE FARLEY

THE HOUSE OF ECSTASY

This actually happened to you. And when I say "you," I mean *you*—now reading these very words. For I know something about you—something deeply personal—something which, however, I am afraid that you have forgotten.

You're puzzled? You don't believe me? Read on, and I'll prove it to you—you'll see that I am right.

To begin with, where were you at eight o'clock on that warm evening of August 4, 1937?

You don't remember? Oh, but I hope you will, my friend. For, as you read on, you will realize the importance of remembering every detail of that eventful night.

The weather was warm and muggy. It made you restless in the house, until finally you went out for a little walk—down to the store at the corner, to buy a package of cigarettes—to take the air. Nothing of importance, you thought.

A young fellow stopped you, asked for a light. Undoubtedly you have forgotten this too, for you are so often asked for a light. And in the dusk of that muggy evening there was nothing to stamp this young fellow as any different from hundreds of others.

You gave him a match; and as the match flared up in the darkness, you studied his clean-cut whimsical features. Rather attractive, he seemed to you.

You said to yourself, "Here is a man I'd like to know."

Then you lit your own cigarette, and noticed that the young fellow was studying you. You hoped that he too was favorably impressed by what he saw.

"Rather a warm night," he said in a pleasing voice, as he fell into step beside you.

So the two of you discussed the weather for a few moments, walking aimlessly along.

Having thus broken the ice, the stranger asked, "Are you doing anything this evening?"

Somehow this question put you on your guard. What was his racket, anyway? You glanced sharply at his face, at that moment illumined by a street-light which the two of you were passing. But what you saw completely reassured you.

"No," you replied. "I'm not doing anything. Why?"

He laughed a bit embarrassedly. "Well, you see, there's a clever seer and mystic, who lives just a couple of blocks from here. I was on my way to his house for a séance, when I met you. I'd feel a little less creepy if you'd come along."

It sounded intriguing. But—

"What does he charge?" you asked.

The young man laughed—a pleasant friendly laugh. "No charge at all," he replied. "A *real* mystic doesn't prostitute his weird abilities by making money out of them. Only charlatans do that!"

"Okay," you said, relieved that there was no fee. "I'll try anything once."

"Come on," he invited.

He led you to one of a block of identical three-story brownstone fronts—no one would ever have imagined what it held. A massive butler answered the door. He looked you suspiciously up and down; then stepping aside, he solemnly ushered you and your friend into a small reception room, where a hunchbacked dwarf of indefinable age arose to greet the two of you. His hairless yellow skin was stretched parchment-like over his skull. His eyes were quick-shifting, black and beady. His slit mouth leered, first at your companion and then at you.

"Well?" he asked in a high-pitched querulous voice, shifting his eyes back to your companion.

"Master," the young man replied, bowing stiffly,

"here is the person whom you directed me to bring."

"You have done well, my pupil," quavered the dwarf, his hunched shoulders shaking slightly as at some concealed jest. "You may go."

Astonished and indignant, you turned quickly to confront your guide. But a subtle change seemed to have come over him. In the bright light of the reception room he did not look as pleasing as he had looked on the street.

His dark eyes were set at a decided slant. His black brows were thick and tufted. His ears, nose and chin were pointed. And his sleek black hair was brushed up on each side of his forehead into two little peaks, almost like twin horns.

"Why, you said—" you began indignantly.

"What I *said* is of no matter," he replied with a shrug and a nonchalant wave of one slender hand. Turning on his heel, he stalked out of the room.

You wheeled to follow him; but behind you a sharp voice croaked, "Stop!"

Invisible hands seemed to reach out from behind and turn you around, and march you back to the toad-like squatting Master.

He smiled a slitted grin, evidently intended to be ingratiating. "Why should you flee, my dear fellow?" he murmured. "I am about to do you a favor."

"But—but—" you began.

"Silence!" he snapped. His face was stern. His claw-like hands, on the ends of scrawny arms, reached out toward you in a fluttery gesture as he crooned, "Sleep! Sleep! You are in my power. You will do as I command. Sleep! Sleep!"

A delicious languor spread over you; and, although your mind remained abnormally clear, all control over your own body gradually slipped from you.

The Master's parchment face relaxed into a friendly grin once more. "You are going to enjoy this," he croaked gleefully, rubbing his taloned hands together. "The ecstasy is going to be all yours. For, alas, my poor crumpled body cannot thrill to the pleasures

of the flesh, except vicariously. So I have summoned you here, in the hope that a few crumbs may drop from the table of your enjoyment, for me to pick up."

"Yes, Master." The words came to your lips through no volition of your own.

The little dwarf grinned delightedly, and his hunched shoulders shook with suppressed chuckles. "This is going to be good!" he chortled. "Come. Follow me."

Like a sleepwalker, you followed him out of the little reception room, down the broad hall, up a flight of stairs, and into a large room with softly carpeted floor, and pictures and mirrors on the wall. The only article of furniture was a couch.

On that couch sat a beautiful young girl, clothed in a gown of some filmy blue material. Her skin was a creamy olive shade, her hair blue-black and lustrous, her face piquant and oval, her lips full and inviting, and her figure slenderly mature.

But her eyes (so you noted) almost spoiled the picture. They were lusterless and dumb, like those of a stunned animal. You momentarily wondered if your own eyes were not the same. And, when she moved, she moved slowly, swimmingly, as in a slow-motion picture.

"Get up, my little dear," croaked the hunchback, rubbing his hands together, and grinning with anticipation.

The girl arose, her sightless sleepwalking eyes on his penetrating ones. "Yes, Master." Her tones were flat and dead, and yet they carried the hint of a bell-like quality.

"Here is your partner, my little dear," he continued, with a leer, waving one skinny talon toward you, as you stood sheepishly, striving to free your paralyzed muscles from his hypnotic spell. "Stand up, my little dear."

"Yes, Master." She rose obediently, and faced you.

Somehow, in spite of the dull animal look in her wide eyes, there was something intensely appealing

about her. So young. So soft. So virginal. And so alone!

Fascinated, you stared and stared at this vision of loveliness. No longer did you strain to escape, for now your every effort was to break the Master's hypnotic spell, not so as to leap *away,* but rather so as to go *forward.*

As you ran your eyes appraisingly over every line and curve of her perfect figure, the girl mechanically seated herself on the couch, lifted up one shapely leg, crossed her knees, unlatched the slipper, and let it plop to the floor.

Its sudden sound seemed to shock the girl almost into consciousness. Her wide, unseeing eyes narrowed, and her expression became momentarily human—the one touch needed for complete perfection.

But only for a brief instant. Then the Master waved one taloned hand in her direction. "Sleep!" he crooned. "Sleep, my little dear. Sleep."

Her vacant stare returned. She unfastened and took off the other slipper.

The hunchback, grinning fatuously, held up one hand, and said, "My little dear, that will be enough for the present." Then, turning to you, "All right, my boy. She is yours."

Released from your paralysis, although still under his spell, you stole slowly, eagerly forward. Your feet seemed planted in shifting sands. Interminable ages elapsed. Would you never reach her?

Behind you the cracked voice of the Master squeaked. "Welcome him, my little dear."

In response to this command, the girl held out her arms to you. A dumb eagerness suffused her piquant oval face. You in turn held out your arms to her, with an intense yearning to clasp them tightly around her.

At last, after countless ages it seemed, you almost reached her, your fingertips met hers, just barely brushing them, and a tingling thrill swept through you. With one supreme effort, you leaped forward.

But an invisible hand seemed to clamp itself upon

one of your shoulders, pulling you backward. And behind you sounded the croak of the Master, saying, "Bah! You are mere automatons! There is no vicarious pleasure to be had by me from such puppet amours as this!"

Then his invisible hand spun you around to face his toad-like leering features.

"Master!" you implored. "Master!"

His slant eyes narrowed, and his slit mouth broadened into a grin. "I am going to be kind to you," he announced, in his high-pitched, cracked voice. "To the two of you—and to myself. I shall remove my hypnotic spell, and then see if you two cannot react to each other like normal human beings."

He waved one taloned hand imperiously.

"Awake!" he croaked. "It is my command that you both awake."

The invisible hands upon your shoulders relaxed their hold. A shudder passed through you. You lifted up one hand and brushed the cobwebs from your eyes. You drew a deep breath. The sluggish shackles slipped off of your mind and soul! You were free. Free!

Wheeling eagerly, you confronted the beautiful, olive-skinned girl. But now she drew away from you—her eyes, no longer dumb, now pools of horror. Her two little hands fluttered up in front of her, as if to ward you off. A dull, red flush, commencing at the rounded hollow of her slim young throat, crept slowly up until it suffused her entire face, as she cringed back against the couch.

And you—your eagerness to clasp her in your arms now changed to eagerness to protect her. You halted abruptly.

From behind you there came a crackling laugh and the words: "She does not seem to relish you, my friend. Well, I shall leave the two of you alone together for a while, until you and she become better acquainted. *Adios!*"

A door slammed, and there was the sound of the

turning of a key in the lock.

The girl was now seated on the edge of the couch, with one hand raised to her eyes to blot out the unwelcome sight of you.

But by now you were in complete command of yourself, once more a gentleman. "My dear young lady," you breathed, moving forward, "there's nothing to be afraid of. I want to help you; I want to be your friend. Trust me, and I'll try to get you out of here. That dwarf is a dangerous madman, and we've got to forget everything except how to outwit him."

She smiled, and nodded. "I *do* trust you!" she exclaimed, rising and gripping your arm.

Hurriedly you made a circuit of all four walls of the room, carefully inspecting them. It was a room without a single window. There was only one door, and that was of solid oak, and locked.

"It is no use, Galahad," said the girl, in a rich liquid voice, but with a touch of mocking sadness. "The Master has us safely imprisoned, and there's nothing we can do about it. Of course, when he is through with *you,* he will probably let *you* go. But I am to be kept here for good."

"I will come back with the police, and raid the place, and rescue you," you asserted.

She smiled sadly. "I wonder," she said.

"Why do you wonder?" you asked, surprised. "If that crazy dwarf is fool enough to let me loose, it ought to be a simple matter to come back here and break in."

"I wonder."

"Why do you keep saying, 'I wonder'?"

"Because other men have been brought here to me by the Master, and they have promised, just as you are now promising. And yet none of them has ever come back."

"But *I* will."

"I wonder."

"Stop it!" you stormed. "Stop parroting those words! I'm a gentleman, and I keep my word. Besides

I—er—I admire you very much," you continued lamely. "I've never seen a girl quite like you. *Of course* I'll come back!"

"The Master is a skillful hypnotist. Before he lets you go, he will hypnotize you into forgetting everything."

"He couldn't make a man forget *you!*"

"Yes, even me. Yet perhaps—"

"Perhaps what?"

"Perhaps—if you were to hold me in your arms—"

Eagerly you clasped her to you, and covered her upturned flower-face with kisses, until finally your lips met and she returned your passion in one soul-searing embrace.

As you released her, you exultantly exclaimed, "Now let the Master do his worst! I shall never forget that kiss!"

A cackling laugh echoed through the vacant reaches of the room.

Startled, you sprang to your feet; but there was no one in the room. No one except you yourself and the dark-haired, olive-skinned girl.

Again the cackling laugh. It seemed to come from everywhere—from nowhere.

"Where are you, Master?" you cried.

"Aha!" spoke his cracked voice out of the air. "I see that you have learned respect, and that you address me by my proper title. And I thank you for a very pleasant evening; I enjoyed that kiss! You too ought to thank *me!*"

"I don't!" you stormed. "Let us out of here, or I'll call the police! Where are you, anyway?"

"I am behind one of the mirrors in the wall," he croaked. "It is what is known in the glass trade as an 'X-ray mirror,' that is to say, a transparent one. From *your* side you can see nothing but reflections, whereas from *my* side it is merely a slightly grayed window-pane. And so I have been able to enjoy vicariously your little moment of bliss."

"But your voice?" you asked, incredulous.

"I am talking into a microphone," croaked the in-

visible dwarf. "There are loudspeakers behind several of the pictures.—And now I am coming in to join my two little playmates."

"If you enter this room, I shall wring your neck!" you raged.

"I rather think not," rasped his high-pitched voice, trailing off into nothingness.

You turned, and placed one arm comfortingly around the shaken girl.

The key grated in the lock. The door opened. The repulsively leering hunchback came hopping in.

Now was your chance. With cool determination, you charged across the room!

But, grinning unconcernedly, he held out one arm in your direction, with the flat of his hand toward you. A mighty invisible blow smote you squarely in the chest, flinging you back upon the couch, and upon the pathetic little figure there.

Making passes with his hands, the obscene frog-like Master approached you. "Sleep! Sleep!" he murmured. "Sleep, my friend."

Your veins filled with water, and you slumped helplessly.

"Get up!" he commanded, not unkindly.

You arose.

"Follow me!"

Like a sleepwalker, you followed.

Behind you, there sounded the pleading voice of your sweetheart, imploring, "Oh, my lover, be sure and make a note of the number of this house when you leave it, and come back and rescue me!"

Love is strong! In spite of the invisible hands which sought to restrain you, you turned and cried, "I will! I promise you!"

Her sweet eyes filled with gladness; then shot a glance toward the Master, a glance filled with scorn for his thwarted powers, then back to you again, welling with perfect confidence.

"I believe you," she cried happily. "I shall be waiting."

Then you turned and followed the hunchback out of the room. Dazedly you were led to the street door.

On the threshold the Master transfixed you with his penetrating gaze, and commanded incisively, "You will now forget all that has happened in this house of ecstasy this evening! Do you hear me? You will forget *all* that has happened! Go down the steps, turn to the right, and walk away. When you reach the corner, you will awake. But you will remember nothing. Good-night, my friend, and I thank you for a very pleasant evening."

The door closed behind you.

Ringing in your ears was the insistent command of the wistful girl who had given you her love. "You must not forget! You must not forget."

Already you felt stronger and more free. The spell was beginning to lift. The vision of a piquant oval pleading face was before your eyes.

"I will not forget!" you stalwartly promised, as you went down the steps. Then, before you turned to the right as commanded, you took careful note of the house number.

You returned from your walk that evening with a vague idea that something was wrong, a vague realization that you had been out of your house an hour or so longer than you could account for.

You consider yourself to be a man of your word, don't you? And yet you have never returned to the house of ecstasy to rescue that girl, although you solemnly promised her that you would.

I have now told you all that I myself know of the episode. But unfortunately I do not know the address of the house of ecstasy. You need that address. You have to have that address, if you are ever to rescue the girl who loved and trusted you.

Try hard, my friend, try hard.

Can't you remember? You *must* remember!

CAPTAIN WILLIAM OUTERSON

FIRE IN THE GALLEY STOVE

The ship *Unicorn* loitered to the westward, running large with a gentle breeze from the south. In the light of the brilliant moon her decks gleamed whitely; aloft, sly shadows played among her sails and spars. Overside, the quiet sea murmured as she passed.

Mister Mergam stood on the weather side of the poop, staring sourly ahead and seeing though not perceiving the beauty of the night. His keen ears caught the various sounds of ship and sea and wind, and his trained mind recognized them automatically, especially the soft thud of the rudder as the sea touched it, now on one side and now on the other. It was a simple sound, near and familiar, relentless as fate and sounding a note of caution, obscurely ominous, as if the voice of the helm attempted to warn him against any lack of vigilance. In this particular morning watch it gave him that impression, not because he was feeling down and defeated, since he had felt that way for years, but owing to his mood of sour rebellion, which had now reached a climax. He hated the empty plains of the sea and the narrow rounds of sailing-ship duties, but had to endure them because he could not make a living ashore.

Through all his years of roving, even on nights like this, he had remained blind to the beauty of the sea, and now his feeling toward it had settled into weary hatred. He knew its effects of blended color, its wide gradations of sound and action, the tireless charm of a sailing ship's effortless movement, the quality of silent distance and the wonder of the skies. Dimly at times, in moments of rare emotion, he had caught a

glimpse of the mystic hand that beckons beyond the horizon and felt for a little while the fated urge of the wanderer. But that was in the beginning, long ago when he had first gone to sea, and he had forgotten it.

The lee side of the deck, to starboard, abounded in shadows cast by the moon. Under the mainsail a dark blotch extended from the half deck to the main hatch, and a bright space lay between that and the forward house. Observing this with his customary dull disinterest in details not requiring action, he watched the shadow thrown by the foot of the mainsail, backing and filling in the languid breeze. Raising his eyes from the deck to the sail, he suddenly stiffened and gazed unseeing in front of him as he felt an unusual movement of the hull, a strange shaking that startled him because it was outside of all his former experience. The whole ship, hull and spars and rigging, trembled eerily, and all the gear aloft made a weird clatter. He had never known any ship to move like this, and as he stood wondering what had caused it the skipper came hurriedly from the companion and halted beside him.

"What was that?" he demanded nervously.

"I don't know, sir," Mister Mergam answered. "I've never felt anything like it until now, so I wouldn't know what it was."

"You don't know!" exclaimed the skipper. "You're here on deck in charge of the ship and something scrapes along her side—a derelict, more than likely—and you don't know what it was! You don't know." The skipper waved his hands helplessly. "Why don't you know? Didn't you see anything? Invisible things don't shake a ship like that. It must have been something big enough to be seen. Were you asleep?"

"No, sir, I wasn't asleep. I was wider awake than you are now, attending to my job, and I saw nothing. There was nothing to be seen. The lookout didn't see anything, or he would've reported it, and the man at the wheel didn't see anything, either."

"The man at the wheel," the skipper repeated unpleasantly. "How do you know he didn't see anything? It isn't his job to see things and report them. He's here to steer the ship, not to keep lookout."

The mate turned away sullenly and approached the man at the wheel.

"Did you see what shook her a minute ago, Thomson?" he inquired.

"No, sir," Thomson answered. "I didn't see nothin'. I looked astern after she stopped shakin' an' there wasn't nothin' in sight."

"You heard what he said, sir," Mister Mergam remarked to the skipper in a tone of meager triumph. "There was nothing in sight."

"Aye, I heard him," Captain Garton returned impatiently. "What do you suppose it could have been? Possibly a submerged derelict."

"No, sir, I don't think so. It wasn't the sort of shock any kind of derelict would give. I've been in collision with a derelict, and it was something entirely different. This was strong, but soft and trembly. A derelict would grind and scrape along her side and make enough noise to wake the dead."

"I suppose you're right," the skipper admitted unwillingly. He moved away from the mate and stood with his hands on the poop rail staring at the sea ahead, a tall man, gaunt and irascible from chronic dyspepsia due to overeating and lack of exercise, tired of life and hating everybody, including himself. His excessively bright eyes wandered fretfully along the deck on the weather side, which was lit by the moon except for an edge of shadow here and there, and he glanced at the leech of the mainsail. Something attracted his attention then, and he looked over on the port bow. A startled exclamation broke from him and he threw up his arm in swift apprehension, pointing urgently.

"Hey, Mister Mergam!" he cried. "What's that?"

The mate looked in the direction indicated by the captain's finger and noted a lifting of the skyline, an effect he had often observed while approaching a high

coast from the sea, though this was not quite so well defined. He stared in silence and without understanding, disregarding the impatient questions of the captain until he arrived at the conclusion that the elevation ahead was a great wave approaching the ship at high speed. In the moonlight he could see its steep unbroken slope shining like bright metal and rushing toward them, and he was disturbed by the thought that it might sweep the decks clean.

"It's a big wave, sir," he said at last in faint excitement.

"Yes, it is," the skipper agreed. "It couldn't be anything else. And it explains the shaking of the ship a few minutes ago. There's been an upheaval of the sea bottom, a submarine earthquake, and when the sea bottom shook, the sea shook with it. The sea floor hereabouts has risen nearly two thousand feet during the past twenty years."

"Tidal wave on the port bow, sir," the lookout reported belatedly. He had been uncertain what name to give it, or whether to make any report about it, since waves of any size are not usually reported aboard ships at sea. They take them as they come.

"Aye, aye," replied Mister Mergam. "Close all ports forrid."

They could see the forms of the men moving about on their bare feet as they carried out this order, scattering silently and passing among the shadows from the sails on the foremast. The ports were closed in a little while, and the men thought they ought to shut all the doors, but before they could begin to do this the big wave rolled up like the side of a mountain.

The skipper and the mate watched it come, not expecting any particular trouble from it, whatever its size, since ships are built to ride the seas in all weathers and conditions, and the wave was approaching from a favorable direction, about two points on the weather bow. As it drew nearer and revealed its enormous size, its smooth crest towering loftily above

the level of the sea, the two officers began to feel doubtful. They could hardly expect the ship to ride dry over such a mass of water as that, so abruptly sloped and moving so swiftly.

When it reached the bows of the *Unicorn,* she gave a mighty heave and lifted her head in a gallant effort to climb the watery height, but she could not rise swiftly enough. Halfway up, her bowsprit and cutwater drove into it, and it broke over her, coming down on the decks with a solid crash that seemed to beat her under the sea. It swept over the forecastle head and rolled along the main deck in an avalanche, burying the houses far under and foaming against the masts as high as the foot of the courses. Rolling over the poop a fathom deep, it submerged the skipper, the mate, and the man at the wheel. They held on grimly, and in a few seconds the wave passed on.

The water sluiced off the decks into the calm sea, and soon all was normal again, save that the galley fire was black out, the morning coffee was ruined, and all the pots and pans were adrift in 18 inches of salt water. Both forecastles were flooded, because the watch on deck, having been given barely enough time to close the ports, had not been able to shut the doors, and the watch below came spluttering out, cursing the other blokes for not having sense enough to do such things without waiting for orders.

"Call yourselves sailors," they sneered malevolently. "You ain't got sense enough to tighten your belts when your pants are slippin' down. Nurses is what you need." They raved back and forth till somebody struck out and the forward deck became a tumbled scene of fighting sailors, cursing and mauling each other but inflicting no serious injuries. Like a pack of sportive demons in the shadows of the moon they rolled about the main deck as far aft as the main hatch, locked in fierce embraces of sound and fury.

The skipper and the mate stood on the poop watching the brawl, and a light came into Mister Mergam's

eye. Extracting a heavy teakwood belaying pin from the taffrail, he swung it gently up and down, almost lovingly, holding it loosely in his right hand.

"I'd better put a stop to that," he suggested to the skipper.

"No," said Captain Garton. "They won't hurt each other too much, and a little exercise will do them good. They've had it too easy this passage."

Mister Mergam seemed disappointed by this decision, but he obediently replaced the pin in the rail and continued to watch the waning battle on the forward deck.

Before long, the rage of the men abated and they separated two by two. Returning to their respective forecastles, they found that the water had drained out through the scupper holes, so the starboard watch lit their pipes and turned in to smoke while falling asleep. In the galley the cook cursed tidal waves and everything else as he gathered up his pots and pans and relit the fire in the stove after cleaning out the mess of sodden coals. It was now half-past four, and the morning coffee—the most welcome event of the day to seafaring men—was due at two bells, therefore he must hurry. He would have a fresh brew ready in time if it could be done.

The skipper felt better after witnessing the fight between the watches, and he smiled for the first time in weeks as he listened to the reeking obscenities of the cook. There was something reckless and defiant in his piercing blasphemies that pleased the old man, who suffered a great deal from indigestion. But he soon became aware of the chill from his wet clothing and turned toward the companion with a sigh.

"Keep a sharp lookout, Mister," he said to the mate as he started down to the cabin. "We don't want any more tidal waves."

"Very good, sir," Mister Mergam replied, swearing under his breath. The skipper's remark seemed to imply that he was to blame for tidal waves.

"Damned old fool," he muttered. "He didn't even know the difference between a collision with a derelict and an earthquake shock."

In the port forecastle the men of the watch were changing into dry dungarees and discussing after their fashion the events of the morning.

"That was a big sea," said one.

"Aye, it was, but I've seen bigger off the Horn," old Charlie declared.

"You never seen a bigger one anywheres, Charlie. You must of dreamt it."

"This old hooker is full of bad luck."

"So she is. She ain't had a lucky day since we left port."

"When d'ya think coffee will be ready?"

"Ask the cook. Mebbe he knows."

"I give Snooky in the sta'bo'd watch a coupla black eyes."

"Take a squint at yer own."

"The skipper's crazy."

"Naw, he ain't crazy. He's sick. He oughta stay ashore."

"Say! Did ya feel that? What the hell was that?"

On the quiet poop Mister Mergam stood with feet apart, glancing listlessly at the sky line from time to time, casting his eyes aloft at the towering sails, surveying the deck, and watching the play of shadows born of the moon. The color of the sea had changed, and it no longer gleamed with the purple blue of deep water. As they were not within 200 miles of the Grand Bank he surmised that the disturbance on the sea bottom had sent up clouds of ooze that imparted a dull hue to the water. While considering this, turning it over in his mind with slow interest, he felt the ship quiver again to a sudden shock, altogether different from the first. It felt as if a floating body, soft and enormously heavy, had come to rest against the bottom of the ship, and he went swiftly to the taffrail to peer intently over the side. At the same time he noticed the men of the watch running silently

to the main rail forward, where they also stared down at the sea. Evidently they had felt the shock. He had just finished his casual observance of them when the skipper erupted on the poop again, very much annoyed.

"What was that, Mister Mergam?" he demanded in his usual exasperated tone. "That was no earthquake shock. Something hit her that time—you can't deny it. Something actual and material struck against her bottom."

"Yes, sir. I'm not denying it. Something certainly hit her then, and I'm looking to see what it was, but there's nothing in sight."

"Nothing in sight," the skipper repeated. "Nothing in sight. What in the name of all the mysteries is happening to this ship, anyhow? All sorts of things going on, and nobody knows anything about it!"

There came another soft, heavy shock, followed by others at short intervals.

"My God!" the skipper whispered, staring fearfully down at the muddy sea. More and more of the things, a whole crowd of them, monsters of some horrible sort, clamped along her keel, driven up from the bottom of the sea by the disturbance down there! "What are they? Can you tell me that, Mister Mergam?"

"No, sir, I can't," the mate replied uneasily.

They stared at each other in the light of the sinking moon, two perturbed and bewildered men suspecting some lurking danger.

"The wheel's jammed, sir!" cried Thomson. "I can't move it."

The skipper and the mate turned and stared at the man, watching his strenuous but unavailing efforts to move the wheel.

"She's lost headway, sir," said Mister Mergam, looking over the side again. "She's standing still."

"You're quite right," the captain agreed in a different tone of voice, low and troubled. "These big brutes clinging to her bottom have stopped her, and one of them has clamped itself across the rudder.

Whatever they are down there, they're keeping out of sight. Ah! There's another. That one struck forrid under the bows. There must be a lot of them."

The man at the wheel, peering at the timepiece in the binnacle, saw that it was five o'clock and made two bells. Forward on the forecastle head, the man on lookout struck the ship's bell twice, two measured strokes that boomed and lingered about the shadowy decks. Placid now, and smoking a short clay pipe as black as ebony, the cook, who had flaming red hair and hailed from Glasgow, thrust his head through the galley doorway and asked what the hell was wrong now. The men strung along the rail told him they didn't bloody well know what was wrong, but if he would hurry with the coffee they would tell him as soon as they found out.

"If there's anither tidal wave comin', give us a shout so's I can close the doorrs and the porrts," the cook requested.

"How about coffee?" they inquired, turning from the rail to observe him with the bantering regard that sailors bestow on sea cooks.

"It'll be ready in aboot ten meenits," he promised them.

In a little less time than that he beat with a ladle on the bottom of an empty pan, making a racket that might have been heard or felt by the beasts along the keel, and the men left the rail to fetch their hook-pots from the forecastle. They were puzzled and a trifle scared and had little to say to each other, though they had chattered enough when those queer shocks had been felt. Some of them thought whales had rubbed their backs against the hull, but others argued that this would not have stopped the ship's headway. There must be a lot of big soft beasts hanging on to her, scared up from the depths by the earthquake down there that had caused the tidal wave, or the ship wouldn't be standing still the way she was.

In silence they went one by one to the galley door and waited in line for their pots of coffee. Charlie

was first. He stood at the door holding his hook-pot inside, to be filled with a ladleful of the stuff the cook called coffee, dipped from a boiler on the stove.

The skipper and the mate still waited at the taffrail for a sight of the things from the deep, and the long inaction had begun to affect their nerves.

"If we could only see them, and find out what they are," muttered the captain, "we might be able to decide on some plan of action. But how can we fight against invisible things of unknown nature!" He paced back and forth along a short path between the taffrail and the standard binnacle, frowning impatiently, clenching and opening his hands nervously.

Mister Mergam had glanced forward at the sound of the cook's gong, and he watched the men as they came out of the forecastle and went to the galley door to await their turn for coffee. The first man in line received his coffee and started for the fore hatch, where he intended to sit while drinking it, and he did not see the long slender tentacle that quirted over the rail above his head and waved here and there seeking what he might find.

It found old Charlie as he reached the fore hatch, concealed from his watchmates by the corner of the forward house, wrapped itself round his neck with a strangling hold that prevented him from uttering a sound, and dragged him violently over the rail.

The next man, following with his coffee, saw Charlie at the rail, striking madly at the tentacle with his hook-pot, and a startled yell attracted the attention of the others. They spun round and saw old Charlie going over the side in a headlong dive with his waving hook-pot, but were too late to notice the deadly tentacle round his neck. They rushed to the rail and stared down at the dull water, but the man who had seen the tentacle held back. He knew the sort of beast it belonged to.

Men may sail the seas for a lifetime and seldom,

if ever, come in contact with the nightmare monsters that inhabit the caves and cliffs of the ocean floor. Gazing down at the slightly muddy water, the men of the *Unicorn* saw a squirming mass of interwoven tentacles resembling enormous snakes, immensely thick and long and tapering at their free ends to the size of a man's thumb. It was a foul sight, an obscene growth from the dark places of the world, where incessant hunger is the driving force. At one place, down near the bulge of the hull, appeared a staring gorgon face with great lidless eyes and a huge parrot beak that moved slightly, opening and shutting as though it had just crunched and swallowed a meal of warm flesh. In its neighborhood the water was stained a reddish hue, possibly with blood from the veins of old Charlie. There were many of those deep-sea devils under the ship, ravenously hungry and now aware that there was food on her decks in the form of puny bodies that could be had for the taking.

Suddenly the men of the watch saw the air above the rail alive with tentacles. They swayed uncertainly for a second or two in order to feel the position of their prey, then lashed out with swift aim at the horrified men. Whipping round them, they tightened their hold to a vise-like grip that no human strength could break, though a sharp knife could slice them in two if properly used. The men were panic-stricken and struck wildly with sheath knives and hook-pots, but failed in their excitement to cut themselves adrift and went over the rail screaming. The boatswain, carpenter, and sailmaker jumped up from the main hatch and rushed across the deck to rescue the few survivors of the watch, but half-a-dozen tentacles seized them and jerked them over the side, striking futile blows.

When the first tentacle came over the rail and fastened itself on Charlie, the steward was ambling forward to the galley for the cabin coffee. On seeing the man dragged violently over the rail the steward stopped and stared in amazement, trying to imagine

what had happened to the sailor and thinking that perhaps he had become suddenly insane. The reeling gait of old Charlie, however, his struggles and the manner in which he went over the rail, convinced the steward that something had hold of him. His smooth-shaven face, round and placid, became puckered with anxiety and he stared in growing consternation at the struggle that developed between the men of the watch and the tapering tentacles that whipped over the rail in dozens. While he stood watching this primitive contest, a tentacle flung itself round his portly waist and dragged him down before his whimper could rise to a scream of terror.

The cook with the flaming hair came out of the galley with a carving knife and tried to run aft to the poop, but was caught. He slashed off the tentacle but was seized by others and dragged over, the severed tentacle clinging round his body. The men of the starboard watch tumbled out raving with drawn knives in ready hands. They had to divide forces to protect themselves on both sides, as the tentacles were now swaying above each rail from forecastle to poop. Though they fought with fury and some skill they had small chance to win against such desperate odds. Some of them jumped into the rigging to get out of reach by climbing aloft, but the men who tried that exposed themselves to the beasts lurking below and were snatched away immediately. There were too many tentacles to be cut, and even when they were slashed clean through they continued to cling round a man's body. They had suction cups on their under sides and rings of sharp claws within these.

"There's the answer," said the mate to the skipper when the battle began after the death of old Charlie. "The things sticking to the bottom are giant octopuses. They're the biggest things in the sea, except for the whales, and only the sperm whale can tackle them. He feeds on them, and sometimes they feed on him, if they can hold him down till he drowns. I'll

get a knife and give the men a hand."

"Better do that than stand here telling me things I already know," the skipper retorted sharply. "There's men dying forrid there."

The mate hurried to the companion on the way to his room for a hunting knife he kept there—a beautiful weapon hitherto useless, with an eight-inch blade as sharp as a razor. The octopus which had folded itself over the stern and jammed the rudder, aware that its companions were obtaining food from the top of this rock-like mass they were clinging to, flung two tentacles over the taffrail and waved one of them in Mister Mergam's direction.

"Look out, sir!" The man at the wheel screamed a warning.

Mister Mergam was just about to descend the companionway when he heard this cry, and he threw a swift glance over his shoulder, saw the thing flicking toward him, and tried to jump down the companionway. He was too late. The tentacle wrapped itself round his chest and tightened. He strained against it, uttering a faint grunt, and braced himself with hands and feet against the hatch.

"Bring a knife, sir, and cut me loose," he implored the captain, who stared at him in horror and rushed away for a knife, going down the poop ladder to the door leading to the cabin from the main deck.

The other tentacle found the man at the wheel and caught him round the waist, binding one arm to his side but leaving the other free. It was the rule aboard the *Unicorn* that no seaman should wear a knife while standing his trick at the wheel, therefore Thomson carried none. He knew that human strength could not prevail against the power of these tentacles, though they could be cut, and he waited for the return of the skipper with the knife. Meantime, he made a sudden jerk and dragged the tentacle a couple of feet toward him, wrapped two turns of it round a spoke of the wheel, and held it fast there. It required desperate strength to do that with one hand, and he

succeeded only because he was an exceptionally powerful man. Now the octopus could not drag him over the side without breaking the spoke, which was teakwood and very tough.

The mate had nothing but his hands, and these could not serve him. A sharp ax was hung on the bulkhead a few steps below him in the companionway, and he made supreme efforts to go down there against the pull of the beast to secure this weapon. His efforts were unsuccessful, for the octopus refused to slack up and tightened its grip till he groaned with the pain of it.

Though the skipper had not been gone more than a few seconds, Mister Mergam thought he would never come back and cried in a gasping voice for him to hurry. Captain Garton shouted that he could not find the knife in the mate's cabin and was bringing the ax from the bulkhead. He was coming right up.

"For God's sake, hurry!" the mate entreated. "The brute's crushing me."

The skipper wrenched the ax out of the slings and staggered up the companion to cut Mister Mergam free, but as he reached him the mate was dragged violently away from the hatch. Captain Garton followed in urgent pursuit. Dashing out on deck, he made a swift step toward the unfortunate mate and swung up the ax for a severing stroke, but before the blade fell Mister Mergam was whipped with a crash against the taffrail and went down over the side.

The man at the wheel found it difficult to hold against the pull of the octopus, even with a double turn of the tentacle round the spoke. He was gasping and purple in the face, and the harder he strove against it the tighter the tentacle was drawn. He was rapidly becoming exhausted. After peering over the side for a few precious moments to see what became of his lost mate, the skipper drew back from the rail horrified and trembling. He was not a strong man. Turning toward the wheel, he noted the perilous plight of the man there, and stumbled across the deck

intending to sever the tentacle where it was wrapped round the spoke. In his condition of quaking repulsion he could hardly lift the ax and stood for seconds trying to swing it above his head.

The octopus jamming the rudder eased its pressure down there, and the wheel spun round under the pull of the tentacle, which slipped off the spoke. Thomson was hurtled across the poop and over the side, crashing against the skipper and knocking him down. The ax fell from Captain Garton's hands, and he rose staggering to pick it up. As he seized it he saw another tentacle whipping over the rail toward him, and in a surge of blind fury he swung the ax, which left his hands and went flashing into the sea. He swooned when the tentacle gripped him, and the octopus drew him down.

Cowering on the forecastle head, the man on lookout saw the last of the crew go down to feed the octopuses, and his mind roved in every direction searching for a means of saving his life. Up to the present no tentacles had come up over the head rail, and he stood absolutely still, hoping that they would not find him.

But in this he was disappointed. One of them came up and waved about, drawing nearer every second. Out of his mind with terror, he sprang to the rail and saw in the water below the appalling face of an octopus. Taking his knife by the blade, he threw it with miraculous aim and saw it sink out of sight in the eye of the beast, which went into a tremendous flurry. Looking aft, the man saw that there were few tentacles now waving over the main deck, and he crept down the ladder to look for a knife. Stealing along the port side, he searched eagerly but could not find one, returned along the starboard side and met the same result. All the men had gone down fighting with the knives in their hands, and the hook-pots. Reaching the fore hatch, he decided to enter the forecastle and shut the door. The ports were already

closed. But he was just a moment too late. They got him.

A little while later a pod of sperm whales came up to blow not far from the *Unicorn;* and the octopuses, feeling the near presence of their deadly enemies, went away from there and returned to the deep places.

The ship *Merivale,* heading eastward some days out of New York, sighted a ship with all sail set. She was observed to behave in an erratic manner and appeared to be abandoned, since there was nobody at the wheel or about the decks. In the gentle breeze that was blowing shortly after sunrise the strange vessel bore away to the west, came up in the wind with all her canvas flapping, paid off slowly, and bore away again, repeating this endlessly. The skipper and the second mate of the *Merivale* watched her queer behavior from the poop, and, as no answer was made to their signals, a boat was sent off to the stranger to investigate.

The boat pulled alongside the *Unicorn,* and the second mate was boosted to the rail. They hove up the boat's painter, which he made fast, and scrambled up beside him. Except for some stains of coffee on the fore deck, which had not completely dried, the decks were clear and shipshape. In the cabin the second mate noted that the table was set for coffee, but the dishes had not been used. He scratched his head in complete bewilderment. All the boats were in the chocks, their covers untouched, and there was no sign of disease or mutiny. As he stood pondering the mysterious situation, one of his men came aft and halted in front of him.

"They ain't been gone very long, sir," he reported. "The fire's still fresh in the galley stove."

FRANK R. STOCKTON

THE LADY, OR THE TIGER

In the very olden time there lived a semi-barbaric king, a man of exuberant fancy, and of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts. He was greatly given to self-communing; and, when he and himself agreed upon anything, the thing was done. When his domestic and political systems moved smoothly, his nature was bland and genial; but whenever there was a little hitch, he was blander and more genial still, for nothing pleased him so much as to make the crooked straight, and crush down uneven places—as in the public arena, by exhibitions of manly and beastly valor. The arena of the king, with its encircling galleries, its mysterious vaults, and its unseen passages, was an agent of poetic justice, in which crime was punished, or virtue rewarded, by the decrees of an impartial and incorruptible chance.

When a subject was accused of a crime of sufficient importance to interest the king, public notice was given that on an appointed day the fate of the accused person would be decided in the king's arena. When all the people had assembled in the galleries, and the king, surrounded by his court, sat high up on his throne of royal state on one side of the arena, he gave a signal, a door beneath him opened, and the accused subject stepped out into the amphitheater. Directly opposite him, on the other side of the enclosed space, were two doors, exactly alike and side by side. It was the duty and the privilege of the person on trial, to walk directly to these doors and open one of them. He could open either door he pleased: he was subject to no guidance or influence but that of impartial and incorruptible chance.

If he opened the one, there came out of it a hungry tiger, the fiercest and most cruel that could be procured, which immediately sprang upon him, and tore him to pieces, as a punishment for his guilt. The moment that the case of the criminal was thus decided, doleful iron bells were clanged, great wails went up from the hired mourners posted on the outer rim of the arena, and the vast audience, with bowed heads and downcast hearts, wended slowly their homeward way, mourning greatly that one so young and fair, or so old and respected, should have merited so dire a fate.

But, if the accused person opened the other door, there came forth from it a lady, the most suitable to his years and station that his majesty could select among his fair subjects; and to this lady he was immediately married, as a reward of his innocence. It mattered not that he might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own selection: the king allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward. The exercises took place immediately, and in the arena. Another door opened beneath the king, and a priest, followed by a band of choristers, and dancing maidens blowing joyous airs on golden horns, advanced to where the pair stood, side by side; and the wedding was promptly and cheerily solemnized. Then the gay brass bells rang forth their merry peals, the people shouted glad hurrahs, and the innocent man, preceded by children strewing flowers on his path, led his bride to his home.

This was the king's semi-barbaric method of administering justice. Its perfect fairness is obvious. The criminal could not know out of which door would come the lady: he opened either he pleased, without having the slightest idea whether, in the next instant, he was to be devoured or married. On some occasions the tiger came out of one door, and on some out of the other. The decisions of this tribunal were not only fair, they were positively determinate: the ac-

cused person was instantly punished if he found himself guilty; and, if innocent, he was rewarded on the spot, whether he liked it or not.

There was no escape from the judgments of the king's arena.

The institution was a very popular one. When the people gathered together on one of the great trial days, they never knew whether they were to witness a bloody slaughter or a hilarious wedding. This element of uncertainty lent an interest to the occasion which it could not otherwise have attained. Thus, the masses were entertained and pleased, and the thinking part of the community could bring no charge of unfairness against this plan; for did not the accused person have the whole matter in his own hands?

This semi-barbaric king had a daughter as blooming as his most florid fancies, and with a soul as fervent and imperious as his own. As is usual in such cases, she was the apple of his eye, and loved by him above all humanity. Among his courtiers was a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens. This royal maiden was well satisfied with her lover, for he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom; and she loved him with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong.

This love affair moved on happily for many months, until one day the king happened to discover its existence. He did not hesitate nor waver in regard to his duty in the premises. The youth was immediately cast into prison, and a day was appointed for his trial in the king's arena. This, of course, was an especially important occasion; and his majesty, as well as all the people, was greatly interested in the workings and development of this trial. Never before had such a case occurred; never before had a subject dared to love the daughter of a king.

The tiger-cages of the kingdom were searched for the most savage and relentless beasts, from which the

fiercest monster might be selected for the arena; and the ranks of maiden youth and beauty throughout the land were carefully surveyed by competent judges, in order that the young man might have a fitting bride in case fate did not determine for him a different destiny. Of course, everybody knew that the deed with which the accused was charged had been done. He had loved the princess, and neither he, she, nor anyone else thought of denying the fact. But the king would not think of allowing any fact of this kind to interfere with the workings of the tribunal, in which he took such great delight and satisfaction. No matter how the affair turned out, the youth would be disposed of; and the king would take an esthetic pleasure in watching the course of events, which would determine whether or not the young man had done wrong in allowing himself to love the princess.

The appointed day arrived. From far and near the people gathered, and thronged the great galleries of the arena; and crowds, unable to gain admittance, massed themselves against its outside walls. The king and his court were in their places, opposite the twin doors—those fateful portals, so terrible in their similarity. All was ready. The signal was given.

A door beneath the royal party opened, and the lover of the princess walked into the arena. Tall, beautiful, fair, his appearance was greeted with a low hum of admiration and anxiety. Half the audience had not known so grand a youth had lived among them. No wonder the princess loved him! What a terrible thing for him to be there!

As the youth advanced into the arena, he turned, as the custom was, to bow to the king. But he did not think at all of that royal personage—his eyes were fixed upon the princess, who sat to the right of her father.

Had it not been for the barbarism in her nature, it is probable that lady would not have been there; but her intense and fervid soul would not allow her to be absent on an occasion in which she was so ter-

ribly interested. From the moment that the decree had gone forth, that her lover should decide his fate in the king's arena, she had thought of nothing, night or day, but this great event and the various subjects connected with it. Possessed of more power, influence, and force of character than anyone who had ever before been interested in such a case, she had done what no other person had done—she had possessed herself of the secret of the doors. She knew in which of the two rooms, that lay behind those doors, stood the cage of the tiger, with its open front, and in which waited the lady. Through these thick doors, heavily curtained with skins on the inside, it was impossible that any noise or suggestion should come from within to the person who should approach to raise the latch of one of them; but gold, and the power of a woman's will, had brought the secret to the princess.

And not only did she know in which room stood the lady ready to emerge, all blushing and radiant, should her door be opened, but she knew who the lady was. It was one of the fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court who had been selected as the reward of the accused youth, should he be proved innocent of the crime of aspiring to one so far above him; and the princess hated her. Often had she seen, or imagined that she had seen, this fair creature throwing glances of admiration upon the person of her lover, and sometimes she thought these glances were perceived and even returned. Now and then she had seen them talking together. It was but for a moment or two, but much can be said in a brief space; it may have been on most unimportant topics, but how could she know that? The girl was lovely, but she had dared to raise her eyes to the loved one of the princess; and, with all the intensity of the savage blood transmitted to her through long lines of wholly barbaric ancestors, she hated the woman who blushed and trembled behind that silent door.

When her lover turned and looked at her, and his eye met hers as she sat there paler and whiter than

anyone in the vast ocean of anxious faces about her, he saw, by that power of quick perception which is given to those whose souls are one, that she knew behind which door crouched the tiger, and behind which stood the lady. He had expected her to know it. He understood her nature, and his soul was assured that she would never rest until she made plain to herself this thing, hidden to all other lookers-on, even to the king. The only hope for the youth in which there was an element of certainty was based upon the success of the princess in discovering this mystery; and the moment he looked upon her, he saw she had succeeded, as in his soul he knew she would succeed.

Then it was that his quick and anxious glance asked the question: *Which?*

It was as plain to her as if he shouted it from where he stood. There was not an instant to be lost. The question was asked in a flash; it must be answered in another.

Her right arm lay on the cushioned parapet before her. She raised her hand, and made a slight, quick movement toward the right. No one but her lover saw her. Every eye but his was fixed on the man in the arena.

He turned and with a firm and rapid step he walked across the empty space.

Every heart stopped beating, every breath was held, every eye was fixed immovably upon that man.

Without the slightest hesitation, he went to the door on the right, and opened it.

Now, the point of the story is this: *Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady?*

The more we reflect upon this question, the harder it is to answer. It involves a study of the human heart which leads us through devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way. Think of it, fair reader, not as if the decision of the question depended upon yourself, but upon that hot-blooded, semi-barbaric princess, her soul at a white heat be-

neath the combined fires of despair and jealousy. She had lost him, but who should have him?

How often, in her waking hours and in her dreams, had she started in wild horror, and covered her face with her hands as she thought of her lover opening the door on the other side which waited the cruel fangs of the tiger!

But how much oftener had she seen him at the other door! How in her grievous reveries had she gnashed her teeth, and torn her hair, when she saw his start of rapturous delight as he opened the door of the lady! How her soul had burned in agony when she had seen him rush to meet that woman, with her flushing cheek and sparkling eye of triumph; when she had seen him lead her forth, his whole frame kindled with the joy of recovered life; when she had heard the glad shouts from the multitude, and the wild ringing of the happy bells; when she had seen the priest, with his joyous followers, advance to the couple, and make them man and wife before her very eyes; and when she had seen them walk away together upon their path of flowers, followed by the tremendous shouts of the hilarious multitude, in which her one despairing shriek was lost and drowned!

Would it not be better for him to die at once, and go to wait for her in the blessed regions of semi-barbaric futurity?

And yet, that awful tiger, those shrieks, that blood!

Her decision had been indicated in an instant, but it had been made after days and nights of anguished deliberation. She had known she would be aked, she had decided what she would answer, and, without the slightest hesitation, she had moved her hand to the right.

The question of her decision is one not to be lightly considered, and it is not for me to presume to set myself up as the one person able to answer it. And so I leave it with all of you:

Which came out of the opened door,—the lady, or the tiger?

AMBROSE BIERCE

AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water 20 feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as *support,* that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest—a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the center of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for 100 yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loop-holed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway of the slope between the bridge and

fort were the spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at parade rest, the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the center of the bridge, not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates, but making no sign.

Death is a dignity who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about 35 years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his habit, which was that of a planter. His features were good—a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock-coat. He wore a mustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties

of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his "unsteadfast footing," then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet.

A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near-by—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. *If I could free my hands,* he thought, *I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigor-*

ously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance.

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it, the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

Peyton Farquhar was a well-to-do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner and like other slave owners a politician, he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army that had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in wartime. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was fetching the water her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

"The Yanks are repairing the railroads," said the man, "and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order and built a stockade on the north bank. The

commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels or trains will be summarily hanged. I saw the order."

"How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?" Farquhar asked.

"About thirty miles."

"Is there no force on this side the creek?"

"Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge."

"Suppose a man—a civilian and student of hanging—should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel," said Farquhar, smiling, "what could he accomplish?"

The soldier reflected. "I was there a month ago," he replied. "I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tow."

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened—ages later, it seemed to him—by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fiber of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The in-

tellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum.

Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud plash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river!—the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the darkness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface—knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. *To be hanged and drowned,* he thought, *that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair.*

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrist apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. *What splendid effort!—what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavor! Bravo!* The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water snake. *Put it back, put it back!* He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst

pang that he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire; his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish!

But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draft of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon the face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragonflies' wings, the strokes of the water-spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him. The captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and

horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a gray eye and remembered having read that gray eyes were keenest, and all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter-swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking into the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, presaging, and enforcing tranquillity in the men—with what accurately measured intervals fell those cruel words:

"Attention, company! . . . Shoulder arms! . . . Ready! . . . Aim! . . . Fire!"

Farquhar dived—dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley and, rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther down stream—nearer to

safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning. *The officer,* he reasoned, *will not make that martinet's error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!*

An appalling plash within two yards of him was followed by a loud, rushing sound, *diminuendo,* which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps! A rising sheet of water curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him!

The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond. *They will not do that again,* he thought; *the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. That is a good gun.*

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men—all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color—that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration that made him giddy and sick. In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him

from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of Æolian harps. He had no wish to perfect his escape—was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

A whiz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled canoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he traveled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman's road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famishing. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular

noises, among which—once, twice, and again—he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain and lifting his hand to it he found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue—he could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he had fallen asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the step she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swunk gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

MARGERY SHARP

THE SECOND STEP

As the car hummed smoothly round the last bend, and as the walls of the villa began to appear through the trees, young Druten put on the brake and dropped to twenty. It was a moment, he felt, to be taken slowly; and from the tail of his eye he could see his wife's small distinguished head lifting eagerly beside him. Slowing down still more, Druten glanced back into the car, where a Chinese man-servant and two little boys were wedged among the baggage. One small boy was Chinese, son of the servant, the other American, and son of the master.

"Is this it, Fu Lin?" asked Druten over his shoulder.

Fu Lin nodded. He was quite young, about the same age as his master, but with emotion so wrinkling his face he might have been anything up to a hundred. *Looks just like his father!* thought young Druten suddenly; and for an instant felt himself a child again, borne on a blue-clad shoulder and holding by a ropy tail of hair. . . .

The car turned in under palm trees and followed a wide sandy drive. After the fashion of that coast, the Villa Caterina stood sheerly against the sea, all its gardens in front and at the back only a broad stone terrace over the blue Mediterranean. At the end of the drive, before a loggia of white stone, Druten brought the car to a standstill and helped his wife to get out. They were both a little stiff, but neither of them noticed it; like Fu Lin, they were filled with a deep, an almost sacred emotion. They gazed on the white stone walls, and their hearts thumped within them; for this was their ancestral home that had been in

the family for two generations, and it contained, besides the famous picture gallery, an heirloom of such extraordinary interest and value that the Drutens went straight off to look for it before even glancing at the Rembrandts.

For the Rembrandts proved merely what everyone knew already—that Old Man Druten had made money; whereas the cross carved in the stone proved something known to hardly anyone at all—namely, that Old Man Druten had had a redeeming feature.

Of Old Man Druten's early life—until he fetched up East, that is, and married a wife out of the First Four Thousand—the undisputed facts amounted to no more than these: that between the ages of 30 and 40 he made money in San Francisco, in which city four young Chinamen, otherwise of good character, made four separate attempts to assassinate him. All the rest (as his wife's family pointed out) was mere rumor. With a fine contempt for gossip, Old Man Druten hired a bodyguard and went on making money. He made it out of drugstores, at about the same time that the republics of South America were beginning to acquire their taste for Chinese women. The rumors increasing, Old Man Druten strengthened his bodyguard and opened a new drugstore; but ill-luck was dogging him, for on the very day of opening an aged Chinaman, said to be grieving for the loss of a daughter, went and committed suicide on the new marble floor. It was at this point that Druten showed his metal. He went straight to the old man's son and offered him the post of valet and body-servant at an extremely adequate salary. The son mused awhile in filial piety, consulted his gods, and made a number of stipulations, among them being this, that he should bring along with him his own infant son and heir, a small boy of two years, yellow as butter and answering, like his sire, to the name of Fu Lin. Druten agreed: he would have agreed to anything. Fu Lin pondered again, pushed up the salary by 100%, and finally accepted.

With such an answer to slanderous tongues—the

son of the dead man his most trusted servant—Old Druten spent six months longer in San Francisco; but though no more attempts were made on his life, the time was spent chiefly in winding up his various businesses. This he did very successfully, retiring on an income which placed him well up in the second flight of American millionaires. He wasn't a Rockefeller, but he could give his wife Rembrandts. After the marriage, curiously enough—for Old Druten was scarcely a man of cosmopolitan culture—they settled in Europe, buying a large, rather beautiful villa on the shores of the Mediterranean. It had gardens on three sides and at the back a wide stone terrace, from the end of which a short steep flight of steps—the second, in those days, unmarked by any cross—ran straight down to the water. Here Mrs. Druten hung her pictures, received the local aristocracy, and in due course gave birth to a son; and here, after an uncommonly checkered career, Old Man Druten managed to die, if not actually in his bed, at any rate in a thoroughly domestic and affecting manner.

It happened in this way, that descending the terrace steps late one night—he was fond of being rowed about when all was still, over the black and silver waters—his old man's foot slipped on the second stair and he slid quietly as a fish into the deep of the bay. Fu Lin, who was already standing in the boat, instantly dived after, crying out as he did so to arouse the house. His call carried far across the water; a second later, from both house and village, lights flared suddenly and a confusion of voices cried from one to the other. Fishing boats put out, and all night long Fu Lin dived again and again, until in the early morning he had to be carried bodily to his bed. He was fainting with exhaustion but they had to lock his door; the first time they left him he came dragging himself forth and prepared to dive again.

But not till three days later was the body found. Nor in the end did Fu Lin find it, but a lad from a strange fishing boat who came fresh and strong and

spent one whole afternoon diving from the terrace wall. He found, not a couple of yards from the foot of the steps, a deep and unsuspected gully in the rocks; and in this gully the body had lain wedged while the boats passed above and Fu Lin cleft open water. They hauled Old Man Druten up and buried him under marble in the nearest Protestant cemetery; and a month later Fu Lin was dead too. He had done his work, he said, and saw no reason to go on living; but before he died he sat two consecutive days at the bottom of the terrace stairs, there carving out, on the second step, a big Christian cross in memory of his master.

"There it is, James," said Mrs. Druten softly.

They stared down in silence. They had expected it, yet not expected it, and now there it was, greened over a little by seaweed, but yet an unmistakable cross cut deep into the rock.

"And if a man's valet doesn't know the truth, who does?" asked Stella Druten. "To inspire a devotion like that, James—it just proves he was good at heart."

Young Druten drew a long breath. "I believe I remember it," he said. "Anyway, I remember mother bringing me here, and seeing old Fu Lin squatted below, and then a day or two later her telling me that he'd gone away. . . ." Druten cleared his throat and, reaching up to a big stone urn, broke off a couple of sprays of sweet geranium. "What they used to call a broken heart, I suppose. At any rate the doctors couldn't find anything wrong. But he died all the same, and his body went back home in a first-class coffin."

In a long pause that followed they heard for the first time the light, regular lapping of the green water. It sounded peaceful, friendly; it belonged with the still sunlight and the smell of flowers.

Stella Druten slipped her hand through her husband's arm and pressed it softly. "As soon as Jimmy's old enough we must tell him too. It's strange, isn't it? —your father and Fu Lin's, then you and our Fu Lin

himself, and now Jimmy and little Charles. . . . I wish they'd call him Fu Lin as well. That makes three generations, James."

Young Druten nodded. "I guess it's just how the Southerners must feel about their old darkies. They look on them as part of the family, and the darkies feel it too. They—I don't know how it is—they sort of keep up the family traditions, and Fu Lin's the same. This place, for instance, he loves as though it were his own home; if it hadn't been for him I might never have come back here, but he used to talk about it and remind me of it till he made me homesick too. Mother used to tell me that when she shut up the house and went home he was so brokenhearted that she offered to leave him behind with the caretaker; and he'd have jumped at it, I guess, if he hadn't had me to look after."

His wife smled back at him. "Just how old were you both, honey?"

"I was six and Fu Lin was eight. But he took himself very seriously. His father had told him to look after me, you see, and he was sure going to do it. He did it for the next twelve years at a stretch, right until I went to college; and then as they didn't encourage valets at Harvard, he seized the opportunity to go back to 'Frisco, marry a wife, and beget a son. The day I graduated, back he came, bringing the two-year-old with him, and though he didn't actually put it into words, I gathered that I now had his permission to marry as soon as I liked."

The pressure on his arm tightened. "But what about *his* wife?" asked Mrs. Druten. "Didn't she mind being left?"

"I have an idea she died when Charles was born. But somehow their women didn't seem to bother them," said young Druten simply. "As long as they have us to look after nothing else counts. We don't deserve it, of course, but there it is; and as an awful consequence, darling, I've an inherited tendency to quote Gunga Din."

He spoke lightly, but the tale had moved him nevertheless; and as they turned to go he dropped back a moment and with a swift, half-furtive gesture tossed a spray of sweet geranium onto the still water.

Like many other Americans of the same age, class, and fortune, the Drutens had early turned their backs on the land of their fathers. Their true, their spiritual home was Europe, and it was with a genuine sensation of relief that they unpacked their trunks and settled down for life at the Villa Caterina. During the first six months there they made only two excursions, one to Oberammergau and one to Bayreuth: the villa, they said, was too delicious to leave; and all their guests agreed with them. For there were guests by the dozen, many of them French or Italian, but many more from the States; and whereas the French and Italians were always led straight to the picture gallery, the Americans, especially those in a hurry, were swiftly shepherded toward the terrace steps. Old Man Druten was still pretty widely remembered, but the sight of the cross and the tale of his servant's devotion never failed to make their effect. The story would be passed on in Paris, repeated on the boat, and finally spread far and wide through every State in the Union; and of all the visiting troop not one failed to remark on the intriguingly feudal atmosphere provided by Fu Lin and his son.

And indeed, without in any way obtruding themselves, the grave young Chinaman and the little yellow boy attracted at least as much attention as either of the Rembrandts. They shared in Old Druten's romantic history, and indeed were often to be seen during the hour of the siesta, standing side by side at the top of the terrace steps: the boy gazing solemnly downward, and his father explaining, in slow guttural phrases, the meaning of the carved cross. For they still spoke to each other in Chinese, and the Drutens, without understanding a syllable, thoroughly appreciated the exotic effect. Their son, they hoped, might possibly pick up a word or two, for like a royal whip-

ping-boy, little Chinese Charles did lessons with Jimmy Druten, played with him in the garden, and slept next door to the nursery as Fu Lin himself slept next to Jimmy's father. The child was a body-servant in the making, and followed in the steps of his fathers with true Oriental piety.

"The way he just worships Jimmy is getting too ridiculous," Mrs. Druten used to say laughingly; and visitor after visitor, glancing out from the window, would see a little white boy hitting a ball while a little yellow boy scrambled after.

At games in general Charles was stupid and clumsy, his only athletic talent lying in the pitching of stones. He could pitch a smooth round pebble plumb onto a five-franc piece at a distance of 30 paces, and Druten now and then had thoughts that as the lad grew older he might be trained as a bowler and play for the M.C.C. For Druten, unlike his wife, who remained faithful to the Continent, had quickly got past being cosmopolitan and was now inclined to the exclusively British.

The boys also did lessons together, and in the schoolroom too, young Charles moved at a respectful distance behind his companion. Only his hands were clever: with pen or brush he could do anything he pleased, write a flowing Italian script or draw big black ideographs on a scroll of silky paper. His hands then were beautiful, moving with calm, delicate assurance, and handling almost with tenderness the materials of his art. Nor was the tenderness a matter of seeming only, for when, one day toward the end of the fifth month, there was found on the terrace a sea bird with a broken wing, the thin yellow fingers dropped scroll and brushes and worked like magic over the shattered bone. With his father's help little Charles made splints half a match long and bandages a centimeter wide; and presently the bird could walk about the terrace and preen its sound wing. For seven days the improvement continued, but on the eighth,

while the boys were at their lessons, a rat found and killed it.

So after that Charles had an enemy, and the throwing-stones whizzed vainly two or three times a day.

Thus the pleasant life went on, unique (said the visitors) in its mingling of cosmopolitan culture and the joys of domesticity, until one afternoon an odd thing happened.

It was the hour of the siesta, but Druten, though stretched out on a couch, found himself unable to rest. He got up, drank some water, and went to the window which, like those of all the other principal rooms, looked out over the sea. For perhaps five minutes he stood there, blinking at the sun on the water and wondering whether to lie down again; and then, on the terrace below, something caught his attention.

Impervious as ever to the midday heat, little yellow-skinned Charles had come out of the passage door and was lying in wait for his enemy the rat. He had with him his favorite throwing-stones, a pair of big yellowish pebbles polished and rounded by the sea: and as Druten watched, the boy settled himself in the shadow, motionless as a statue, his eyes roving from edge to edge of the sun-dried shrubs.

He had not long to wait. Almost at once, on the far side of the terrace, a bunch of foliage quivered slightly. It made a compact blot of shadow, vandyked at the edge to a pattern of leaves; and as Druten and the boy watched, the blot began slowly to change shape. One of the leaf-points was stretching itself out, it was whiskered on either side, it had two bright eyes; and soon a whole separate and complete outline had detached itself from the first. The rat was abroad and careless in the noonday sun.

Hardly daring to move, lest the beast should hear and take warning, Druten turned his eyes on the other shadow, till then still motionless as the wall behind it; and in that moment a hand flicked up and the pebble flew. The rat writhed once over and then

lay still, while from its broken head a small red blotch crept out over the stone.

"Hough!" grunted Charles.

And Druten, with lips half-open to shout applause, closed them again and held his peace; for there was something in the child's demeanor that seemed to show that the business was not yet finished. Without any sign of triumph the boy came slowly across the terrace, picked up the creature by the tail, and flung it contemptuously into the sea: then squatting down by the bloodstain took out a big single-bladed pocket-knife and began scraping at the stone. For half an hour, never raising his head, he scraped and scraped at the patch between his knees; and when he had finished there was a big Christian cross scratched deep into the rock.

This incident Druten found curiously disturbing. It started during the next few days all sorts of odd speculations, which, because he did not share them with anyone, gradually took possession of his mind. It bothered him, for instance, that the same symbol should have been used to commemorate both friend and enemy, and turning this problem idly in his head, he presently found himself embarked on a second train of thought at least as disturbing as the first. He began to recollect certain vague but unsavory rumors, which in San Francisco at any rate seemed still to cling about his father's name. Young Druten had visited that city but once when, at his mother's wish, he set up the Druten Memorial Fountain; and on account of those same malicious whispers he had not enjoyed his stay. Sheer rumor, of course; but there was also the witnessed fact of those four attempts on Old Man Druten's life: which would seem to show that the Chinese population at any rate took rumor rather seriously. . . .

"Only—the whole thing's fantastic!" said Druten aloud.

It was nearly two in the morning; for once, sitting alone in the big lounge, he had heard all the house-

hold go off to bed. Directly overhead his wife's footsteps passed gently down the corridor, she was going her rounds, looking first into the night-nursery, where Jimmy slept, then into Charles's room next door. Neither boy was awake tonight, for the footsteps passed on with hardly a pause; and the gentle shutting of her own door was the last sound in the house.

In the moments that passed while he listened young Druten's thoughts seemed suddenly to have raced ahead. He had left off at a general consideration of the San Franciso rumors and now found himself faced (with no intermediate step that he could remember) by a question so cut-and-dried in its brutality as to seem more like the fruit of a lifelong suspicion than of a three-days' doubt. The question was this: Given that Fu Lin the first had entered Old Druten's service with the deliberate intention of murdering him, why had he waited? Why not have done it at once, in San Francisco?

Answer: Because in San Francisco Old Druten still had a bodyguard; because in San Francisco his death would at once have cast suspicion on the whole Chinese community. Because—more slowly, more reluctantly, the third reason presented itself—because at that time Old Druten had not yet begotten a son.

"I'm going crazy," young Druten assured himself. "I've got a touch of the sun. . . ."

In the hall outside a clock chimed the hour. Grateful as at the lifting of a spell, he pulled himself out of the chair, loosened his shoulders, and with a conscious effort directed his mind to the tidying of the room. Two o'clock in the morning—just the time for wild imaginings! He plumped up a cushion, straightened a chair: the servants in the morning would be surprised at such neatness.

But his mind was not to be controlled by the folding of a paper; it had wandered 20-odd years back, to the night on the terrace when Old Druten met his end. An impressive scene it was, with lights and outcry and a faithful servant hurling himself again and

again into the waters of the bay; but for its earliest and most crucial moments—for what really happened first on the steps and then under water, where Fu Lin could swim like a fish—for all that there was only Fu Lin's own word. No one had doubted it; no one had asked, for example, any questions about times; and with a margin of no more than a few minutes, the old man might have been drowned and dead and wedged into the gully before even the alarm was sounded.

"Fantastic!" said young Druten again.

He picked up a handkerchief of his wife's, a picture-book of Jimmy's: from the handkerchief came a faint smell of chypre, but for the first time since his marriage the perfume brought him no thought of Stella. At last all was neat, and with a final look behind him, Druten went out into the hall and closed the door. In the extreme stillness the clock ticked heavily. It now showed a quarter past: but instead of going upstairs, he took a lantern in his hand and went down the passage to the terrace door.

Outside it was silent too, and so dark that Druten's lantern seemed to cast no more light than a Christmas candle. The smell of the sea, however, came strong and fresh, clearing his brain and sharpening his senses; and almost as readily as in broad daylight, he crossed the terrace to the head of the stairs. Halfway down he stopped and, leaning a little forward, swung a yellow disk of light over the last two steps. The last of them, water-lapped, showed green with seaweed; on the second Fu Lin's cross sprawled like a scar.

Irrationally, yet with increasing force, he had felt as though an actual view of the thing would help to settle his mind; and in this his instinct had been right, for suddenly, as he stood there, all doubts were removed, and as surely as though he had seen it he knew now what had passed. The old man fumbling at the step. Fu Lin not in the boat, as he had said, but following behind; and then the single broad ripple, the

single parting of the water, as two bodies intertwined slid gently into its depths. . . .

"He must have known about that gully before," thought young Druten presently.

And after a little interval—for his mind was as though numbed—another thought came to him: that there was still in the house Fu Lin the second; and not only Fu Lin, but Fu Lin's son, little Christian Charles, who slept in the room next to Jimmy. . . .

"I must go back and give warning," thought Druten quickly.

The faintest of sounds made him turn his head. On the topmost step, between him and the house, a Chinaman was standing.

ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

THE BLUE PAPER

More than 30 years ago a college classmate told me he had heard this strange story from an aged Canadian priest who said it was a folk-yarn long before it was imprisoned in print. Neither my classmate nor I ever discovered who wrote it. Cleveland Moffett, Elizabeth Jordan, and others have written versions of it since, based on my oral recital. Perhaps you may know the original source.

—ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE (1941).

John Thane, a successful young American, is sent by his firm to France on a business trip. He has never before been abroad and has no knowledge of French.

Arriving in Paris late in the afternoon, he takes a room at a hotel, then goes out to a sidewalk café. At a nearby table he sees a beautiful young Frenchwoman who smiles repeatedly at him. He makes no move to respond, and in a few moments she takes a piece of blue stationery from her handbag, writes something on it, and drops it at her feet. Then, with a meaningful glance at him, she rises and quickly disappears in the boulevard throng.

Curious, and now sorry he has failed to make the acquaintance of so charming a creature, Thane retrieves the paper. On it are a few words in French. Expecting that the young woman has written something for him, he asks the headwaiter to translate the message. After taking one horrified look at the words, the man orders Thane to leave the café.

Back at his hotel, Thane tells the manager of his strange experience and shows him the paper. The

manager eyes him in abhorrence and orders him to clear out of the hotel at once, refusing any explanation.

Dazed and miserable, Thane puts the blue paper in his pocket, determining not to show it to anyone else in that strange city.

Upon his return to America, he tells his story to the president of his firm, a native Frenchman, who has been his father's friend and his friend for years. The president readily agrees that it must be some cruel jest and offers to solve the mystery. But when Thane shows him the blue paper he stares at it with lips contorted, throws it in Thane's face and orders him out of the office and out of the firm's employ. Jobless, crushed, Thane stumbles into the street. Not only his peace of mind but now his career is lost—all because of a few words on a little piece of paper!

At last he has an idea. His old childhood nurse, who is devoted to him, is French. Going to her home, he pours out the tale of his hideous predicament. She swears solemnly that she will translate the mysterious words for him. As he sits down he draws out a pistol and lays it on the table between them. "A simple, correct translation," he reminds her, "or I will never leave this room alive." She nods and holds out her hand for the paper.

Thane digs into the pocket where he has always kept it. Then he fumbles hysterically from pocket to pocket. The paper is gone. Thane never saw it again.

JAMES M. CAIN

THE BABY IN THE ICEBOX

Of course there was plenty pieces in the paper about what happened out at the place last Summer, but they got it all mixed up, so I will now put down how it really was, and specially the beginning of it, so you will see it is not no lies in it.

Because when a guy and his wife begin to play leapfrog with a tiger, like you might say, and the papers put in about that part and not none of the stuff that started it off, and then one day say X marks the spot and next day say it wasn't really no murder but don't tell you what it was, why I don't blame people if they figure there was something funny about it or maybe that somebody ought to be locked up in the booby-hatch. But there wasn't no booby-hatch to this, nothing but plain onriness and a dirty rat getting it in the neck where he had it coming to him, as you will see when I get the first part explained right.

Things first begun to go sour between Duke and Lura when they put the cats in. They didn't need no cats. They had a combination auto camp, filling-station, and lunchroom out in the country a ways, and they got along all right. Duke run the filling-station, and got me in to help him, and Lura took care of the lunchroom and shacks. But Duke wasn't satisfied. Before he got this place he had raised rabbits, and one time he had bees, and another time canary birds, and nothing would suit him now but to put in some cats to draw trade. Maybe you think that's funny, but out here in California they got every kind of a farm there is, from kangaroos to alligators, and it was just about the idea that a guy like Duke would think up. So he begun building a cage, and one

day he showed up with a truckload of wildcats.

I wasn't there when they unloaded them. It was two or three cars waiting and I had to gas them up. But soon as I got a chance I went back there to look things over. And believe me, they wasn't pretty. The guy that sold Duke the cats had went away about five minutes before, and Duke was standing outside the cage and he had a stick of wood in his hand with blood on it. Inside was a dead cat. The rest of them was on a shelf, that had been built for them to jump on, and every one of them was snarling at Duke.

I don't know if you ever saw a wildcat, but they are about twice as big as a house cat, brindle gray, with tufted ears and a bobbed tail. When they set and look at you they look like a owl, but they wasn't setting and looking now. They was marching around, coughing and spitting, their eyes shooting red and green fire, and it was an ugly sight, specially with that bloody dead one down on the ground. Duke was pale, and the breath was whistling through his nose, and it didn't take no doctor to see he was scared to death.

"You better bury that cat," he says to me. "I'll take care of the cars."

I looked through the wire and he grabbed me. "Look out!" he says. "They'd kill you in a minute."

"In that case," I says, "how do I get the cat out?"

"You have to get a stick," he says, and shoves off.

I was pretty sore, but I begun looking around for a stick. I found one, but when I got back to the cage Lura was there. "How did that happen?" she says.

"I don't know," I says, "but I can tell you this much: If there's any more of them to be buried around here, you can get somebody else to do it. My job is to fix flats, and I'm not going to be no cat undertaker."

She didn't have nothing to say to that. She just stood there while I was trying the stick, and I could hear her toe snapping up and down in the sand, and from that I knowed she was choking it back, what she really thought, and didn't think no more of this here cat idea than I did.

The stick was too short. "My," she says, pretty disagreeable, "that looks terrible. You can't bring people out here with a thing like that in there."

"All right," I snapped back. "Find me a stick."

She didn't make no move to find no stick. She put her hand on the gate. "Hold on," I says. "Them things are nothing to monkey with."

"Huh," she says. "All they look like to me is a bunch of cats."

There was a kennel back of the cage, with a drop door on it, where they was supposed to go at night. How you got them back there was bait them with food, but I didn't know that then. I yelled at them, to drive them back in there, but nothing happened. All they done was yell back. Lura listened to me a while, and then she give a kind of gasp like she couldn't stand it no longer, opened the gate, and went in.

Now believe me, that next was a bad five minutes, because she wasn't hard to look at, and I hated to think of her getting mauled up by them babies. But a guy would of had to of been blind if it didn't show him that she had a way with cats.. First thing she done, when she got in, she stood still, didn't make no sudden motions or nothing, and begun to talk to them. Not no special talk. Just "Pretty pussy, what's the matter, what they been doing to you?"—like that. Then she went over to them.

They slid off, on their bellies, to another part of the shelf. But she kept after them, and got her hand on one, and stroked him on the back. Then she got a-hold of another one, and pretty soon she had give them all a pat. Then she turned around, picked up the dead cat by one leg, and come out with him. I put him on the wheelbarrow and buried him.

Now, why was it that Lura kept it from Duke how easy she had got the cat out and even about being in the cage at all? I think it was just because she didn't have the heart to show him up to hisself how silly he looked. Anyway, at supper that night, she never said a word. Duke, he was nervous and excited and told all

about how the cats had jumped at him and how he had to bean one to save his life, and then he give a long spiel about cats and how fear is the only thing they understand, so you would of thought he was Martin Johnson just back from the jungle or something.

But it seemed to me the dishes was making quite a noise that night, clattering around on the table, and that was funny, because one thing you could say for Lura was: she was quiet and easy to be around. So when Duke, just like it was nothing at all, asks me by the way how did I get the cat out, I heared my mouth saying, "With a stick," and not nothing more. A little bird flies around and tells you, at a time like that. Lura let it pass. Never said a word. And if you ask me, Duke never did find out how easy she could handle the cats, and that ain't only guesswork, but on account of something that happened a little while afterward, when we got the mountain-lion.

A mountain-lion is a cougar, only out here they call them a mountain-lion. Well, one afternoon about five o'clock this one of ours squat down on her hunkers and set up the worst squalling you ever listen to. She kept it up all night, so you wanted to go out and shoot her, and next morning at breakfast Duke come running in and says come on out and look what happened. So we went out there, and there in the cage with her was the prettiest he mountain-lion you ever seen in your life. He was big, probably weighed a hundred and fifty pounds, and his coat was a pearl gray so glossy it looked like a pair of new gloves, and he had a spot of white on his throat. Sometimes they have white.

"He come down from the hills when he heard her call last night," says Duke, "and he got in there somehow. Ain't it funny? When they hear that note nothing can stop them."

"Yeah," I says. "It's love."

"That's it," says Duke. "Well, we'll be having some little ones soon. Cheaper'n buying them."

After he had went off to town to buy the stuff for the day, Lura sat down to the table with me. "Nice of you," I says, "to let Romeo in last night."

"Romeo?" she says.

"Yes, Romeo. That's going to be papa of twins soon, out in the lion cage."

"Oh," she says, "didn't he get in there himself?"

"He did not. If she couldn't get out, how could he get in?"

All she give me at that time was a dead pan. Didn't know nothing about it at all. Fact of the matter, she made me a little sore. But after she brung me my second cup of coffee she kind of smiled. "Well?" she says. "You wouldn't keep two loving hearts apart, would you?"

So things was, like you might say, a little gritty, but they got a whole lot worse when Duke come home with Rajah, the tiger. Because by that time, he had told so many lies that he begun to believe them hisself, and put on all the airs of a big animal-trainer. When people come out on Sundays, he would take a black-snake whip and go in with the mountain-lions and wildcats, and snap it at them, and they would snarl and yowl, and Duke acted like he was doing something. Before he went in, he would let the people see him strapping on a big six-shooter, and Lura got sorer by the week.

For one thing, he looked so silly. She couldn't see nothing to going in with the cats, and specially couldn't see no sense in going in with a whip, a six-shooter, and a ten-gallon hat like them cow people wears. And for another thing, it was bad for business. In the beginning, when Lura would take the customers' kids out and make out the cat had their finger, they loved it, and they loved it still more when the little mountain-lions come and they had spots and would push up their ears to be scratched. But when Duke started that stuff with the whip it scared them to death, and even the fathers and mothers was nervous, because there was the gun and they didn't know

what would happen next. So business begun to fall off.

And then one afternoon he put down a couple of drinks and figured it was time for him to go in there with Rajah. Now it had took Lura one minute to tame Rajah. She was in there sweeping out his cage one morning when Duke was away, and when he started sliding around on his belly he got a bucket of water in the face, and that was that. From then on he was her cat. But what happened when Duke tried to tame him was awful. The first I knew what he was up to was when he made a speech to the people from the mountain-lion cage telling them not to go away yet, there was more to come. And when he come out he headed over to the tiger.

"What's the big idea?" I says. "What you up to now?"

"I'm going in with that tiger," he says. "It's got to be done, and I might as well do it now."

"Why has it got to be done?" I says.

He looked at me like as though he pitied me.

"I guess there's a few things about cats you don't know yet," he says. "You got a tiger on your hands, you got to let him know who's boss, that's all."

"Yeah?" I says. "And who *is* boss?"

"You see that?" he says, and cocks his finger at his face.

"See what?" I says.

"The human eye," he says. "The human eye, that's all. A cat's afraid of it. And if you know your business, you'll keep him afraid of it. That's all I'll use, the human eye. But of course, just for protection, I've got these too."

"Listen, sweetheart," I says to him. "If you give me a choice between the human eye and a Bengal tiger, which one *I* got the most fear of, you're going to see a guy getting a shiner every time. If I was you, I'd lay off that cat."

He didn't say nothing: hitched up his holster, and went in. He didn't even get a chance to unlimber his whip. That tiger, soon as he saw him, begun to move

around in a way that made your blood run cold. He didn't make for Duke first, you understand. He slid over, and in a second he was between Duke and the gate. That's one thing about a tiger you better not forget if you ever meet one. He can't work examples in arithmetic, but when it comes to the kind of brains that mean meat, he's the brightest boy in the class and then some. He's born knowing more about cutting off a retreat than you'll ever know, and his legs do it for him, just automatic, so his jaws will be free for the main business of the meeting.

Duke backed away, and his face was awful to see. He was straining every muscle to keep his mouth from sliding down in his collar. His left hand fingered the whip a little, and his right pawed around, like he had some idea of drawing the gun. But the tiger didn't give him time to make up his mind what his idea was, if any.

He would slide a few feet on his belly, then get up and trot a step or two, then slide on his belly again. He didn't make no noise, you understand. He wasn't telling Duke, Please go away: he meant to kill him, and a killer don't generally make no more fuss than he has to. So for a few seconds you could even hear Duke's feet sliding over the floor. But all of a sudden a kid begun to whimper, and I come to my senses. I run around to the back of the cage, because that was where the tiger was crowding him, and I yelled at him.

"Duke!" I says. "In his kennel! Quick!"

He didn't seem to hear me. He was still backing, and the tiger was still coming. A woman screamed. The tiger's head went down, he crouched on the ground, and tightened every muscle. I knew what that meant. Everybody knew what it meant, and specially Duke knew what it meant. He made a funny sound in his throat, turned, and ran.

That was when the tiger sprung. Duke had no idea where he was going, but when he turned he fell through the trap door and I snapped it down. The

tiger hit it so hard I thought it would split. One of Duke's legs was out, and the tiger was on it in a flash, but all he got on that grab was the sole of Duke's shoe. Duke got his leg in somehow and I jammed the door down tight.

It was a sweet time at supper that night. Lura didn't see this here, because she was busy in the lunchroom when it happened, but them people had talked on their way out, and she knowed all about it. What she said was plenty. And Duke, what do you think he done? He passed it off like it wasn't nothing at all. "Just one of them things you got to expect," he says. And then he let on he knowed what he was doing all the time, and the only lucky part of it was that he didn't have to shoot a valuable animal like Rajah was. "Keep cool, that's the main thing," he says. "A thing like that can happen now and then, but never let a animal see you excited."

I heard him, and I couldn't believe my ears, but when I looked at Lura I jumped. I think I told you she wasn't hard to look at. She was a kind of medium size, with a shape that would make a guy leave his happy home, sunburned all over, and high cheekbones that give her eyes a funny slant. But her eyes was narrowed down to slits, looking at Duke, and they shot green where the light hit them, and it come over me all of a sudden that she looked so much like Rajah, when he was closing in on Duke in the afternoon, that she could of been his twin sister.

Next off, Duke got it in his head he was such a big cat man now that he had to go up in the hills and do some trapping. Bring in his own stuff, he called it.

I didn't pay much attention to it at the time. Of course, he never brought in no stuff, except a couple of raccoons that he probably bought down the road for $2, but Duke was the kind of a guy that every once in a while has to sit on a rock and fish, so when he loaded up the flivver and blew, it wasn't nothing you would get excited about. Maybe I didn't really care what he was up to, because it was pretty nice,

running the place with Lura with him out of the way, and I didn't ask no questions. But it was more to it than cats or 'coons or fish, and Lura knowed it, even if I didn't.

Anyhow, it was while he was away on one of them trips of his that Wild Bill Smith the Texas Tornado showed up. Bill was a snake-doctor. He had a truck, with his picture painted on it, and two or three boxes of old rattlesnakes with their teeth pulled out, and he sold snake-oil that would cure what ailed you, and a Indian herb medicine that would do the same. He was a fake, but he was big and brown and had white teeth, and I guess he really wasn't no bad guy. The first I seen of him was when he drove up in his truck, and told me to gas him up and look at his tires. He had a bum differential that made a funny rattle, but he said never mind and went over to the lunchroom.

He was there a long time, and I thought I better let him know his car was ready. When I went over there, he was setting on a stool with a sheepish look on his face, rubbing his hand. He had a snake ring on one finger, with two red eyes, and on the back of his hand was red streaks. I knew what that meant. He had started something and Lura had fixed him. She had a pretty arm, but a grip like iron, that she said come from milking cows when she was a kid. What she done when a guy got fresh was take hold of his hand and squeeze it so the bones cracked, and he generally changed his mind.

She handed him his check without a word, and I told him what he owed on the car, and he paid up and left.

"So you settled his hash, hey?" I says to her.

"If there's one thing gets on my nerves," she says, "it's a man that starts something the minute he gets in the door."

"Why didn't you yell for me?"

"Oh, I didn't need no help."

But the next day he was back, and after I filled

up his car I went over to see how he was behaving. He was setting at one of the tables this time, and Lura was standing beside him. I saw her jerk her hand away quick, and he give me the bright grin a man has when he's got something he wants to cover up. He was all teeth.

"Nice day," he says. "Great weather you have in this country."

"So I hear," I says. "Your car's ready."

"What I owe you?" he says.

"Dollar twenty."

He counted it out and left.

"Listen," says Lura: "we weren't doing anything when you come in. He was just reading my hand. He's a snake doctor, and knows about the zodiac."

"Oh, wasn't we?" I says. "Well, wasn't we nice!"

"What's it to you?" she says.

"Nothing," I snapped at her. I was pretty sore.

"He says I was born under the sign of Yin," she says. You would of thought it was a piece of news fit to put in the paper.

"And who is Yin?" I says.

"It's Chinese for tiger," she says.

"Then bite yourself off a piece of raw meat," I says, and slammed out of there. We didn't have no nice time running the joint *that* day.

Next morning he was back. I kept away from the lunchroom, but I took a stroll, and seen them back there with the tiger. We had hauled a tree in there by that time, for Rajah to sharpen his claws on, and she was setting on that. The tiger had his head in her lap, and Wild Bill was looking through the wire. He couldn't even draw his breath. I didn't go near enough to hear what they was saying. I went back to the car and begin blowing the horn.

He was back quite a few times after that, in between while Duke was away. Then one night I heard a truck drive up. I knowed that truck by its rattle. And it was daylight before I heard it go away.

Couple weeks after that, Duke come running over

to me at the filling-station. "Shake hands with me," he says. "I'm going to be a father."

"Gee," I says, "that's great!"

But I took good care he wasn't around when I mentioned it to Lura.

"Congratulations," I says. "Letting Romeos into the place seems to be about the best thing you do."

"What do you mean?" she says.

"Nothing," I says. "Only I heard him drive up that night. Look like to me the moon was under the sign of Cupid. Well, it's nice if you can get away with it."

"Oh," she says.

"Yeah," I says. "A fine double cross you thought up. I didn't know they tried that any more."

She set and looked at me, and then her mouth began to twitch and her eyes filled with tears. She tried to snuffle them up but it didn't work. "It's not any double cross," she says. "That night, I never went out there. And I never let anybody in. I was supposed to go away with him that night, but—"

She broke off and begin to cry. I took her in my arms. "But then you found this out?" I says. "Is that it?" She nodded her head. It's awful to have a pretty woman in your arms that's crying over somebody else.

From then on, it was terrible. Lura would go along two or three days pretty nice, trying to like Duke again on account of the baby coming, but then would come a day when she looked like some kind of a hex, with her eyes all sunk in so you could hardly see them at all, and not a word out of her.

Them bad days, anyhow when Duke wasn't around, she would spend with the tiger. She would set and watch him sleep, or maybe play with him, and he seemed to like it as much as she did. He was young when we got him, and mangy and thin, so you could see his slats. But now he was about six year old, and had been fed good, so he had got his growth and his coat was nice, and I think he was the biggest tiger I ever seen. A tiger, when he is really big, is a lot bigger

than a lion, and sometimes when Rajah would be rubbing around Lura, he looked more like a mule than a cat.

His shoulders come up above her waist, and his head was so big it would cover both her legs when he put it in her lap. When his tail would go sliding past her it looked like some kind of a constrictor snake. His teeth were something to make you lie awake nights. A tiger has the biggest teeth of any cat, and Rajah's must have been four inches long, curved like a cavalry sword, and ivory white. They were the most murderous-looking fangs I ever set eyes on.

When Lura went to the hospital it was a hurry call, and she didn't even have time to get her clothes together. Next day Duke had to pack her bag, and he was strutting around, because it was a boy, and Lura had named him Ron. But when he come out with the bag, he didn't have much of a strut.

"Look what I found," he says to me, and fishes something out of his pocket. It was the snake ring.

"Well?" I says. "They sell them in any dime store."

"H'm," he says, and kind of weighed the ring in his hand. That afternoon, when he come back, he says, "Ten-cent store, hey? I took it to a jeweler today, and he offered me two hundred dollars for it."

"You ought to sold it," I says. "Maybe save you bad luck."

Duke went away again right after Lura come back, and for a little while things was all right. She was crazy about the little boy, and I thought he was pretty cute myself, and we got along fine. But then Duke come back and at lunch one day he made a crack about the ring. Lura didn't say nothing, but he kept at it, and pretty soon she wheeled on him.

"All right," she says. "There was another man around here, and I loved him. He give me that ring, and it meant that he and I belonged to each other. But I didn't go with him, and you know why I didn't. For Ron's sake, I've tried to love you again, and

maybe I can yet, God knows. A woman can do some funny things if she tries. But that's where we're at now. That's right where we're at. And if you don't like it, you better say what you're going to do."

"When was this?" says Duke.

"It was quite a while ago. I told you I give him up, and I give him up for keeps."

"It was just before you knowed about Ron, wasn't it?" he says.

"Hey," I cut in. "That's no way to talk."

"Just what I thought," he says, not paying no attention to me. "Ron. That's a funny name for a kid. I thought it was funny, right off when I heard it. Ron. Ron. That's a laugh, ain't it?"

"That's a lie," she says. "That's a lie, every bit of it. And it's not the only lie you've been getting away with around here. Or think you have. Trapping up in the hills, hey? And what do you trap?"

But she looked at me, and choked it back. I begun to see that the cats wasn't the only things that had been gumming it up.

"All right," she wound up. "Say what you're going to do. Go on. Say it!"

But he didn't

"Ron," he cackles, "that's a hot one," and walks out.

Next day was Saturday, and he acted funny all day. He wouldn't speak to me or Lura, and once or twice I heard him mumbling to himself. Right after supper he says to me, "How are we on oil?"

"All right," I says. "The truck was around yesterday."

"You better drive in and get some," he says. "I don't think we got enough."

"Enough?" I says. "We got enough for two weeks."

"Tomorrow is Sunday," he says, "and there'll be a big call for it. Bring out a hundred gallon and tell them to put it on the account."

By that time, I would give in to one of his nutty

ideas rather than have an argument with him, and besides, I never tumbled that he was up to anything. So I wasn't there for what happened next, but I got it out of Lura later, so here is how it was:

Lura didn't pay much attention to the argument about the oil, but washed up the supper dishes, and then went in the bedroom to make sure everything was all right with the baby. When she come out she left the door open, so she could hear if he cried. The bedroom was off the sitting-room, because these here California houses don't have but one floor, and all the rooms connect. Then she lit the fire, because it was cool, and sat there watching it burn. Duke come in, walked around, and then went out back. "Close the door," she says to him. "I'll be right back," he says.

So she sat looking at the fire, she didn't know how long, maybe five minutes, maybe ten minutes. But pretty soon she felt the house shake. She thought maybe it was a earthquake, and looked at the pictures, but they was all hanging straight. Then she felt the house shake again. She listened, but it wasn't no truck outside that would cause it, and it wouldn't be no State road blasting or nothing like that at that time of night. Then she felt it shake again, and this time it shook in a regular movement, one, two, three, four, like that. And then all of a sudden she knew what it was, why Duke had acted so funny all day, why he had sent me off for the gas, why he had left the door open, and all the rest of it. There was five hundred pounds of cat walking through the house, and Duke had turned him loose to kill her.

She turned around, and Rajah was looking at her, not five foot away. She didn't do nothing for a minute, just set there thinking what a boob Duke was to figure on the tiger doing his dirty work for him, when all the time she could handle him easy as a kitten, only Duke didn't know it. Then she spoke. She expected Rajah to come and put his head in her lap, but he didn't. He stood there and growled, and his

ears flattened back. That scared her, and she thought of the baby. I told you a tiger has that kind of brains. It no sooner went through her head about the baby than Rajah knowed she wanted to get to that door, and he was over there before she could get out of the chair.

He was snarling in a regular roar now, but he hadn't got a whiff of the baby yet, and he was still facing Lura. She could see he meant business. She reached in the fireplace, grabbed a stick that was burning bright, and walked him down with it. A tiger is afraid of fire, and she shoved it right in his eyes. He backed past the door, and she slid in the bedroom. But he was right after her, and she had to hold the stick at him with one hand and grab the baby with the other.

But she couldn't get out. He had her cornered, and he was kicking up such a awful fuss she knowed the stick wouldn't stop him long. So she dropped it, grabbed up the baby's covers, and threw them at his head. They went wild, but they saved her just the same. A tiger, if you throw something at him with a human smell, will generally jump on it and bite at it before he does anything else, and that's what he done now. He jumped so hard the rug went out from under him, and while he was scrambling to his feet she shot past him with the baby and pulled the door shut after her.

She run in my room, got a blanket, wrapped the baby in it, and run out to the electric icebox. It was the only thing around the place that was steel. Soon as she opened the door she knowed why she couldn't do nothing with Rajah. His meat was in there, Duke hadn't fed him. She pulled the meat out, shoved the baby in, cut off the current, and closed the door. Then she picked up the meat and went around outside of the house to the window of the bedroom. She could see Rajah in there, biting at the top of the door, where a crack of light showed through. He reached to the

ceiling. She took a grip on the meat and drove at the screen with it. It give way, and the meat went through. He was on it before it hit the floor.

Next thing was to give him time to eat. She figured she could handle him once he got something in his belly. She went back to the sitting-room. And in there, kind of peering around, was Duke. He had his gun strapped on, and one look at his face was all she needed to know she hadn't made no mistake about why the tiger was loose.

"Oh," he says, kind of foolish, and then walked back and closed the door. "I meant to come back sooner, but I couldn't help looking at the night. You got no idea how beautiful it is. Stars is bright as anything."

"Yeah," she says. "I noticed."

"Beautiful," he says. "Beautiful."

"Was you expecting burglars or something?" she says, looking at the gun.

"Oh, that," he says. "No. Cats been kicking up a fuss. I put it on, case I have to go back there. Always like to have it handy."

"The tiger," she says. "I thought I heard him, myself."

"Loud," says Duke. "Awful loud."

He waited. She waited. She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of opening up first. But just then there come a growl from the bedroom, and the sound of bones cracking. A tiger acts awful sore when he eats. "What's that?" says Duke.

"I wonder," says Lura. She was hell-bent on making him spill it first.

They both looked at each other, and then there was more growls, and more sound of cracking bones. "You better go in there," says Duke, soft and easy, with the sweat standing out on his forehead and his eyes shining bright as marbles. "Something might be happening to Ron."

"Do you know what I think it is?" says Lura.

"What's that?" says Duke. His breath was whistling

through his nose like it always done when he got excited.

"I think it's that tiger you sent in here to kill me," says Lura. "So you could bring in that woman you been running around with for over a year. That redhead that raises rabbit fryers on the Ventura road. That cat you been trapping!"

"And stead of getting you he got Ron," says Duke. "Little Ron! Oh my, ain't that tough? Go in there, why don't you? Ain't you got no mother love? Why don't you call up his pappy, get him in there? What's the matter? Is he afraid of a cat?"

Lura laughed at him. "All right," she says. "Now you go." With that she took hold of him. He tried to draw the gun, but she crumpled up his hand like a piece of wet paper and the gun fell on the floor. She bent him back on the table and beat his face in for him. Then she picked him up, dragged him to the front door, and threw him out. He run off a little ways. She come back and saw the gun. She picked it up, went to the door again, and threw it after him. "And take that peashooter with you," she says.

That was where she made her big mistake. When she turned to go back in the house, he shot, and that was the last she knew for a while.

Now, for what happened next, it wasn't nobody there, only Duke and the tiger, but after them State cops got done fitting it all together, combing the ruins and all, it wasn't no trouble to tell how it was, anyway most of it, and here's how they figured it out:

Soon as Duke seen Lura fall, right there in front of the house, he knowed he was up against it. So the first thing he done was to run to where she was and put the gun in her hand, to make it look like she had shot herself. That was where he made *his* big mistake, because if he had kept the gun he might of had a chance. Then he went inside to telephone, and what he said was, soon as he got hold of the State police:

"For God's sake come out here quick. My wife has

went crazy and throwed the baby to the tiger and shot herself and I'm all alone in the house with him and—*Oh, my God, here he comes!*"

Now, that last was something he didn't figure on saying. So far as he knowed, the tiger was in the room, having a nice meal off his son, so everything was hotsy-totsy. But what he didn't know was that that piece of burning firewood that Lura had dropped had set the room on fire and on account of that the tiger had got out. How did he get out? We never did quite figure that out. But this is how I figure it, and one man's guess is good as another's:

The fire started near the window, we knew that much. That was where Lura dropped the stick, right next to the cradle, and that was where a guy coming down the road in a car first seen the flames. And what I think is that soon as the tiger got his eye off the meat and seen the fire, he begun to scramble away from it, just wild. And when a wild tiger hits a beaver-board wall, he goes through, that's all. While Duke was telephoning, Rajah come through the wall like a clown through a hoop, and the first thing he seen was Duke, at the telephone, and Duke wasn't no friend, not to Rajah he wasn't.

Anyway, that's how things was when I got there, with the oil. The State cops was a little ahead of me, and I met the ambulance with Lura in it, coming down the road seventy mile an hour, but just figured there had been a crash up the road, and didn't know nothing about it having Lura in it. And when I drove up, there was plenty to look at all right. The house was in flames, and the police was trying to get in, but couldn't get nowheres near it on account of the heat, and about a hundred cars parked all around, with people looking, and a gasoline pumper cruising up and down the road, trying to find a water connection somewheres they could screw their hose to.

But inside the house was the terrible part. You could hear Duke screaming, and in between Duke was the

tiger. And both of them was screams of fear, but I think the tiger was worse. It is a awful thing to hear a animal letting out a sound like that. It kept up about five minutes after I got there, and then all of a sudden you couldn't hear nothing but the tiger. And then in a minute that stopped.

There was nothing to do about the fire. In a half hour the whole place was gone, and they was combing the ruins for Duke. Well, they found him. And in his head was four holes, two on each side, deep. We measured them fangs of the tiger. They just fit.

Soon as I could I run to the hospital. They had got the bullet out by that time, and Lura was laying in bed all bandaged around the head, but there was a guard over her, on account of what Duke said over the telephone. He was a State cop. I sat down with him, and he didn't like it none. Neither did I. I knowed there was something funny about it, but what broke your heart was Lura, coming out of the ether. She would groan and mutter and try to say something so hard it would make your head ache. After a while I got up and went in the hall. But then I see the State cop shoot out of the room and line down the hall as fast as he could go. At last she had said it. The baby was in the electric icebox. They found him there, still asleep and just about ready for his milk. The fire had blacked up the outside, but inside it was as cool and nice as a new bathtub.

Well, that was about all. They cleared Lura, soon as she told her story, and the baby in the icebox proved it. Soon as she got out of the hospital she got a offer from the movies, but stead of taking it she come out to the place and her and I run it for a while, anyway the filling-station end, sleeping in the shacks and getting along nice. But one night I heard a rattle from a bum differential, and I never even bothered to show up for breakfast the next morning.

I often wish I had. Maybe she left me a note.

RALPH STRAUS

THE ROOM ON THE FOURTH FLOOR

John Chester ought never to have gone in for politics. I am quite certain that he should have sat down at a desk and written romances, and become a "best seller," and built himself a marble house, and married a wife, and hired a press agent. Instead, as everybody knows, he elected to be returned to Parliament twenty-five years ago, and there he has remained ever since.

His appearance, as you know, is military. That white mustache suggests the field-marshal, and his clothes are obviously of the dragoon cut. Also, he has a figure which to my knowledge has changed not an inch in the last twenty years. Some people call him a phenomenon and expect you to know exactly what they mean, and somehow you do. He knows everyone and goes everywhere. He has more friends than any other man in Europe. And he is the kind of man to whom people, even the discreet people, tell things, which possibly accounts for his amazing stock of stories.

I was dining with him a week or two ago at the House of Commons. A world-famous ex-Minister was sitting in solitary state at the next table. Chester had been unusually silent, and I wondered what was troubling him; but when the great statesman hurried away, my host gave the peculiar chuckle which, with him, is the invariable introduction to some yarn or other.

"The most remarkable man in England," he began, looking in the direction of the now empty table.

"So I am given to understand."

"He is the only man who guessed the Farringham rid-

dle, you know. Guessed it at once, too. Most remarkable man. Yes. And yet—" He paused and looked at me as though I had contradicted him. "Sometimes," he continued, twirling the white mustache, "I wonder whether he knew more about the affair than he pretended. He *might* have heard of it, of course, in his official capacity."

"You mean when he was Prime Minister?"

"Precisely."

"You pique my curiosity," said I.

John Chester emptied his glass. "You have never heard of the Farringham case, then? No; well, in the ordinary way you wouldn't. So many of these things have to be hushed up. Besides, it is thirty years old now."

I lit a cigar and prepared for one of Chester's inimitable yarns.

"Yes," he began, "Mrs. Farringham was a beautiful widow with a passion for traveling in unusual places. She had plenty of money, and she moved from one continent to the next as you or I drive to our clubs. She never took a maid with her; but her daughter, I suppose, did much to fill the maid's place. I met them first in Florence, I remember. The girl must have been about twenty then. Mrs. Farringham nearly forty, though she scarcely looked older than her daughter.

"She was entertaining some Italian prince who wanted to become her son-in-law or her husband—I couldn't make up my mind which, and didn't like to ask—and I was invited to call at her London house. I fully intended to go as soon as I returned home, but—well, you shall hear why I never had the opportunity.

"It was in the year of the great Exhibition in Paris—1900. The Farringhams had been traveling in Russia and Turkey. They had spent a week in Constantinople—a detestable place—and had decided to make a tour through Asia Minor. But apparently for no reason at all Mrs. Farringham suddenly took it into her

head that she would like to buy new carpets for her London house, and the Asia Minor trip was indefinitely postponed.

"The ladies visited Thomas Cook, and Thomas Cook in his best English told them how to reach home in the most comfortable manner. Incidentally, he advised a night or two in Paris. The Exhibition had just opened its gates. Now I don't suppose for one moment that Mrs. Farringham cared in the least whether she saw the Exhibition or not, but her daughter had not seen so much of the world as her indefatigable mother, and it was decided that twenty-four hours in Paris would make a pleasant break in a tiresome journey.

"And so it happened that three days later two ladies, rather tired and rather irritable, arrived at the Paris terminus. It was just eight o'clock in the evening. They had already dined in the train. A porter found their baggage—three large trunks and a green bag which had accompanied Mrs. Farringham from the time she had first crossed the Channel—and, with the help of a cabman, succeeded in placing the four pieces on the roof of the cab. Before driving off, however, the cabman altered the position of the green bag. Apparently he had got it into his head that the green bag was the last straw to break his conveyance, and he put it beneath his feet on the box.

"When they arrived at one of the big hotels—I forget for the moment which it was—the ladies asked for two adjoining rooms. The politest of hotel managers shrugged his shoulders many times. 'Paris,' said he, 'is full. It flows over with *tout le monde*. It is beyond me to give madame and and mam'selle two rooms in the closest adjoinment. But if madame will take an apartment on the fourth floor, and mam'selle an apartment on the fifth floor—of the extreme comfort—it will be well.' His manner implied that only madame's beauty had made such a favor possible.

"The ladies agreed, and signed their names in the visitors' book. One of the hotel porters took charge of the trunks, and a chambermaid showed the visi-

tors to their rooms. Mrs. Farringham's bedroom was not very large, but it looked comfortable. Her daughter's room was exactly above it.

"The porter unstrapped Mrs. Farringham's trunks, and in the politest possible way hoped that the ladies would enjoy their visit to Paris. Then he received a small coin and disappeared. The chambermaid uttered a similar sentiment and followed his example. Mother and daughter were left alone. You follow so far?"

"Perfectly," said I.

John Chester looked up at the ceiling. "Very well, then. Here you have two estimable ladies arriving one evening in a Paris hotel of unimpeachable respectability and being given rooms one over the other. Good.

"For a short while Miss Farringham stayed with her mother and helped her to unpack a few things. Then, feeling tired, she suggested that they should both go to bed.

" 'Immediately?' asked her mother. 'It is not yet nine o'clock.'

" 'Very well,' said the girl, 'I will lie down for half and hour or so in my own room and then come down to help you undress.'

"And she went to her room on the fifth floor. She was feeling particularly drowsy. Nearly two days in a continental train is enough to make anyone drowsy. She just lay down on her bed, dressed as she was, and in a minute or two was asleep."

Again my host paused, this time to refill his glass. "Quite an ordinary story, isn't it?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

I knew better than to utter a word.

"Yes," he went on, "the girl lay on her bed and fell asleep. When she awoke it was ten minutes before midnight. She went down to the fourth floor and knocked on the door of her mother's room. There was no answer. She went in. The room was dark. She turned on the electric light. The bed was empty. In-

deed, the room was obviously untenanted. It was awaiting the arrival of some visitor.

"Of course she must have made some mistake. She went out into the passage. Her mother's room would be an adjoining one. But on one side of the empty room was a bathroom, and outside the door of the other stood two unmistakably masculine boots. Added to which she was almost certain that she recalled the correct number. She rang for the chambermaid.

" 'I am afraid I have made some mistake,' she said. 'I thought this was my mother's room, but—this is the fourth floor, by the way, isn't it?"

"The maid looked at her curiously. 'Yes, mam'selle, this is indeed the fourth floor, but what does mam'selle mean? No lady accompanied mam'selle to the hotel. Mam'selle traveled with herself!' "

John Chester looked at me across the table in much the same way as I imagined the chambermaid had stared at Miss Farringham. It was almost a minute before he spoke again. I had no notion what was coming, but already felt in some vague way that I was no longer sitting in the dining-room of the House of Commons. I leaned forward over the table. "Go on, dear man, please!"

" 'Mam'selle traveled with herself,' " he repeated. "Yes, that is what the chambermaid said, and Miss Farringham stared at her. 'You are making a very stupid mistake,' she said. 'Why, surely it was you who took in my mother's bag—a large green bag. We came together, about half-past eight.'

"The maid seemed completely bewildered. 'Shall I ring for the porter?' she asked, more or less mechanically.

"Miss Farringham nodded. A feeling of uneasiness had suddenly come over her.

"The porter came up, and the girl recognized him. She repeated her question. The porter allowed his mouth to open to its widest extent, which happened to be his method of expressing the completest surprise. No madame, said he, had arrived with mam'selle. He

had certainly taken mam'selle's two trunks to a room on the fifth floor, but what did she mean?

"And then, I fancy, a tiny pang must have touched Miss Farringham's heart. Yet, obviously, this could only be an absurd mistake. In another moment she would be laughing with her mother. She looked hard at the two servants standing there in foolish bewilderment. 'Call the manager, please,' she said.

"They brought the manager to her. He was, as always, vaguely apologetic. Mam'selle was not comfortable in her room? Was there anything he could do? She had not supped? Some refreshment in her room?

"The girl explained. Her mother had been given a room on the fourth floor. Apparently this had been changed. Where was she now? She asked the questions quite calmly, but her heart was beating at a greater rate than was good for it. On a sudden it seemed to her that something was horribly, immeasurably wrong. You are probably familiar with that feeling yourself.

"The manager's manner changed ever so slightly. His tones were still suave, but a note of incredulity would not be hidden. It was as though he were angry at being summoned to the fourth floor by a possibly mad Englishwoman for no reason at all. 'Mam'selle is joking?' he asked almost coldly.

"It was then that the girl realized how frightened she was. Wherever her mother might be, even though no more than a single wall was separating them, she was at that moment alone in Paris with strangers who were obviously in no mood to believe what she said. 'But my mother and I, we drove from the station. You gave us the rooms yourself. Yes, and you said how sorry you were that we could not have adjoining rooms because the hotel was full. And then—of course, you remember—we wrote our names in the visitors' book.'

"The manager retained his professional politeness. That is the first necessity in a hotel manager. 'I cannot understand mam'selle,' he said quietly. Then he

turned to the porter. 'Bring up the visitors' book,' he ordered.

"The visitors' book was produced. You can imagine how eagerly Miss Farringham examined it. Yes, there, four or five names from the bottom of the last page, was her own; but it was sandwiched in between a vicomte and an English baronet. Her mother's name was not there.

"You can picture her dismay.

" 'Perhaps mam'selle is tired, and overwrought after her journey,' suggested the polite manager. English girls, he knew, were often peculiar, and Miss Farringham was undoubtedly pretty.

" 'But—my mother!' stammered the girl. "What does it all mean? I don't understand—'

" 'There is a doctor in the hotel if mam'selle—'

"She interrupted him. 'Oh, you think I am ill. But I am not. We must search the hotel. Perhaps my mother has found a friend; or she may be in the drawing-room. I am horribly nervous. You must help me.'

"The manager shrugged his apologetic shoulders.

"They searched the hotel."

John Chester handed me his cigarette case. "Yes," he repeated, "they searched the hotel."

"And they found—"

"Everyone but the mother. In an hour's time, as you can imagine, Miss Farringham had become frantic. The manager did everything he could. As a final recourse he despatched the porter to look for the cabman who had driven the girl from the station. It was a rather forlorn hope, but the girl seemed eager to see him. She was in that state of mind in which things are no longer ordinary or extraordinary, but merely hopeful or hopeless. Fortunately the cabman was found. He was still on duty, as a matter of fact, at the terminus. And at two o'clock in the morning he was standing, hat in hand, in the foyer of the hotel."

"It was the same cabman?" I asked.

"Miss Farringham recognized him instantly. 'You

remember me?' she asked eagerly.

" 'But yes, mam'selle. You arrived at eight-ten—alone. I drove you to this hotel. Two trunks."

" 'No, no. My mother was with me. There were three trunks and a large green bag.'

"The cabman looked stupidly at her.

" 'And don't you remember, you changed the position of the bag as we drove off. Perhaps you thought that it was unsafe on the roof. You put it beneath your feet on the box. Oh, you must remember, you must remember!'

"The cabman was obviously astonished. 'But there was no green bag,' said he. 'I remember precisely. The young lady, I think, must be American or English, or she would not be traveling with herself.'

"Miss Farringham stared wildly about her and fell down in a faint.

"They got her to bed and promised to send a telegram to England. Early next morning she crossed the Channel, just dazed. And she was met at Charing Cross by friends just as mystified as herself. That night she was seriously ill. Brain fever."

"But the mother?" I asked.

"Nothing more," said John Chester, "was ever heard of the mother."

The division bell was ringing, and my host excused himself. "I must vote," he explained. "I shall be back in ten minutes, which will give you just sixty times as long as the ex-Prime Minister took to solve the riddle." He nodded, and hurried away.

I tried to exercise those faculties which the detective of fiction finds so useful. Either Mrs. Farringham had arrived at the hotel in Paris, I argued, or she had not. John Chester had stated distinctly that she had arrived, and therefore—

My host had returned. "A pretty problem?" said he. "Confess yourself completely at sea."

"Completely," said I.

"Come along to the terrace, then," and we walked out and stood looking over the Thames. It was not

a warm night, and we were coatless. "I have often wondered," he began at last, "why Mrs. Farringham had that sudden desire to buy carpets for her London house."

I hurriedly sought for a clue in the carpets, but found none.

"Perhaps," he continued, "it was an excuse. Perhaps she shared in common with most of her sex the desire to practice the gentle art of self-deception. It is just possible, that is to say, that Mrs. Farringham gave up the proposed trip through Asia Minor because she was not in her usual health."

He was silent for so long that I drew his attention to the low temperature.

"Then I'll explain," he said with a smile. "It is all quite simple, and depends on one little fact which may or may not have escaped your notice. In France they have a peculiar way of doing things. A logical way, I admit, but sometimes peculiar. Consequently things happen in France, and particularly in Paris, which could not possibly happen anywhere else. The Farringham affair is a case in point. I will tell you exactly what happened, and then you shall come inside to hear the debate."

"Well, then, here, as I said before, you have the fact of two ladies arriving one evening in a Paris hotel. There is no question about that: they both arrived, and Mrs. Farringham was given a room on the fourth floor, the actual room which her daughter found untenanted at midnight. Now I will say at once that there was nothing peculiar about this room; it was just an ordinary bedroom in a big hotel. What was peculiar was the fact that while Mrs. Farringham had been in the room at half-past eight, she was not there, nor indeed anywhere in the hotel, at midnight. Consequently, at some period between these two hours she went out, or was taken out."

"But the manager and the porter—"

"I see you will not let me tell the story in my own way," smiled John Chester. "I was going to show you

how you might have solved the riddle. No matter. You shall have the plain sequence of things at once. A few minutes after Mrs. Farringham had been shown to her room her daughter had gone up to the fifth floor and she was alone. Ten minutes later the bell in the room rang. The chambermaid appeared, and to her dismay found madame lying motionless on the floor. She rang for the porter, and the porter, hardly less frightened than herself, fetched the manager. The manager called for a doctor. Fortunately there was one in the hotel. The doctor appeared and made his examination. Mrs. Farringham was dead."

"Dead!" I repeated.

"Dead," said John Chester. "Now the death of a lady in a large hotel is an unpleasant event at all times, but in this case there was something so peculiarly unpleasant that the doctor instead of notifying the police, called up one of the Government offices on the telephone, and was lucky enough to find a high official still at his post.

"What followed you may think extraordinary, and extraordinary it certainly must have been. In less than an hour's time there had arrived at the hotel a small army of men. Some seemed to be visitors, others workmen. If you had watched them at all, you might have come to the conclusion that a large quantity of furniture was being removed. As a matter of fact it was. In particular, an ottoman might have been seen being carried downstairs and placed in a furniture van, which drove rapidly away. If you had waited about the fourth floor, you might further have seen new furniture brought into the room which Mrs. Farringham had occupied, and you might have been puzzled at a peculiar odor until the manager, whom you would have met casually on the stairs, informed you that a clumsy servant had upset a case of drugs destined for the Exhibition.

"At the same time, if you had been allowed into the manager's own sanctum downstairs you would have seen three or four gentlemen talking earnestly

to a chambermaid and a porter, and, at a later hour, to a cabman who happened to have taken up his stand outside the hotel. The porter and the chambermaid incidentally received large sums of money, and the cabman, similiarly enriched, was bidden to await instructions. Also several lessons in the art of acting had been given."

"I am more bewildered than ever."

"And yet," said John Chester, "two words whispered over the telephone had been sufficient to cause all these curious events to take place!"

Once again he paused. "Mrs. Farringham had been traveling in the East. Doesn't that suggest somehing to you?"

"You mean—" I was beginning.

But he interrupted me: *"Bubonic plague!"*

"But I don't see—"

"At headquarters they were obliged to come to a speedy decision. In the interests of the community, my dear fellow, it was decided—the Government, that is to say, decided—that Mrs. Farringham *had never arrived in Paris.* Further they were not concerned. That was the only vital point."

"But even then—"

"Do you suppose," asked John Chester, "that anybody would have visited Paris if a case of bubonic plague had been reported? Even if there was no more than a rumor that—"

"No, but—"

"It was a case of one against the many. The Government, being Republican, and also patriotic, made its choice for the many. Also, being French, it did not lack the artistic temperament."

"It's ghastly!" I murmured.

"It was Exhibition year," said my host. "But you are quite right," he added; "it is very cold. Let us go in."

I do not remember what question was being debated that evening.

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

ELEMENTALS

When Sherwood Latimer accepted the invitation of his temporary employer, John Slake, to a little dinner for two in the big ugly residence on Madison Avenue that was always so obtrusively guarded by private detectives—for so many fanatics seemed to feel it their duty to try and assassinate the first millionaire in America—it was with no idea at all of encountering anything more elemental than well-cooked food. But he and Slake got to talking.

About Latimer's just finished job in the first place—that excellent translation of Carlo Guiccardini's rare 16th-century pamphlet that Slake had bought in his last bandit raid on European art collections. About 16th-century Italy in general, and why Latimer, in spite of his 25 years, was the best man on 16th-century Italian in the country.

About universities—Latimer was going back to Harvard as an assistant in history in the fall—and the ludicrousness of the contrast between the salaries paid American teachers and the energy, personality and wide knowledge expected of them. And then slashingly down into the elementals of life itself—what ruled this curious thing called human existence—what forces swayed it most wholly.

They made an odd contrast as they stared at each other across the tablecloth—the lean, hungry-looking young man in the shabby dress suit so obviously a family relic—the sleek, tigerish, diverse figure in the perfectly fitting dinner coat, with his voice as soft and purring as the voice of a gigantic cat. An even odder contrast when they had once begun to argue, for the argument concerned the essential invisible power that rules all human affairs.

That force, quoth Latimer, was the love of a man for the one woman—and he defended his youthful

proposition with a vigor most unacademic in its skill and intensity, in spite of all Slake's grumblings of, "Bosh, my friend—pure bosh—there are only three prime movers in this oddity we call the human soul—fear, hunger and hate."

The little ormolu clock on the mantelpiece had chimed 11:00 some minutes before. They had been contending two hours over their point—and in spite of all Slake's mockingly perfect examples of human cowardice and weakness and insufficiency, he had not been able to make his opponent budge one inch from his original position. The elder man leaned forward in his chair now, regarding the younger, his eyes widening and glowing like those of a great smooth beast when it walks into darkness from a lighted place.

"Good! You persist. You stick to your guns and your illusions in spite of any facts that I can adduce. Very well, let us take another instance. From Guiccardini this time." He spoke slowly and thoughtfully. "You will remember the incident—your translation of it was flawlessly terse. In the chapter on the Merry Diversions of His Highness Prince Alessandro."

Latimer twisted uneasily. He did remember the incident—one of those pieces of cruel and sensitive torture in which that mad Renaissance Prince had taken such delight.

"Leaving out a few of those details which are rather heady for a modern stomach, the two lovers whose devotion was a proverb in his court—the two lovers who were ready to undergo anything in life or death for each other. Their devotion came to the ears of Alessandro—and he, like myself, had somewhat of the practical executive's tendency for testing promises by performance. He suggested a test of this immortal devotion—a very simple test. You remember what the reward was to be if the test were withstood? It was liberal enough—a dukedom for the man, a permanent revenue for them both—titles of honor. The title of 'Most Faithful In Love' was the one which he had appropriately selected, if I recall it rightly. If the test

were not withstood, the penalty was death, of course —and Alessandro had always been an experimenter in curious methods of making people die. And you will remember that, though it appeared they had little choice in the matter, even so the lovers were genuinely delighted to accept the test. 'They embraced it,' says Guiccardini, 'as if they were to dance together at a feast day, with great nobleness and joy of heart.' But, unfortunately, the test was an elemental one—and when Alessandro heard of their eagerness, I can imagine that he smiled." He smiled himself and a resemblance that had long been pricking at him resolved itself with a shudder in Latimer's mind. Slake had no real part in 20th-century America. Latimer stared at him as he might have at Alessandro come alive again in all his leopard's subtlety, strength and ravin. Slake went on:

"The test was to be by hunger—elemental hunger. For ten days they were to be kept in adjoining rooms —a strong glass partition between so that they could see each other but neither encourage each other by conversation nor plan for the future. They were given water lest they die of thirst and so spoil the test—water but nothing more. On the tenth day, but at an hour known to neither of them since they had been left no means for calculating time—which is a refinement on which I must really congratulate Alessandro—the glass partition was to be removed and one piece of bread thrown in to them, as meat is thrown into a place where two starving animals are caged together. On their mutual behavior as regarded that bread depended the success or failure of the test."

Slake paused and Latimer brushed his hand across his eyes for a moment. Slake's voice had made the picture indecently vivid—the two hunger-bitten creatures in their gay court dresses, gaping with licking lips and avid eyes at that one precious scrap of food.

"Well, you know the rest. Alessandro's faith in his elemental was justified. Guiccardini says that it was difficult for the men who were to take them to execu-

tion to separate them at first—they had torn and entwined their way into such a deadly knot in their death grapple for that one small piece of bread. And the bread was spoilt between them; neither got any good of it. And yet if this elemental love of theirs had been greater than elemental hunger for one half-hour —for Alessandro was just enough to provide that time limit—well, they both would have had their heart's desire forever and been 'Most Faithful In Love.' Well?" He looked at Latimer with narrowed eyes.

"Alessandro was a mad monster—a cruel devil!" said Latimer shakily.

"Perhaps—but he was also a practical man. And in this case a fair one. He merely wished to see if their professions had any value. If they had, he stood ready to reward them very magnificently. But they proved to have no value."

"It wasn't a fair test—not by any means a fair test!" said Latimer. "Starvation—death by starvation—that was too much, too horrible. And then suddenly giving them food! And then just because they lost their heads for a moment—"

"They—lost their heads." Slake smiled. "But before they lost them they had proved in their own persons that hunger is greater than love. The test was too hard for them, you say—but a few minutes ago you were saying wth apparent conviction that *no* test could be too hard. At all events, I think I have proved my point."

"*No!*" said Latimer rebelliously. "They would have died for each other—of course they would—even Guiccardini admits that. It was the dragging out—"

"It was hunger. The elemental. They acted as any two people would have acted. Oh, *I* don't blame them! I should have acted in precisely the same way. Except that I think I would have managed to get the piece of bread." He smiled. "Yes, I think I would have. Oh, they were in love, of course they were—probably more in love than most people dare to be now! But their love, whatever its dimensions, was

smaller than their hunger. Their hunger ate them up. Any two would have been the same."

"Any two would *not,*" said Latimer violently. "They failed because their love wasn't big enough. Certainly. But some people would have been big enough —some loves would. You *can't—*" and he hesitated.

The purr had come back into Slake's voice. "I wonder, Mr. Latimer, just what people you mean."

"Oh—dozens!" said Latimer vaguely. "Most people," he went on stoutly, "or half of them at any rate. Even now."

"Yes," said Slake softly. "Yes." Then he stiffened suddenly in his chair. "Would *you?*"

Latimer was taken completely aback. "Why, I don't know, Mr. Slake—why—why the premise is preposterous, of course! Such a thing couldn't happen now—"

"But suppose it could, Mr. Latimer?"

That particular thick sleekness of scorn was the last drop of fuel on the silent, intense flame of Latimer's internal wrath. *"Yes!"* he said defiantly, and then wondered why on earth he had said it.

"You would be willing to wager—your future professorship, say—on your and one woman's ability to withstand Alessandro's test? You are certain of that?"

"Yes," said Latimer again, and more composedly. At least he had managed to take most of the contempt out of Slake's low voice.

"You are absolutely sure of yourself and the lady?"

Young Sherwood Latimer smiled. Catherine and himself—how ridiculously simple with them a thing like Alessandro's test would be! A thing to joke about!

"Very well, then—suppose we try it," Slake said.

"What!"

"No really, I'm not suggesting anything so impossible as that seems. The stakes first—let me see."

"Your idea would be so fantastic—if not insolent—"

"The stakes," Slake went on, unheeding. "As I am not Alessandro—and a great pity it is—I can hardly request you to put up your lives as a forfeit. A written promise from you that you would give up your pres-

ent career forever and enter any business I wished you to at a salary entirely at my own discretion—that would be quite sufficient, in case either one of you—failed! From the lady, I should, naturally, require no promise at all—the loss of your career would be quite sufficient to make you both wholly miserable for a number of years in case you married—if you did marry—which, if either of you failed in such a test, I should hardly imagine you would care to do." He paused for Latimer to speak, but Latimer seemed to have no words. "Should the test be withstood successfully—and I should not require a longer period than twenty minutes for its actual duration—a check for $10,000 to be delivered to you the same day."

He smiled again. Latimer shivered—$10,000! That meant that he and Catherine could marry at once instead of waiting another year; they had been engaged a year already. It meant leisure for research—to do the work that he wanted. It meant a home and children—everything that both of them wanted most in life. He sighed tiredly—it was like John Slake to dangle all these things so casually, on conditions that he could never accept. If he had only required some other conditions—any other ones—

"I suppose you think you have the right to play practical jokes of this sort on your employees, Mr. Slake," he stammered. "Or rather you haven't the right but you seem to have the power. The thing is utterly impossible, of course. Even supposing I accepted—which I wouldn't and couldn't—you have neither the power nor the means—"

"Power? Means? My dear Mr. Latimer, you are hardly flattering!"

"But this is the twentieth century!" said Latimer.

"The twentieth century. Exactly. That is why. The century of all centuries where money is power. I made a rather interesting statistical computation a year or so ago." He smiled. "As to the legal penalties I should have incurred for—a few little things I have found it necessary to do at one time or another. They

amounted, in the aggregate, to a prison sentence of one hundred and fourteen years."

He leaned forward intently. "My servants are—well trained," he said slowly. "They should be—at their salaries. The better ones—and I have several—are quite beyond the possibility of surprise at any whim I may happen to wish carried out. Well! On the third story there is a little suite of sound-proof rooms—a miniature apartment—seven rooms in all. I use it whenever a problem chances to come up that I wish to think over entirely undisturbed. The meals are sent up on a dumb-waiter—the species of waiter that, on the whole, I prefer. We could carry out our little experiment there in perfect peace." He waved his hands defensively in the air. "Oh, I shouldn't make the conditions nearly as hard as Alessandro's! The glass screen was a pretty idea but a little—expensive. I could have a window put in that would do just as well. The apartment is sizable enough—I should stay in it, of course, for the duration of the experiment. Meals would be sent up from the kitchen—" he grinned like a dog—"but naturally only one person could eat them—myself. You would be in one room, the young lady in the room adjoining. The rest of the apartment would be mine. You would not have food—but water in any quantity would be yours. As for cleanliness, I could arrange a bathroom apiece. I would be perfectly willing to shorten the time to seven days. Just consider!" He seemed to be very earnest. "A seven days' fast—a thing a health crank undergoes voluntarily. A fast that no reputable Christian hermit or modern explorer would treat as anything but a joke. And moreover, if you will permit me, a fast with every modern convenience in a well lighted, well heated apartment—for I should differ from Alessandro's quaintest conceits in that respect. Books?" he ruminated. "I shall consider whether I could allow you books. Anything else in reason, certainly. Well Mr. Latimer, you accept, of course?"

"Of course *not!*" said Latimer firmly.

"Really, but why? $10,000 for one week's lack of occupation! You will never have a chance like that in all your life. And of course you are sure of winning or we would never have any argument. $10,000 *now,* when life is just beginning for both of you, when you need money more than you will ever need it again! Ten—thousand—dollars!"

"But what would *you* expect to get out of your ridiculous proposal?" said Latimer suddenly, out of an overmastering curiosity.

Slake sank back in his chair again. His eyes filmed like a preying eagle's. "Amusement," he said slowly. "A man as rich as I am, Mr. Latimer, is the hardest person under the sky to amuse. He has tasted most things too early. In the old days there were gladiatorial games for such men—and that was as it should be. You see, that is always amusing—that one thing. One can be bored ineffably by all other things in the world but not by that. The struggle to live!" His voice sank to a cruel cadence. "To look on—to see men fighting with the paltry weapons of men against something too strong to conquer—bleeding—dying." He looked at the tablecloth as if the blood he was speaking of lay on it like a stain. "That is—most intensely amusing," he said a little hoarsely. "And what I have proposed, Mr. Latimer, is just such a spectacle. On a small scale of course—but that would make it only the more poignant. The terror, fear, the amusement would be refined and thrice refined. And besides—"

He changed again. "I admire your brains, Mr. Latimer," he said briskly. "I could use you. If I could be sure of utter obedience from you, you might make me a very valuable—servant—in many ways. But anything I offered you now in reason you would refuse —you are *such* a stubborn young man, so sure of your own career. Should you lose—I would have that obedience. Oh, you're a gentleman—you wouldn't break your word! I should have the absolute use of you—for, say, ten years. That gamble, you see—why, that would double the amusement. Well, I offer."

"And I refuse," said Latimer for the last time. He rose. "I really must be going to bed now, Mr. Slake. I have some correspondence to—" his voice trailed off.

Slake remained seated, his eyes smoldering. "You will always remember this, when you're poor and at your wits' end," he said sardonically. "You might have had $10,000—in exchange for a little courage."

"Perhaps I shall." Latimer was past caring for Slake's purr of mockery now. "I'll be frank, Mr. Slake—if you'd made your insane offer to myself alone—I'd have jumped at it." He laughed. "But—"

"Of course," Slake purred, "of course! The young lady. She could not bear it—of course. Well, perhaps it is just as well, Mr. Latimer. You will be able to keep a few of your youthful illusions—for a time." He rose, giving his hand. "By the way, I hope you will give my sincerest congratulations to Miss—to Miss—"

"Vane—Catherine Vane," said Latimer mechanically.

"Miss Vane. Not one of the Newport Vanes, I presume? There were Vanes in Philadelphia, but I really don't seem to recall—" He hesitated maliciously.

"Oh *you* wouldn't know!" said Latimer in a burst of careless irritation. "She's working up at Columbia—in the secretary's office." Why had he said that?

Slake produced a gold pencil and made a note. His eyes held Latimer; the flame in them burned higher.

"What are you doing?" said Latimer, terrified.

Slake gestured in the air. "Oh, nothing, Mr. Latimer, nothing! Merely a habit of mine—a notation—a little reminder. You see," his eyes glittered with bright and dancing flecks, "you see I have a whim—a whim of wishing to meet Miss Catherine Vane in person. I should like very much indeed, since you are so obdurate, to find out what *she* will say to this trifling experiment of mine!"

Latimer looked stupefiedly for what seemed to him a very long time at the little white dints his teeth had just made in the flesh of his wrist. An uncontrollable shudder went over his body. It was impossible—he couldn't have come to *that* stage yet when it was only

the fourth day.

He forced his eyes around the walls of the neat, luxuriously decorated box of a room that those eyes knew already by heart. The wallpaper was covered with bluebirds: 21 birds to each wall, 84 to the room; 84 bluebirds perched upon 84 sprays of some species of blue shrub. Every bird was exactly like every other bird—84 bluebirds that he had counted so many times.

He was sane. He was completely sane. If he had bitten his arm just then, it was nervousness, that was all—pure nervousness and wondering if Catherine, too, suffered under this shameful, continual pain like the pressure of a dull, thick knife against the pit of his stomach. Catherine. And Catherine, too, was sane. Quite sane. Quite sane—still. He thought with horrible doubt, *Catherine Vane is sane, is sane. Catherine Vane is sane, is sane.*

The foolish rhyme started beating in his mind like the noise of a broken bell. He stopped it with a gripping effort of will. No more of *that* either. They both of them were sane—and in three days it would all be over. . . . He counted all the bluebirds on the wall that was nearest him again and carefully: 21! There was always that haunting thing inside his brain that kept telling him that some day there might be 20, or 22. And after that— No more of *that,* Sherwood Latimer! No more of *that,* at all. Presently he would get up and go over to the window and look at Catherine. That would help. And after that he would read.

Slake saw them twice a day; that had been in the contract. How many times had Slake been in already, then? He counted slowly. Seven times. He would come again in an hour—it must be just about an hour—after the daylight in the room had died and the electric lights were on. Seven times. That meant four days. Eight times would mean four days, too, but nine times and ten times would mean five days. He still knew what day it was. That was very good.

His mind kept going back to the strangeness—the utter strangeness of the last two weeks. He and Cath-

erine—Catherine and he. Catherine Vane and Sherwood Latimer, two ordinary, usual, everyday young people—and Slake's ruddy face looking down at them forever as the moon looks down on people in hell—the moon that makes people go mad. Go mad and do things like this.

Catherine had wanted to do this—that had been the only reason. Catherine had been so sure. He remembered her laughing voice: "Why, Sherry darling, just *think*. It's everything we want, Sherry, everything *now*, and it's *ours* if we only have the little courage to take it." It was going to take a good deal more than that!

The last straw had been when Slake had simply said that he would be willing, if necessary, to carry out his damnable experiment with Catherine alone; conditions might have to be altered but she should have the same terms. Of course that had settled Catherine—she had such clear courage. And she'd told him—perfectly seriously—she'd rather have it that way because then she'd be the only person to do any suffering and it would all be for both of them. And then, of course—It must have been a paralysis of will on his part, he reflected grimly. No man would let the person he loved go through a thing like this with him—even if neither of them had been able to imagine it would be like this.

All the same he knew, as he knew that he had eyes, that Catherine, somehow, would have carried this deathly business through alone if he hadn't finally accepted it for both of them. Because she loved him.

What power there was in Slake—what a deadly cruelty of jesting power! Those contracts—those contracts had been so clever. Slake had had them drawn up, of course. All the terrible meaning in them hidden away under a drift of legal, ordinary-sounding phrases. They were very subtle too, very binding. In consideration of a task to be performed, Sherwood Latimer and Catherine Vane were to receive $10,000. If the task were not performed—the forfeit clause. The unspecified task. Setting a definite date for the performance.

The clause stating that in case both asked to be relieved of the task before it was completed the forfeit clause should come into operation at once—but that neither could be released without full written consent from the other. Oh, Slake was a clever devil! He would doubtless hold places of high trust when he got to hell.

Of course, possibly, the contracts might not hold. If the nature of the task were explained. But nobody could ever believe the explanation. And even if they did—Latimer sighed hopelessly. The law, as he knew it, took little account of the meanings of things—only the forms. And besides—trying to break those contracts—they against Slake and his millions? Latimer knew the nature of the man too well. He would spend incredible sums to carry out his jest. And Latimer and Catherine had no money.

They were in it now, in it like flies on a piece of flypaper. They must just stick it out—that was all.

There was nobody like Catherine; there never could be. She had laughed even when Slake explained the arrangements, his hands moving backward and forward as he spoke like the needling thrust and retraction of the claws of a cat. "Your only outlook is on a rather unesthetic airshaft. I cannot, of course, allow either of you either soap or toothpaste—they are edible, unfortunately." And again: "You will notice that I have provided you each with a Bible, a Koran, and other religious works—you can employ yourselves in making a comparative study of various forms of belief."

Two ordinary human beings, accustomed to three meals a day, but physically fit enough—not weaklings, either of them. It seemed rather ridiculous to think that they couldn't hold out seven days without food. To people who didn't have to do it, that was.

The second day had been worse than this in some ways. The mere physical pain had been sharper. Now it was only constant; eternally constant, eternally heavy—a thick sort of nibbling like the continual but

never violent gnawing of blunted iron teeth. But the second day, the giddiness had not really begun till toward the end. The giddiness was bad. It made your body feel light all over like cork, and fierce in intermittent spurts as if it were filled with burning air. It made your mind too babyishly pleased or irritated with small things like creases in the carpet.

He would go and see Catherine now. He could walk quite firmly if he tried, though his legs felt queerly unsubstantial and brittle. Peanut-brittle legs. He chuckled weakly. He would go and see Catherine. He started tapping like a woodpecker at his side of the double window of netted glass. The window was small and high up—you had to stand—even now standing seemed to tire you immensely for some odd reason. He had not noticed the clever position of the window at first. But that was Slake.

Catherine was sitting in a low chair, reading. A shock of delight and release ran over his heart like warm wind; that was what you did to yourself by sitting alone and brooding. Why, she was just the same —a little paler, but then she had never been ruddy. She was standing it superbly. Only three more days!

She turned her head, saw him, smiled beautifully. Darling, darling! She got up, left her book by the chair and went over to the table for another one. How slowly she walked! Then she was at the window.

They had fooled Slake in one respect, anyhow. Thanks to his giving them books they were able to talk to each other—though he had carefully taken away all writing materials. They had tried lip reading at first, but that was too hard; it really worked only with very simple sentences. She held her copy of the Bible so that he could see. She pointed at a word on the page, *Good.* She turned to another place, *Evening.* To another, *Dear.*

He smiled. How very like Catherine! Oh, Lord, if he could only *get* to her! He had spent half an hour that afternoon looking for a sentence he knew must be somewhere. He grinned a little. Slake's experiment was

an admirable training in Biblical exegesis. Finally he found his sentence and pointed: *The lions do lack and suffer hunger.*

She shook her head wih mock dolefulness, then started turning leaves rapidly. *Happy shalt thou be and it shall be well with thee.* Her finger ran along the line. *Thy wife.*

He dived into Proverbs—they didn't trip you up with "begats" and unimportant details of the construction of Solomon's temple. *The rich man's wealth is his strong city. The destruction of the poor is their poverty.* His fingernail underlined the passage bitterly.

She responded with something on the same page. *Love covereth all transgressions. Love,* she pointed.

Then her face seemed to change a trifle; her hand went hesitatingly to her side. But she smiled reassuringly. "I—am—all—right," her mouth said, forming the syllables slowly. She pointed again: *Yet a little sleep—a little slumber—*

"Yes, do lie down!" he said earnestly, forgetting she could not hear him. Then, and after a fashion he would have thought only foolishly romantic four days ago, he pressed his lips against the cold glass.

She put the tips of her fingers against her mouth and blew a kiss to him like a child before it is carried upstairs to bed. Then—very slowly—she was walking back to her chair. He saw her clutch at the back of it.

He realized that his knees were trembling. Silly! His head swam for a moment, too—he felt the floor begin to turn like a plate underneath his feet. He set his teeth and managed to get back to his chair.

The light failed gradually in the room. When it was quite gone Latimer rose and felt his way to the electric switch. There was another dumbshow of talk with Catherine that left him tottery. Then he went back to his chair again and sat there, thinking.

After a while Slake came. The soft clink of a key in the door; Slake's head looking in rather cautiously.

Latimer made his eyes lift and meet the probing intentness of those other eyes. A curious pricking thrill

gripped his stomach for a moment; the man was so obviously, so damnably, so superbly well fed.

"Everything all right, I suppose, Mr. Latimer?"

"Everything—entirely—satisfactory—Mr. Slake," Latimer forced the words. His eyes burned at the bulge of Slake's throat over his collar; at the ruddy shine on his cheeks that came from the quantity of good hot food he had just consumed.

"How—charming! You are admirable guests indeed, Mr. Latimer—you and Miss Vane. You make so little demand on one's hospitality." He paused, smiling. "I wished for you at dinner this evening—I really wished for you," he said smoothly. "The bisque had a trifle too much whipped cream in it for my personal taste, but the fish was perfection—baked bluefish, you know. And the roast—"

"Stop!" said Latimer through clenched teeth.

"Dear, dear, I forgot. My apologies." He gazed at Latimer with the curious dispassionateness of a scientist watching the ferment of life in a culture through the long eye of his microscope. "So it has really begun to touch you—my elemental," he said amusedly.

"I have no complaints to make," said Latimer in a stifled voice. If he gripped his hands on the chair rim they would not tremble. It was nothing—only the sudden steam and odor of roasting meat that had risen in his mind like perfume at Slake's words.

"No complaints? And Miss Vane has no complaints. Very well. Good night." The door closed softly after him. The key clinked again.

Latimer stared at his book for a long while, making no sense of the jumble of black and white signs on the page. "Who sleeps dines," the French said. Well—he would try.

Drowsiness came easily—sleep was harder. Drowsiness to lie and think of all the meals he had ever had, of all the different varieties of food that had ever existed—golden hot cakes, a huge warm pile of them, drowned with syrup. Little sausages sending a rich sharp steam into the air, crammed to bursting with

crumbs of hot meat and spice. A great pan of frizzling bacon—chicken à la king—a roast of rare beef, the thick good slices curling and bleeding away from the knife. All food—any food—burnt chops—cold mashed potato—if he had a dish of cold mashed potato here beside him he wouldn't care about forks or spoons—he would put his mouth to it as if he were tasting wine and when the last good, good bit of it was gone he would lick the dish with his tongue. Food, just *food!* Meat, cooked meat—and no finicking around about how done it was or wasn't—meat that sent its rich perfect smell up into your brain until you wanted to pick it up in your hands and worry it like an enemy —meat— He lay back on his pillow almost trembling with the violence of his wish for a piece of meat. But after a while he managed to fall sleep.

It was light again. He looked in the mirror as he was dressing. He seemed to be having a great deal of trouble with his clothes this morning—they had too many buttons—they were hard to put on. A four days' beard had not improved his appearance, certainly—even shaving soap had been barred by Slake. But otherwise he seemed to himself to be much as usual. The cheeks were a little hollower perhaps; the beard made it hard to tell. His eyes, too—they seemed larger, somehow, and as if they were in fever. Only two days more! He dressed and got to his chair on legs that seemed yards from his body, sank into it and fell asleep again.

He was awakened from a dream in which the walls of the room had turned to meat. He ate and ate, but as soon as he swallowed a morsel it seemed to vanish into air; it never reached his stomach. Slake's voice: "Good morning."

The usual questions and answers. "I am perfectly satisfied." The key in the door. Ten hours till Slake came again.

Again he dreamed, and this time there was a long table directly in front of him. Saliva poured into his mouth; all the things that had ever been food since

the beginning of time lay there in front of him, and he could not touch a morsel. He woke and went for a drink of water. How *useless* water was. You could pour it down your throat in gallons and it didn't help at all.

Catherine didn't get up till late today, he noticed—not until about the time when lunch would have ended—if there ever had been such a thing as lunch. She was wholly without color now; her face had the pallor of wax but her eyes were indomitable. They gave him strength for a little. Only now neither could stay at the window for more than a few minutes at a time; they were both too weak.

He was counting those infernal birds on the wall again, sometime in the afternoon; he didn't know what time. This time there were 22 on the wall that faced him. He counted them over and over: 22.

It was a good deal later. What was this stuff he had in his mouth—this thing you could chew and chew without ever getting sustenance? Oh, yes, he remembered now! In sieges—eating grass. Fooling your stomach by putting almost anything in it; that made it hurt less. But there wasn't any grass here, of course, so he had tried paper—a flyleaf out of the Koran. Disgusting. And then pieces of towel—it was probably towel he had now. But it didn't help.

It was night now. Slake had come in and taken away the books. "I had forgotten that they might be—misapplied," he had said. That was probably because he had noticed the teethmarks on the leather binding of that Hindu book.

Pain. Pain that was as much a part of him as the tick of his heart. Pain that took him up in its soft heavy hands and squeezed his body between them like a fruit. The line between actuality and those things that were only in the mind—the room in which he lived and those universes of hot food that swam before drowsy eyes like a succession of raw and gaudy lights—growing fainter and fainter like a line rubbed out of a drawing. Unspeakable weakness. Fever in the head. Bad dreams.

It had been dark for a while and now it was light again—real light, not electric light. Morning. Must get dressed before Slake came in for the morning. Slake had been in already—how many times? He didn't know. . . . He was sitting in his chair composedly when Slake entered. He must find out what day it was.

"Still no complaints, Mr. Latimer?"

"Still no complaints." He had let his eyelids droop a little—if Slake saw too close into his eyes, Slake would know. "After all, Mr. Slake, it won't be for very much longer," he said in a voice that seemed to come thinly from a great distance.

"True," Slake was purring. "A mere question of hours, shall we say?" He was looking keenly at Latimer.

"Hours!" croaked Latimer avidly. "Hours! Yes."

"Or shall we say—days?" Slake dropped the last word into the silence like a leaden weight.

"Days. Days. *Is* it days?"

"I'm afraid you will have to puzzle that out for yourself, Mr. Latimer." The door closed.

Latimer was glad that he had had the foresight to move his chair directly under the window yesterday. Even so it had taken him the strugglings of an ant with an overlarge pebble and the sweat had poured from his hands at the end. Today it would have been just impossible.

He dozed fitfully, tormented by visions of plenty. It must be afternoon. There was a feeble sound going on somewhere near him—a sound like the noise of a moth beating itself against the glass of a lamp. He raised his head and listened. Catherine?

He dragged himself to his feet, gripping on the window-sill for support till the tips of his fingers were white. There was a face at the other side of the window—Catherine's face. The face was trying to smile. How could it smile? It was trying to speak, but his mind was too blurred to read what it said with its soundless, moving lips. All he knew was that the face was Catherine's and that she was starving.

He fell back from the window and covered his

face with his hands. He did not know how long the fit of ugly weeping lasted that shook him so hysterically. But when it was over, his mind, in spite of the intermittent burnings of its fever, was quite composed. This couldn't go on. This was the end.

After an immense amount of time had passed, Slake came. Latimer heard his key and quieted himself with a straining effort. He must speak slowly, calmly. "I'm afraid—I shall have to withdraw from the contest."

"And—may I ask why?"

"Catherine," said Latimer weakly. He was ashamed of not saying more but every word that he spoke seemed to take some of his life out with it as it left his mouth.

"I see," said Slake dubiously. "I see. And yet the young lady seems to be standing it very well—she is less plump, perhaps, but—well, I shall go and consult her." He turned away. In a short time he was back. "I am sorry, Mr. Latimer, but Miss Vance refuses to consider any withdrawal on her part," he said, his eyes adance again. "And therefore, by the terms of our agreement—"

"Damn the agreement!" Latimer had risen now—he was moving toward Slake—moving with the tortuous cautiousness of the cripple—his right hand clenched. "Damn the agreement—and you—you devil from hell!" and he snarled like a dog and sprang for Slake's throat.

"Oh, would you, Mr. Latimer, would you?" Slake had put him aside like a doll; he was holding him off at arm's length; the slender, feminine fingers had tightened around his throat like strangling wire. Latimer did not speak, as speech is known to humanity; he made inarticulate gobbling sounds and beat with his hands, but his eyes glared into Slake's eyes with a passion that had gone beyond fear

"What an exhibition of temper!" said Slake—and he flung Latimer from him as if he were paper.

Latimer lay on the floor for a moment, whining and striving to crawl forward on incapable limbs.

Then Slake had gone—but Latimer realized with a thin tinge of imbecile pride that he had backed to the door. He was left alone with his hunger—and that last glimpse of Catherine's face.

Exactly what Latimer did and said and thought during the next 24 hours he was, fortunately, not to remember except in snatches. There was a great deal of noise all about him, for one thing—an endless drumming pulsation of sound that was somehow part of him and yet seemed to come from outside himself as well, and fill the whole world as a shell is filled with the tumult of the sea. He was the skin of the drum—and the drummer that played a measure for dancing skeletons upon it—and the twitching drumsticks—and the ear that heard and the mind that recorded all.

There was a squawking voice—not his own—it couldn't be his own—his voice had never sounded like that—that kept talking to itself and cursing somebody called Slake in a high, recurrent gasp. There were colors that streaked before his eyes like blots of vivid light, piercing colors of sunset-orange and scarlet and bright green. These settled to the burning ruddiness of the heart of a furnace; and that ruddiness was within him also, oddly. It scorched at him as if he were the furnace itself and someone had lighted a fire that ate over his bones and flesh without consuming one cell of them, with only torment. There was a reeling phantasmagoria of dreams like the patterns a madman draws in the air; and at the end of it a collapse into broken peace, a peace so complete and sightless that, he thought dully, he must have died. Then somebody was carrying him like a great shattered toy along a smooth, paneled corridor. He was being put down on something that yielded and was soft. For a long time it seemed to him, he lay there, delicately and easily, his body relaxed. After that measureless time he turned his head toward his left side. He was lying on a couch in a room, not the room in which he had been tortured.

Three steps away from him, if he had been able to rise, there was another couch. A figure lay on the couch—a woman, by the dress. His eyes regarded her incuriously. Why was she there? His eyes went back to the ceiling. The ceiling was cool and white. It had nothing to do with pain.

After another time a faint prickling began to work like yeast inside his body. It ran all over him at first like the feet of a small and rapid animal. Then it settled to one place, as such an animal might settle, finding food. It began to gnaw. He was hungry. He opened his mouth, but no sounds came. When people were hungry, they asked, and were given food, he seemed to remember. "Food," he said faintly, his lips writhing back from his teeth.

A voice from somewhere distant; a smooth voice. He hated the voice; it made his flesh bristle as if he had stroked the fur of a cat the wrong way. "There is food on the floor," said the voice. It waited. "There is food on the floor."

He raised himself on one arm with an immensity of effort. His eyes looked at the space between the two couches. There was something there on a plate—something white and solid. A slice of bread.

The figure on the other couch had stirred now, too. It had raised itself on an arm—its great eyes stared at the bread. Then its eyes left the bread and looked into his, without recognition. His muscles began to tense. That thing on the other couch had seen the food, too. That thing wanted the food as bitterly and wholly as he wanted it; he could tell that by its eyes.

For a long time they lay there, looking at each other suspiciously, like starving dogs across a bone. Then Latimer looked at the bread again, and his whole body seemed to grow thin with longing. It was such a little, little piece.

Slowly, with the cautious movements of a thief, putting his hands in front of him like the paws of a cat, Latimer slid down from the couch. Then he rested on all fours for a moment, gazing at the woman.

A vast wave of unspeakable relief passed through his body. She had not got down from her couch to meet him—to fight him for that food. She was not able. She could only lie there and stare.

His hand reached out and touched the bread, shyly. He shivered, as a dog shivers on being stroked, at the exquisiteness of that touch. There was not very much of it—that piece of bread—but its surface was rough and pleasant. He knew to the last quarter-crumb of it how tinglingly rich and satisfying it would be. It was good bread. Good bread.

The woman on the couch had made a tiny despairing sound at seeing him touch the bread. For a moment, now that the bread was in his hands, he forgot about it, looking at her. Who was she, that strange gaunt woman who could not move to come down and take the bread away from him? His mind tried perplexedly to remember—for ages, it seemed. It was pitiful to see her lying there, making no movement. After he had eaten the bread he might have strength enough to go over to her and find out who she was and what she wanted. Not now, though. Not now.

The lust for the bread possessed him until he shuddered. His fingers closed over it, grippingly, tenderly, possessively. In a moment he would feel the first sweet taste of it on his tongue. His hand began to go to his mouth—not very fast or he might drop the bread.

Somewhere in the room someone who was not the woman had laughed. He paused, hugging the bread to his breast, his eyes going furtively about him. They should not have that bread—it was his, his, *his!*

A frail whisper of sound came to his ears. "Sherwood," it was saying. "Sherwood." He nodded. That was his name. He was Sherwood Latimer, the man who had bread at last.

"Sherry!" said the whisper, again, insistently, growing stronger. "Oh, Sherry, *dear!*"

The bread was very near his mouth now—his mouth that slavered at it unconsciously—but he did not look at it. He looked at the strange woman.

"Sherry, dear. Dear Sherry. Oh, Sherry, I'm so *hungry!*" the voice wailed thinly like a child.

And then there was a soft bright shock in his mind like the impact of a blunted arrow and the whole room seemed to right itself before him as if it had been swinging upside down in space. That was *Catherine,* that lean, worn image of fever on the couch. That was Catherine, *Catherine!* And she was hungry.

Sighing, he put the bread away from his lips. It was all very simple now. Holding the hand with the bread in it in front of him as a dog holds out a hurt paw, he began the immense journey across the floor to the other couch. Catherine was hungry, so he must feed her; that was all. It was very lucky he thought dully, that somebody left that piece of bread on the plate.

He reached her side and rose clumsily to his knees. He broke the bread into two pieces and laid one carefully on the floor. If she was as hungry as he was, it wouldn't be good for her to eat that whole slice of bread all at once—he remembered that now. His arm went around her shoulders, the hand settled and was at rest in the soft curls of her hair. The other hand had crumbled a small piece of bread. Their eyes looked at each other deeply; this time they knew. "Dear Sherry," she said with a gulp. Something burned behind his eyes like salt. "Bread. Eat it," he said childishly, in a choking voice. His head sank on her breast. Even now, and though she was Catherine, he could hardly bear to see her take the bread. He waited agonizedly for her to be finished. When she was, in spite of everything, he would give her the rest.

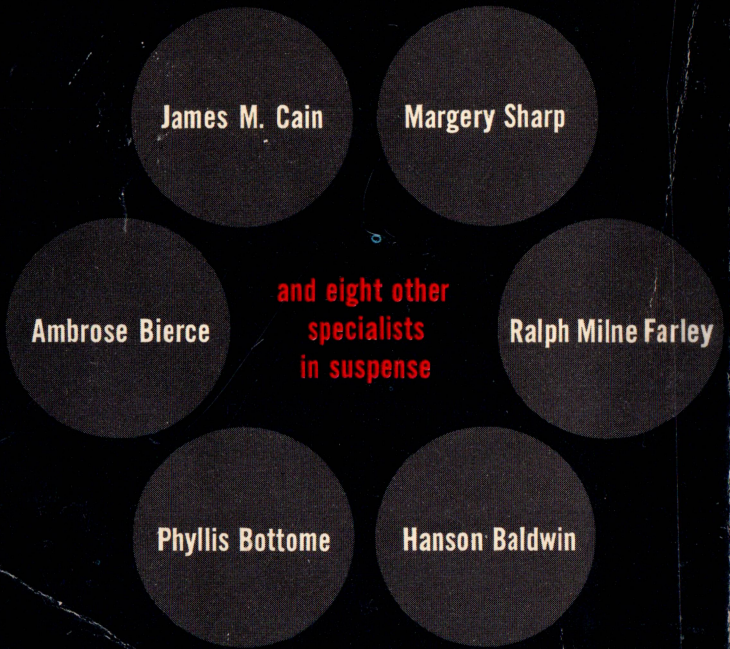
Then he felt his hand at her mouth being pushed away by her weak hand. He raised his head.

"You first—you're *hungrier!*" she said in a whisper. His fingers relaxed. The bread fell to the floor.

"Time!" said a voice behind them, and then, "Time—all over!" And then, "Oh, pick it up, you babies, do you think *I'm* going to feed you?" in tones of outrageous disappointment. But they were not listening. They were holding each other close.

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

Alfred Hitchcock is forever prowling about, sneaking up when you least expect him. With just a few well-chosen tales, he slyly creates delicious agonies of suspense with such distinguished cohorts in terror as:



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